

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 20 February 2008

Session 3

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SCOTTISH MINISTERS AND LAW OFFICERS

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MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND EARLY YEARS—Adam Ingram MSP

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MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT—Michael Russell MSP

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20 February 2008

Scottish Parliament

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Rev Canon Isaac M Poobalan, from the church of St John the Evangelist in Aberdeen.

Rev Canon Isaac M Poobalan (Church of St John the Evangelist, Aberdeen): The icon of the Holy Trinity by the 16th century Russian iconographer Andrei Rublev is a source of inspiration, and I always carry a copy of it with me. It is also known as the “Hospitality of Abraham” because the story goes that Abraham welcomed three strangers into his tent and served them with kindness and generosity, only to discover later that they were none other than the Divine.

The icon shows three figures seated in a circle around a table on which there is bread and wine. There is a tree and a house in the background. The three figures appear to look calmly but purposefully at the items on the table, with one of their hands pointing to the other.

Like the icons on our computers, which, when clicked on, open up windows with challenges, opportunities and possibilities, this icon opens up for me layers of meanings that inspire, challenge and enable. First, as a symbol of the Holy Trinity, it reminds me of the creative power that is God the Father, the work of healing and restoration fulfilled in Christ Jesus the son of man, and God the Holy Spirit, who inspires and empowers. Secondly, as a symbol of hospitality, it reminds me of service to others and care for strangers. Finally, and most important, it is community focused and at the same time pointing away from self and honouring the other.

When I was preparing for this time for reflection, I could not help but draw parallels between this inspirational icon and the community gathered in the chamber. I recall the days of preparation for this great chamber—the building and those who occupy it. There was a sense of an icon in the making that would open up windows of opportunities and possibilities for Scotland. I believe that the sense of an icon in the making remains.

I will move on to what the icon symbolises. First, the Trinity. I believe that, in its work of creation, restoration and empowerment, this chamber

continues to participate in the threefold work of the Trinity: in the creation of possibilities for the people of Scotland and preserving the natural beauty of creation; in the restoration of health and well-being to individuals and communities; and in the empowerment of the vulnerable and the marginalised. Secondly, recent media reports showed that Scotland is second to none for hospitality. I believe that this chamber enables such hospitality, and my presence here today is evidence. Finally, while you are called to serve this great nation of Scotland, you as chosen people form a community that is an icon in the making, in looking away from self and seeking to honour the other. I hope nothing will make you feel or believe less.

May God bless you to continue to be windows of opportunities and possibilities for Scotland and beyond.

Amen.

Snaring

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a statement by Michael Russell on snaring. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions.

14:34

The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell): As members are no doubt aware, during the passage of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, the Environment and Rural Development Committee carefully examined snaring. The committee concluded that although there was room for improvement, the need remained for predator control in the countryside and the other options that were available to land managers were not necessarily better for animal welfare.

Nonetheless, at stage 3, the then minister, Allan Wilson, announced a full public consultation on snaring. A clear majority of the 243 responses that were received by February 2007 were in favour of a complete ban, although a breakdown of views shows that individuals were mostly in favour of a ban whereas organisations—particularly countryside organisations—remained supportive of snaring in some form.

Since then, both sides of the argument have run several campaigns. I have no doubt that it is an extreme case but, in the past few weeks, my office has received more than 4,850 e-mails and cards from people who seek a ban. A very much smaller number of messages have supported the continuation of snaring.

In recent months, I have been heavily engaged with the subject. I have discussed snaring with representatives of many organisations and been on several fact-finding visits. I greatly respect and empathise with those who campaign for a complete ban on snaring. We should—justly—be proud that Scotland has some of the strongest wildlife protection legislation in the world. It is important that we continue to maintain the highest standards and that everything that is done in the countryside—including everything that is done to control pests and predators—is consistent with those high standards.

However, no responsible politician can ignore the fact that some argue equally passionately that snaring is a regrettable but essential tool for high-quality land management in Scotland. Such people also have a keen interest in and concern for wildlife, and their view that snaring plays a key role in maintaining the iconic Scottish landscape of heather-clad hillsides that are alive with a rich diversity of species cannot be set aside lightly.

Those people base their argument on the three pillars of shooting, biodiversity and agricultural imperatives. First, they contend that effective predator control is essential to maintain the shooting for which Scotland is world famous—whether upland grouse moors or lowland pheasant shoots. Shooting also provides considerable economic benefit to rural areas, where jobs and income can be scarce. For example, a 2006 study calculated that shooting is worth £240 million each year to the Scottish economy. It generates approximately 1.75 million visitor nights, most of which take place during the autumn and winter months when other visitors are thin on the ground. The shooting sector pays 58,000 workers, which is the equivalent of 11,000 full-time jobs. The sport also provides the equivalent of 2,000 full-time conservation jobs and spends £43 million a year on improving habitat and wildlife management.

Secondly, those who are in favour of snaring assert that control of predators, and foxes in particular, is a key factor in maintaining and enhancing biodiversity. A Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust field experiment showed that predator control increased the breeding stock of the wild grey partridge by 42 per cent. Without such control, stocks declined in most years. Among others, national park staff at Loch Lomond and the Cairngorms have made it clear that if snaring were not available to them as a means of predator control, they fear that they would be unable to meet their statutory objectives on maintaining biodiversity.

Shooting and biodiversity are linked. It is no accident that managed moorland contains many more species of ground-nesting birds such as lapwing, golden plover and curlew than does unmanaged land. The key factor is that predators such as foxes are controlled. That is essential for innovations such as the new Langholm moor project, among whose partners are Scottish Natural Heritage, RSPB Scotland and the Buccleuch Estates.

Of course, we must accept that farmers throughout Scotland depend heavily on efficient predator control to protect their animals. Lambs are the best-known target, but other free-range stock, such as poultry and pigs, is also at risk. Many farmers and crofters occasionally need to protect crops from the extensive damage that rabbits can do, and snaring is a tool in that protection.

However, we must all accept that alternatives to snaring exist. Shooting disposes of more than 70 per cent of the foxes that are killed each year, but clean and efficient shooting that does not leave wounded animals is very dependent on the shooter's skill and the lie of the land. It is not suitable in every area or case. Other predator

control methods such as trapping in cages, hunting with hounds, poisoning and gassing, are illegal, ineffective or dangerous to the operator and often to a wider range of wildlife.

The welfare implications of snaring are a matter of debate and concern. It is to be regretted that no scientific study on the welfare issues associated with snaring has ever been carried out, but it is clear that badly set snares and snares that are set close to urban environments or in the wrong place and are not regularly checked have the potential to injure wildlife and domestic animals, which they sometimes do. I have no doubt that it is those sorts of snares that are regularly—and rightly—brought to the attention of bodies such as the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Those who set such snares are wildlife criminals. That said, scientists who wish to catch animals for radio-tagging experiments use snares without causing any apparent harm. Members will wish to note that the British Veterinary Association's ethics and welfare group recently stated:

"in some circumstances snaring might be the least inhumane method where control is necessary".

That conclusion was also reached in 2005 by the independent working group on snares.

The key issue that I have had to consider in weighing all the evidence is whether the protection of our unique biodiversity, the management of our successful shooting industries and the safeguarding of our key agricultural production could be undertaken without the option of using snares. That is, I have had to consider whether those things could be undertaken in a more humane and appropriate way, taking into account cost effectiveness and actual results on the ground. If they could, snaring might well be able to be dispensed with; if they could not, snaring would—regrettably—have to remain within the range of tools that are necessary for good land management in Scotland.

At the end of a lengthy discussion and reflection process, I have reached the conclusion that snaring is still necessary in some circumstances. However, it is also clear to me that we can and must do better in eliminating bad practice. Bad practice—sometimes criminally bad practice—is responsible for some of the dreadful cases that animal rights organisations have brought forward.

Members of the public are rightly concerned about what happens to the wildlife that is part of our heritage, and they need to be absolutely confident that where snaring is necessary, there is no room for any doubt about what is allowed; that the practice is undertaken by competent and responsible individuals; that we have outlawed any practices that do not match up to welfare

standards; and that we are vigorously enforcing the law. Accordingly, I intend to introduce a package of regulations and primary legislation where necessary that will aim to make fundamental changes to the practice of snaring in Scotland.

My officials and I have discussed the changes with industry representatives—landowners, managers, gamekeepers and representatives of sporting interests—and I hope that they will command widespread support. I would like to have the co-operation of welfare organisations and other organisations such as Advocates for Animals and the League Against Cruel Sports, but unfortunately those organisations told me as recently as last Friday that they are not prepared to countenance any alternative to a total ban. *[Applause.]* I regret that approach, but assure them that the door remains open to them and to those members who have just applauded if they are willing to work with the Government to introduce the best possible practice.

The package that we intend to introduce will make a significant difference to animal welfare. We will require the compulsory fitting of crimped safety stops to prevent nooses from closing too far and inflicting damage. That should, arguably, have been done long ago, and it has, on its own, the potential to bring about a huge improvement in the welfare of animals that are restrained by snares. We will also require the compulsory fitting of identification tags on snares, which will allow the authorities to identify their owners, but will not allow identification by casual passers-by. We will specify that the action of a snare must be checked before it is set, and we will make it clear that any snare that is not staked in place must be fixed with an anchor that cannot be dragged away. We will prohibit the setting of snares on posts, over watercourses, on planks and on fences, as such setting can cause unnecessary suffering, and we will specify that areas in which snaring is taking place should be clearly marked with signs. I believe that such measures can be introduced by means of regulations under section 11 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

When the opportunity arises to introduce primary legislation, we will also consider how we might create a new offence of tampering with a lawfully set snare. Such an offence is required for good governance and because tampering with snares even for the best of reasons can sometimes—perhaps unwittingly—make their effects more deadly and cruel. We will also give legal status to a new land management industry accreditation scheme. The aim will be that, within a fixed period, everyone who sets snares will require to have received training in best practice and the law. Eventually, no one without such training will be allowed to set a snare.

We will also put in place arrangements to assist with technical developments in the use of snares, and those developments will be reported back to ministers with the aim of incorporating them into best practice.

By implementing this package of measures, Scotland will have established the best possible practice in ensuring animal welfare while allowing effective land management and all the economic and conservation benefits that accrue from it to continue. We will also send to those wildlife cowboys and criminals who use snares illegally and indiscriminately a clear signal that they will be vigorously pursued and punished. This statement charts a new way forward. I hope that it will command the support of the whole chamber.

The Presiding Officer: The minister will now take questions on the issues that are raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I express our great disappointment that he has not listened to the overwhelming majority of those who responded in favour of a ban on snaring, not just in the representations that he has received, but in the previous consultation by the Scottish Executive and in the public campaign to end the unnecessary suffering of animals that, as the minister well knows, are not restricted to wildlife that is intended to be caught by snares. Government is about tough choices, and on this occasion we believe that the minister has not risen to the challenge.

I make it clear to the minister that we do not believe that his statement will end the debate. How can he possibly believe that his proposals for an incredibly complex, very detailed set of provisions can work? He has not given us a timetable for implementation; he has made virtually no reference to the alternative approaches that are used by some land managers; he admits that he has no plans to consider the animal welfare implications of the continued use of snaring throughout Scotland; and, crucially, he has left us with a total lack of clarity on enforcement.

Michael Russell: That, unfortunately, has the nature of a question that was asked before the member heard the statement. It is absolutely clear what we are proposing. We are proposing a set of changes that are not only clear, but will be effective. We hope that they will command the respect and the attention of those who work in the countryside.

I very much respect—I regret that the same attitude is not being shown towards me from the Labour benches—the position that is taken by

those who oppose the use of snares. However, after much consideration, I think that this is the best way forward. If Labour members had wanted to ban the use of snares, they had eight long years in administration in which to do so—but they did not. They did not do so because, as the Opposition spokesperson has indicated, it is a hard decision that requires much consideration.

The package of measures that we propose will be effective, will improve and assist biodiversity, will protect jobs and will improve animal welfare. In my book, those are three things that should be welcomed by every member in the chamber, not resisted in the petty, point-scoring way that we have just heard.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I thank the minister for providing an advance copy of his statement and I declare my interest as a farmer.

This is an issue that, understandably, raises strong emotions. Although there is a divergence of opinion across the chamber about how best to approach the matter, I am certain that each of us is committed to the aims of protecting the biodiversity of Scotland and improving animal welfare standards. To that end, there is a need to strike a balance between legislation and the needs of the wider rural community and the economy. In his statement, the minister has demonstrated a keen awareness of that requirement.

I have three questions for the minister. First, he will be aware that Advocates for Animals and the League Against Cruel Sports have a legal opinion that argues that the continuation of snaring is contrary to the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c) Regulations 1994. Any legislation that is passed by the Parliament must be compliant with those regulations. Can the minister assure us that the proposals that he has outlined are compliant with those regulations and tell us whether the Government has sought specific legal advice on that point?

Secondly, the minister will be aware of the concerns about the capture of non-target species in snares. Although that accounts for only a small number of the animals that are caught, it is still something that we should work hard to avoid. Can he give an assurance that his proposals will lead to a reduction in indiscriminate trapping?

Thirdly, if he has not already done so, will the minister consider whether it is possible to create a forum for all interested parties to come together and engage with ministers in a dialogue on these issues, to inform and further develop best practice in this area?

Michael Russell: I will answer the member's questions briefly. First, best practice in snaring will ensure that the number of animals from non-target species that are snared is kept to a minimum. The

independent working group on snaring that was established in England, which reported in 2005, noted that 100 times more badgers were killed on the roads than by snares. There are huge dangers to animals apart from snaring, but our proposals will reduce very dramatically the number of animals from non-target species that are snared, as good practice does.

Secondly, we want to work with the industry and everyone else involved, including the animal welfare organisations—if they will work with us—to get best practice. Yet again I invite all organisations to work with us; we will set up the arrangements for that to happen.

Thirdly, my position on the legal opinion that was mentioned is exactly the same as that of the previous Administration. The present arrangements are legal, and the arrangements that we propose will also be legal.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): The Liberal Democrats, too, take the view that everything that is done to control pests and predators must be consistent with the highest possible standards of animal welfare. In particular, we are mindful of the view of the British Veterinary Association ethics and welfare group that, where control is necessary, snaring may be the least inhumane method in some circumstances. We agree with the minister's decision not to ban snaring, but to enhance the regulations to ensure that best practice is achieved.

My two questions focus on the details of the regulations that the minister proposes. First, how do his new proposals for greater regulation differ from the code of the British Association for Shooting and Conservation? Secondly, he will be aware of the industry's certificated training courses, which are supported and financed by local authorities and, in my constituency, by the Cairngorms National Park Authority. How does he envisage those programmes fitting in with the measures that he has announced today?

Michael Russell: I welcome and am grateful for the member's support. I will answer his questions directly. The codes of practice of the British Association for Shooting and Conservation are all very well, and some of them are helpful, but our proposals will bring together a range of measures in one set of regulations. There is a difference between regulations and codes. The regulations will be binding and will be legally enforceable. They are also more varied than the existing codes. For example, compulsory fitting of ID tags has been a controversial issue, as there is fear that it might be misused. With dialogue, we will be able to persuade the industry to support the measure.

I am considering a range of accredited training. I want to ensure that we have the best training courses possible and that we move as quickly as is feasible to a situation in which no one who is involved in setting a snare has not been through a rigorous training course that deals not only with best practice but also with the law, so that there is no dubiety. I will examine all courses and ensure that the best of them are available in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: We move to back-bench questions. I ask members to keep their questions relatively brief.

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The minister said that the best people to set snares are people who are competent and responsible and have training in best practice. Mike Rumbles also touched on that point. What will the minister do to ensure that there is upskilling and that people's training is properly recognised and controlled?

Michael Russell: One of the big problems in certain areas of activity and work in the countryside is that many people believe that they have the competence to do things when plainly they do not. I was horrified to see that, in a recent case in the Borders, someone who described themselves as a gamekeeper had no qualifications or experience. I want those who undertake a variety of actions in the countryside to know what they are doing and have the skills to do it. That means professionalisation—for example, helping gamekeepers to become more professional. I know that they are keen on that, because I have discussed the issue with gamekeepers on a number of occasions. I want to ensure that, as a result of the courses that we are able to provide, no one will be able in a court of law to describe themselves as a gamekeeper without being able to prove that they are competent in that task.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): The minister spoke about consultation. Will he confirm again that the vast majority—more than 70 per cent—of responses to the Scottish Executive consultation were in favour of a complete ban on snares? Will he further confirm that his office received 5,000 responses, mainly from throughout the UK, the vast majority of which supported a total ban; that there is significant cross-party support in this Parliament for my motion, which proposes a total ban; that there is a media campaign for a total ban; and that the United Kingdom is one of only five European member states that has not enforced a total ban?

Is the minister aware that the vast majority of young people, of whom there are many in the public gallery this afternoon, abhor this cruel and inhumane practice? Can he tell us exactly what the purpose of consultation is if he does not listen to one word of what the people say? Is it not the case that the minister was just not big enough to

take the tough decision and, when push came to shove, turned a deaf ear to the people of Scotland in favour of a minority lobby?

Michael Russell: I want to be as reasonable as I can be in responding to Irene Oldfather. It is sometimes difficult, but I will do my very best. It is almost impossible, actually, rather than difficult.

Irene Oldfather's point about European member states is a chimera. The people who argue that ours is one of the few countries that still permits snaring do not look at the wider issue of traps and snares as used in other European countries and realise that traps and snares are specific to landscape and habitat. It is clear that there will be different regulations in different countries. The important unifying point is whether the law takes animal welfare into consideration as strongly as it can. I depart from those whom I respect greatly in the animal lobby when they say that anybody who holds a different view cannot believe in animal welfare. The arguments that I make today are designed to improve that situation. There should be respect for that and for those who argue for it with me.

As regards the consultation, I received postcards and 5,000 e-mails that blocked up my inbox in such a way that unblocking it required professional attention. Despite listening to—*[Interruption.]* Ms Oldfather is not listening; she is shouting. Had I done the easy thing, I would have lain down under an enormous campaign. I have listened to everybody and I hope that this afternoon I have presented a set of proposals that are designed to meet the objections from all sides. *[Interruption.]* As usual, Opposition members are shouting "No!" They are the no-sayers of Scottish politics and the no-sayers of the Scottish countryside. I wish that they would listen to the arguments for jobs and the economy in Scotland. I wish that they would also listen to the arguments for biodiversity. If they did, their attitude would be more reasonable and command greater respect in Scotland.

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I have genuine concerns about snaring and thank the minister for meeting me and others to explain the matter to us and to listen to our concerns. The minister mentioned in his statement that he has looked at the types of snares that are used and his decision that all snares must have safety stops and identification tags. Will he explain the evidence that made him reach that decision and what difference the measures will make?

Michael Russell: There is absolutely no doubt that unstopped snares should not be used. Given that the previous Government had a chance to do something about them, I am surprised that it never made such a proposal. I am glad that we are doing something about them at last.

ID tags are more controversial. Certain people in the countryside fear that they could be misused, but it is important that we ensure that those who have set snares are identifiable. It is also important that there are notices to say that snaring is taking place, so that people are alerted to it. Those two measures, allowing only snares with safety stops and the other measures will make a considerable difference to animal welfare and ensuring that snares do the job that they are meant to do.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The minister will be aware that the independent working group on snares identified a long list of adverse welfare impacts on snared animals. They ranged from thirst and hunger to amputations. Does the minister believe that the technical amendments that he has proposed today will make any significant difference to animals' suffering as compared with an outright ban?

Michael Russell: I very much hope that they will. The independent working group on snares noted that this activity has a variety of animal welfare impacts ranging from the very mild to the very severe and, as I said in my statement, the lack of good scientific research on this matter inhibits the debate. It is a matter of regret that Ms Oldfather is still shaking her head—no one can deny that a lack of scientific evidence will inhibit any debate.

In such circumstances, we have to move as quickly as we can to the best possible situation. I believe that this complex package of measures—they are the very best ones I could have picked and they have been set out in an easily understandable form—will produce major improvements. As I have said, we will educate people on these matters.

I am grateful for Mr Stewart's reasonable approach. Of course, I have had to—*[Interruption.]* It is a great pity that one cannot have a rational debate in this chamber without interruption—and, as ever, Ms Brankin is the obstacle.

If Mr Stewart continued to demonstrate his belief in an absolute ban in a way that illustrated the various problems and if further scientific evidence came forward, any rational person would return to the issue. However, I believe that these proposals represent an important step forward.

The Presiding Officer: As we have less than four minutes for the four other members who wish to ask questions, brevity will be greatly valued.

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): I am glad that the minister recognises the importance of managing the land for environmental benefit. It was interesting to learn in *The Sunday Times* that an announcement would be made on the tightening up of regulations with regard to snares.

The Presiding Officer: Can we have a question, please.

Jim Hume: The minister mentioned that requirements will include the signage of snares and the use of ID tags, not for the public identification of snare owners but for local authorities' knowledge. How exactly will he ensure that the identities of newly licensed snarers will be kept safe and private?

Michael Russell: It is very much our intention to ensure that identities are kept safe and private, and we will take all reasonable steps to do so. Mr Scott asked about working with the industry and others—including, I hope, animal welfare bodies. With them, we will closely consider this issue to ensure that that situation is maintained.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): It is a matter of deep regret that the Government has not chosen to ban snaring. Can we gain any comfort from the proposed arrangements? How does the minister propose to set a baseline for and monitor the success of these proposals—if indeed they prove to be successful?

Michael Russell: Among other things, I intend to draw today's statement to the attention of those who are undertaking the present thematic review of wildlife crime and to build into the review the requirements that will exist, to ensure that our proposed changes are effective and effectively implemented. I am also very happy to discuss with the industry and, indeed, the member any other means of overseeing these proposals to ensure that we can quantify them.

One problem with introducing a total ban that has been suggested and that goes against the grain of the member's comments is that such a move would drive snaring further into illegality and further underground, which would make the situation worse rather than better. I worry about that.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): As the minister is aware, not all of those who represent and live in rural areas support snaring. I am implacably opposed to it and consider it to be an indiscriminate and inhumane activity. It is certainly not a party-political issue.

The minister referred to bad practice. Given that there are only two full-time wildlife crime officers in Scotland, one in Grampian and the other in Lothian and Borders, how does he intend to police the snaring that he will permit? Moreover, will he review the operation of the legislation that will be introduced to ensure that the chamber can fully debate its effectiveness?

Michael Russell: As I have indicated, I will draw this statement to the attention of the team that is undertaking the thematic review. I will also draw its

attention to Christine Grahame's question, to ensure that the intention is to make resources adequate to the task.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The minister has given the impression that snaring is essential for effective predator control and he has implied that land managers fully support this approach. As he might be aware, that is not the case. Indeed, some land managers maintain effective predator control without the need for snaring. Will the minister provide more detail on how much consideration has been given to alternative methods, including research on non-lethal methods? What steps will he take to ensure that land managers share and promote to others best practice on such methods?

Michael Russell: Claire Baker makes an important point. There was nothing in my statement that said that snaring is compulsory. Land managers who choose not to use snaring will choose not to use snaring. I am happy to listen to the member's suggestion on the exchanging of information on non-lethal practices, which many land managers would welcome, but I cannot take the further step of saying that no land manager should be allowed to use snaring. Land managers who use non-lethal methods, which are often more intensive and more expensive than snaring, have my support.

Malawi

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a debate on Malawi.

15:06

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): Despite newspaper reports to the contrary, I am fit and well and managed to do a lot of work in Malawi. I am just looking round the chamber to check that my MSP colleagues who were also in Malawi are fit and well and back at work. Yes they are. Good. We are all fine, and we all had a highly constructive visit.

I am pleased that we are having a subject debate on Malawi following my first ministerial trip there. The relationship between Scotland and Malawi transcends politics and is, because of the history of our two nations, supported by all MSPs and the whole of civic Scotland.

I had always been supportive of Scotland's partnership with Malawi and the agreement of the Parliament and the previous Scottish Executive to an international development budget, but when I took up the post of Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture last year, I was keen to take stock of progress on all our international development work—the time was right for me to do so. I also wanted to give everyone in Scotland who is involved in international development work the opportunity to comment on the Scottish Government's broad objectives in that area and, most important, on the mechanisms that we use for allocating funding.

We approached the process with careful thought and consideration because we must ensure that when we design an international development policy, we take on board a wide range of views and remain clear about our objectives. Most important of all, we must take on board the views of the Government and people of Malawi. I was determined not to rush the process, but instead to take time to ensure that we got it right. I wanted to draw on performance to date and to look forward to our future aspirations and priorities.

The refreshed international development policy will include a section specifically on Malawi and will confirm our commitment to continue to work closely with the Malawian Government in identifying future funding priorities.

As everyone knows, the programmes between Scotland and Malawi were originally set within the framework of the four strands of the co-operation agreement: health, education, civil society and governance, and sustainable economic development. Those four areas are still at the

forefront of our policy delivery, and many initiatives that fit into the co-operation agreement are still being undertaken and supported by the Scottish Government through the international development fund. We will continue to operate in those broad areas although during my visit I agreed with my counterparts in the Government of Malawi to develop a much stronger focus within those areas. I will say more about that later.

Members will be aware of the recent announcement of the remainder of this year's international development budget and will recognise that we have focused heavily on the strands that the Malawian Government felt were hugely important.

I awarded £5,000 assistance to emergency relief for the flooding in the Chikwawa district and to address the severe health implications in the area. That assistance was match-funded by the University of Strathclyde and the Lord Provost of Glasgow. It is important to acknowledge the many organisations in Scotland that care about and contribute to Scotland's partnership with Malawi.

While in Malawi, I visited Bwalia Hospital and the University College of Nursing and College of Medicine. I was very pleased to see the work that is being done between Scotland and Malawi. Government and institutions are trying to build capacity there.

The same is true in education. We are now focusing resources on encouraging the development of the vocational education and skills training sector. In order to tackle that at source in Malawi, I recently announced funding of £250,000 to Adam Smith College in Kirkcaldy to develop a programme of capacity building with the staff of every Government-funded further education college in Malawi, which will work with a group of about eight colleges in Scotland. I am pleased to say that progress is looking good.

I am very keen to ensure that everything that we do is joined up and that nothing is done in isolation. One example of that approach is the Chisomo Children's Club, which is a day centre for rescued street children. The club is not only about feeding children during the day and giving them some education—it is also about trying to re-integrate them into their families and villages and, where possible, helping them to complete their education. The club is now also funded to provide the children with vocational education and skills training to get them on to the path of employment so that they can work themselves out of poverty.

I saw the work of Mary's Meals, which provides *likhuni phala* to children who receive one meal a day from local volunteers. That one meal a day ensures that many children do not starve, but it also encourages them to attend school, which

increases educational attainment. The other aspect of the project's work that is so important is that it works with communities. The whole community is involved in collecting, cooking and distributing the food or, as we saw, helping with the pre-school children. It is essential to get communities completely involved so that good work such as that is sustainable.

I turn to governance and civil society development, which is a strand that needs a good bit more work. I am not sure whether David Stewart is in the chamber, but he asked me the week before last about civic governance in Malawi and stressed its importance. I am delighted that we are funding a new relationship between the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and the Council for Non-Government Organisations in Malawi to strengthen its capacity to support the non-governmental organisation sector in Malawi. We had a very positive meeting with CONGOMA and Government representatives. I was very heartened to see the support that the Malawian Government is giving to the strengthening of civil society in Malawi. That is very important.

Institutional linking is also important. Government cannot do everything—this is not about Governments deciding what is best. Institutional linking between Scotland and Malawi is hugely important. One of our Deputy Presiding Officers, Alasdair Morgan, visited the Office of the Ombudsman in Malawi last week. Civil society development can gain from linking strong institutions in this country that have had—let us face it—many more years of democracy than Malawi has had. The benefit that can come from working together is hugely important.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Does the minister agree that, in looking at a country such as Malawi, it is important to promote the institutions of democracy? Does she further agree that its Parliament needs to be seen as being strong against the Executive, which in turn strengthens the confidence that external investors, for example, have in the country? Will she say something about the links that the Parliament is making with the Malawian Parliament to try to build up that institution in Malawi?

The Presiding Officer: You have less than one minute, minister.

Linda Fabiani: That is hugely important. It was a mark of the members of the Scottish Parliament who were in Malawi last week that they focused on some of those issues. I am sure that more will be said about that.

Sustainable economic development is an important strand and the Government of Malawi is hugely keen that we get involved in that. We must work from the bottom up and fund people so that

they can provide sustainable livelihoods for themselves, their families and their communities. In a place such as Malawi we should, further down the line, aim to be able to walk away and leave a viable and successful state that has in place all the appropriate institutions. We have started to consider that with the Government of Malawi and have provided £240,000 for work on that. Part of the funding is for the Malawi enterprise programme, which helps women attain microcredit and promotes youth business in Malawi. When I was there, I saw examples of that work that impressed me hugely. That is an important way forward. Opportunity International is extremely important, as it allows microfinance and enables people to get bank accounts and to save. That is an excellent example of where Scotland can add value.

Scotland is good at this. We should make our relationship with Malawi one that is very special.

15:16

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I welcome the debate and Linda Fabiani's opening comments, which indicate a great deal of continuity from the previous Administration's approach. I also welcome the announcement on 7 February of the Scottish Government's allocation of more than £677,000 in continued support for international development programmes in Malawi. Perhaps in her winding-up speech, the minister will confirm whether the budget of £4.5 million for international development programmes for this year has now been allocated fully.

Although international development is largely a reserved matter, three years ago the foundations of Scottish international development policy were laid with the aims of complementing the United Kingdom Government's international development policy, contributing to the millennium development goals, which have poverty eradication at their heart, engaging the Scottish population in international development issues, and transferring Scottish skills to where they are most needed in the world. Malawi is central to that effort. The signing of the co-operation agreement on 3 November 2005 was a momentous event that celebrated and cemented Scotland's historic links with Malawi and paved the way to a successful development partnership. I very much look forward to hearing the speeches of those who were instrumental in putting those policies into action, especially Jack McConnell and Patricia Ferguson, but also Karen Gillon and Sarah Boyack, who visited Malawi only last week.

It is a depressing thought that so many things have not changed since I first became actively involved in international development issues more

than 40 years ago—indeed, some things have got worse. For example, it is shocking that 30,000 African children will die today from diseases that we can prevent and cure. However, there has been recent progress, not least in Malawi, and the UK Government has increased its commitment to the global development challenge. That is reflected, for example, in the 11 per cent real-terms increase in the Department for International Development budget for the forthcoming spending period and in the £70 million a year that that department has pledged to Malawi in the period 2007-11.

Although it is at times disheartening to see just how much work is still needed in Malawi, it is encouraging to see progress. For example, although Malawi is one of the 10 poorest countries in the world, poverty levels fell by 5 per cent in 2006. Moreover, the latest figures show that life expectancy is rising after years of decline, and they reveal significant falls in infant mortality. The Save the Children report, "Saving Children's Lives: Why equity matters", which was published two days ago, reveals the horrifying extent of child mortality rates in developing countries throughout the world. Sub-Saharan Africa, with about 11 per cent of the world's population, accounts for nearly half of the total infant deaths throughout the world, and 19 of the world's 40 worst-performing countries are found there. However, because of support for the various health programmes in Malawi, the mortality rate there for under-fives dropped by more than 10 per cent between 2004 and 2006, which prompted Save the Children to identify Malawi as a positive example of the progress that can be made in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Malawian Government's community home-based care programme is a key development. One project, which is supported by Oxfam and funded by the Scottish Government, works to provide basic medical care to rural communities in the 81 villages that are worst affected by HIV/AIDS. Across Malawi more generally, the number of people contracting HIV and AIDS is starting to stabilise, with greater access to testing and anti-retroviral drugs, particularly in urban areas but increasingly in rural regions as well. Moreover, a UK Government-supported programme to make a substantial increase to health workers' salaries in Malawi is reducing staff emigration and improving the health prospects of those who are most in need of health care.

There have been further improvements in education—for example, more than 80 per cent of children now attend primary school. There have also been improvements in management of the economy, with growth of more than 7.5 per cent over the past two years. However, there is clearly a very long way to go. It is therefore vital to build on the successes while maintaining the continuity

and sustainability of the programmes that are already established.

Sustainability has to be one of the central principles of our involvement in Malawi; we have to bear that in mind whenever a project is funded. Involvement has to be based on partnership and a sustained engagement with local people to help them to develop in the way that they decide on. Before any project is begun, or indeed extended or ended, there has to be full consultation with the communities that will be benefiting from the intervention and also with other agencies and partners. Moreover, when funding decisions are made—as was recognised by the previous Administration—additional weight should be given to projects that promote women's equality and empowerment, thereby positioning women's rights and contributions at the heart of the development process.

Finally, we need to harness the expertise and experience of Scottish non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations in Malawi in order to ensure that we encourage and deliver best practice and channel Scottish skills and good will in ways that offer the most effective assistance to the people of Malawi.

Over and above all that, we must never forget the broader international context. There has been significant progress in debt cancellation for Malawi since Gleneagles, but there are still big trade injustices and the particular challenge at present of the European Union's economic partnership agreements. As John McAllion of Oxfam told us at a recent meeting of the cross-party group on Malawi, Malawi will have to remove tariffs on EU goods this year, which could affect both its food production and public spending levels.

We should never forget the bigger international picture because, at the end of the day, no amount of development of good practice will be successful if the international rules continue to be stacked in favour of the developed countries of the north and against the developing world of the south.

15:22

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

It is my pleasure to be able to contribute to this afternoon's debate on Malawi. When I had the pleasure and privilege two years ago of being part of a cross-party parliamentary delegation that visited Malawi, I was of course struck by the great challenges facing the country, but I was also struck by the great natural beauty of Malawi and, above all, by the friendliness and approachability of the people. The memories of that visit will remain with me for a long time.

Malawi has long historic links with Scotland. The links are remembered to this day, and the affection

of the Malawian people for the Scots is still very much alive and will be recognised by anyone who visits the country now. The links go back to David Livingstone, the great Scottish missionary and explorer, and the many others who followed him, such as Dr Robert Laws from Aberdeen.

Those Scots went to Malawi not as conquerors or colonisers but as liberators. They went at a time when Malawi was being ravaged by the Arab slave trade, and they went—fundamentally, in Livingstone's case—to stamp out the slave trade. Livingstone went with the twin aims of bringing Christianity and commerce to Malawi. He felt that only by improving the economy of the country and by opening up trade routes could he provide alternative sources of income to the people of central Africa, thus ensuring that the slave trade would have no future. It speaks volumes that Livingstone is remembered with affection in Malawi today.

When we visited Malawi, we visited some of the missionary graves, and I am sure that others who have visited more recently will have done the same. It is striking to see memorials to young Scots; many of them were in their twenties, and I do not remember any who were older than perhaps their mid-thirties. Those people would have gone to Malawi 150 years ago, or perhaps slightly more recently. It must have been a huge culture shock in the 19th century to leave Scotland and go to a country on the other side of the world, where they faced disease and famine. Many of them gave their lives—a tremendous sacrifice that is still remembered by the Malawian people. It speaks volumes that in post-colonial Africa, when so many countries, on achieving independence, changed the names of their towns and cities to more African-sounding names, Malawi's principal city is still called Blantyre, after the birthplace of David Livingstone, such is the reverence that the people of Malawi still have for that great Scot.

I pay tribute to the previous Executive and the current Government for the work that they have done in Malawi. Particular tribute should be paid to the former First Minister, Jack McConnell, for his personal interest in the Malawian project and for driving forward the 2005 co-operation agreement, which was signed by Mr McConnell and the President of Malawi. During my visit to Malawi, I was struck by the beauty of the country and the friendliness of the people. We visited the British High Commissioner's residence in Lilongwe and I was particularly struck by the elegance of the surroundings—the manicured lawns and the building's marble floors—and our attendance by staff in starched white uniforms, who looked after our every need. When we came home, I said to my wife Emma that I had found my perfect retirement job, which was as the British High Commissioner to Malawi. It seems that the ex-First

Minister had the same idea a little earlier than I did. I am sure that we all wish him well when he takes up that important role, and that he will use that role to develop the existing links between Scotland and Malawi.

We will hear a lot today about the problems in Malawi, such as its economy, which has the fifth-lowest gross domestic product in the world. Malawi has low life expectancy, an horrendous rate of HIV/AIDS, a lack of basic health care and problems in education. I want to focus on civil society and governance, which is one of the strands of the co-operation agreement.

Although the Scottish Government will allocate money from its budget to support Malawi, it will only ever be a drop in the bucket compared to the vast sums being spent by the UK Department for International Development and by other international aid agencies. The best way we can help is not necessarily to give money but to consider how we can help to strengthen some of the institutions in Malawi, and Government and civil society. There is a desperate need in Malawi to improve the economy and encourage foreign investment. The country has tremendous potential, not only in tourism, but in other sectors. Foreign investors need to have confidence in the stability of a country and in its political structures. Malawi is already well ahead of many of its African neighbours, but there is much more to be done.

I have been interested to see the excellent work that has been done by Parliament—rather than the Executive—in building links with the Malawian Parliament in order to strengthen the role of that legislature. However, we need to do much more. In terms of the expenditure of the Scottish Government in Malawi, and its commitment to that country, there is a particular need to build up civil society there, and its Parliament as an institution.

The minister referred to the excellent work that is being done by many voluntary groups throughout Scotland. When I returned from Malawi, I was amazed by the number of invitations I received from different groups—church groups and schools—to speak to them about my experiences in Malawi. Governments can do a great deal, but the people can do so much more. Voluntary groups throughout Scotland are doing excellent work—through the Scotland Malawi Partnership and by other means—to build up and develop links and to help people on a one-to-one basis. That is extremely valuable. I congratulate the Government on the initiatives it is taking and encourage it to push on with that important work, particularly in improving civil society and governance.

15:29

Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): I am delighted to be speaking in the debate. I have been extremely fortunate to have been to Malawi twice with the Scottish branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I am glad to hear that the minister is well following her visit, which I know she enjoyed.

All the MSPs who visited Malawi for the first time were particularly struck by certain events or visits that they made while they were there. I will return later to the one that especially affected me. After the visit, and the visit of the then First Minister, Jack McConnell, a co-operation agreement with Malawi was signed on 3 November 2005, as other members have mentioned. I add my congratulations to Jack McConnell on all the work that he has done. He will be a great asset and a help for both Scotland and Malawi when he takes up his new post.

A commitment was given through the international development fund, initially for £3 million per annum. That was increased by 50 per cent to £4.5 million for 2006-07 and 2007-08. I was a little disappointed that the Scottish National Party Government did not meet its manifesto commitment for its first 100 days, for the aid budget to be increased by 100 per cent. Rather, the aid budget will be doubled only by 2011.

Malawi is a very poor country. It is landlocked, and life expectancy is around 46 years. DFID's poverty figures show that 50 per cent of people there live on an income of less than 23p per day. HIV and AIDS have stabilised at about 14 per cent of the population. In the capital city, Lilongwe, HIV and AIDS cases among pregnant women fell from 25 to 16 per cent in the five years to 2003, and I know that the figure is still coming down. The under-five mortality rate declined to 133 deaths per 100,000 live births—I stress live births—in 2004, which is a 43 per cent reduction in 12 years.

Free primary education was introduced in 1994, and enrolment has risen by 60 per cent. In 2000, the average class size was 114. I remember visiting schools with Karen Gillon and others and finding class sizes of substantially more than 100. By 2006-07, the figure had come down, perhaps to 85—the equivalent of a whole primary school year here. Now, 81 per cent of children aged between six and 13 go to school. However, secondary schools are not free, so many children cease education at the end of primary school. Often, primary schools have children who are older than 13, because they did not manage to start school until after the age of six.

Hunger is ever present. One fifth of the population are not able to meet their minimum daily food needs. The last year I was there, the

maize crop—the main food source—had failed, which resulted in huge shortages and a huge amount of hardship. However, Malawi is now making good progress in achieving food security. For the second year running, the country has produced a record maize harvest. That is due to a successful Government fertiliser and seed subsidy programme, as well as to good rains. The 2007 harvest was 3.2 million tons, which is a surplus of 1 million tons. That will provide the Government with reserves for the future, and any sales will give the country welcome income.

I now return to the visit that made the most impact on me. Before I went to Malawi, I was approached by a constituent, Anne Findlay. She told me about a group of nurses and a doctor who were spending their own time and money delivering a maternity programme called ALSO—advanced life support training in obstetrics for health care professionals. She wanted me to visit Bottom maternity hospital. I agreed. I went, and I was thoroughly appalled at the conditions. I met Tariq Maquid, Grace, the head nurse, and others. We could not have met a more dedicated band. The infant mortality rate in 2004 was 984 deaths per 100,000 live births. Those who died before birth are not recorded. Graeme Walker, a doctor who works at the Royal infirmary of Edinburgh maternity unit, told me that he had never, in all the years he had worked at the maternity unit, seen a death at birth.

My visit was soon followed by that of Jack McConnell. I know that his visit to Bottom hospital had the same profound effect on him that mine had on me. Soon after his return, the ALSO group was awarded funding from the Scottish Executive to continue its work training midwives. Many of those nurses and doctors have now been to Malawi several times, giving up their time, including holiday time, for the benefit of nurses in Malawi. Nurses are now trained in various different parts of Malawi. However, one of the big problems in maternity care is the number of nurses who leave Malawi once they are trained. Many of them come to the United Kingdom. The ALSO team is helping to stem that flow.

One of those nurses, Linda McDonald, decided to do more to help Bottom hospital by raising money. A recipe book was launched and more than £100,000 was raised. The STV Christmas appeal in 2006 was for Bottom hospital and, with Tom Hunter matching the money pound for pound, more than £800,000 was raised from the Scottish population for a new maternity hospital in Lilongwe.

I became a member of the Malawi Underprivileged Mothers trust, which is run by Linda McDonald—I have found that one cannot say no to Linda. Other funds have been raised and

a second recipe book has already raised more than £50,000. With those funds, Tariq and Grace will get a new maternity wing at Top hospital for serious cases. The refurbishment of Bottom hospital by the Rose Project in Dublin will improve maternity care for thousands of deserving mothers and their babies from all around Lilongwe, thanks to the fundraising efforts of Linda McDonald and the generosity of Tom Hunter, STV and the Scottish people.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. We are considerably oversubscribed. Speeches should be up to six minutes, but please do not feel that it is compulsory to take six minutes.

15:35

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): I am glad to be able to participate in this debate as someone who had the privilege of going to Malawi last week with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation. I came back with a positive view of Malawi, which has enormous potential for the future. We went at one of the better times of year—in the latter part of the rainy season, when the country is at its greenest and is perhaps most like Scotland. Malawi is one of the most attractive countries. It has an enormous potential for tourism and agriculture, if it diversifies and moves away somewhat from its predominant crop of maize.

As Murdo Fraser said, the people of Malawi are enormously welcoming and friendly—we found that wherever we went, particularly in rural villages—although many of them suffer adversity. If they are able to maintain those characteristics as development moves ahead, it will stand them and their country in great stead.

I turn to development issues. One of the positive things that I learned—other members are probably aware of this—was that many of the measures that we can take to help countries such as Malawi do not necessarily have enormous budgetary implications. I am thinking, for example, of the provision of the simplest types of educational equipment; the provision of simple buildings in villages for self-help initiatives, particularly health initiatives; and measures to combat malaria, which is still the second most common cause of death. Malawi is one of the countries that are coloured red on the map of African countries that are most at risk of malaria. Malaria is a totally preventable disease that is debilitating even when it is not fatal. Many of the measures that we can take are relatively cheap, particularly if local materials and labour are used, and they have a concomitant beneficial effect on the local economy.

Malawi has seen a huge population explosion over the past decade and a bit. Although the

economy is growing at a fairly strong rate, that growth will have to be sustained if Malawi is to address the needs of its growing population. Population growth might slow as measures to reduce child mortality become effective—there is a link between child mortality reducing and birth rates going down—but there is a lag in that regard.

Economic growth will be necessary over a long period. For such economic growth to take place, and for it to improve, it is necessary for Malawi to improve its transport infrastructure. It is unlikely that Scotland will be able to contribute significantly to that, given that transport tends to be a relatively expensive item in any budget, but I mention it because the issue is not often raised in these debates, and I suspect that my colleagues might not mention it. However, transport infrastructure is a priority of the Malawi Government and it is vital if rural development is to increase, tourism is to prosper, and—more important, for humanitarian reasons—rural areas are to have adequate access to medical and educational facilities.

The spinal trunk road network—if I can describe it in that way—is basically adequate, partly because of European Union investment, and it can perhaps cope with some increase in traffic, but the other road network consists of dirt tracks and is a disincentive to movement, given that it is virtually impassable in some places at certain times of year.

A basic rail network exists, but there are no passenger services. Usually, it is used only seasonally to export tobacco—ironically, there is a potential conflict in the fact that, although we are trying to reduce the consumption of tobacco in western countries, it is an economically important crop for Malawi. Of course, Malawi is landlocked, so it needs adequate access to the sea through other countries for its exports. Currently, however, its rail links through Zambia and Mozambique are problematical at best. That area needs considerable attention.

I welcome the minister's assurance that Scotland's policy will proceed in agreement with the priorities of the Government of Malawi. That is important. I think that the Government of Malawi is undergoing some stresses at the moment, but I hope that those difficulties will be resolved. One of our tasks as parliamentarians is to ensure that the institutions of Government that request assistance get any help that we can give them in terms of technical expertise.

I met the ombudsman and his chief investigating officer, as the minister said, and was impressed by their energy. I was also impressed by some of their powers. That is one area in which we in Scotland could learn from what has been done in Malawi. There, the ombudsman is someone to be feared, but I am not sure that our local authorities regard our ombudsman in the same way.

At the General Assembly of the United Nations in September—I am always keen to read what happens at the General Assembly—the President of Malawi said:

“I can say with confidence that Malawi is indeed becoming a success story.”

Some might disagree with that judgment, but as an aim it is worth pursuing and it is certainly worthy of whatever assistance we can give.

15:42

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab):

As other members have said, it is always a great pleasure and privilege to speak in this chamber on the subject of Malawi. My problem is usually trying to limit myself to my allotted time. Accordingly, I will focus on only one area that is of concern to me but which cuts across all the other strands of our co-operation agreements.

We have heard about the many problems that the citizens of Malawi face every day, which those of us who have been to that amazing country have seen for ourselves. We have heard about the scourge of AIDS across the country, the lack of education for many, particularly girls, and the attempts to ensure that the democratic process is understood and participated in by all Malawians.

However, let us consider for a moment the plight of Malawi's 60,000 deaf citizens. Malawi has only one deaf sign language interpreter, and she is in full-time education, which means that she must divide her time between her studies and interpretation. With only one sign language interpreter, how do those 60,000 deaf people cope? In practical terms, they cannot be fully involved in decision making about their treatment if they happen to be in need of health care. In education, it means that they are unlikely to be able to take advantage of any opportunities that are available to them. Further, we are aware of reports of individuals who have been wrongly imprisoned simply because they could not defend themselves and did not understand the process to which they were subject.

The kind of work that is done by organisations such as Deaf Action is important. Since becoming involved in Malawi, Deaf Action has made good progress towards helping to increase the numbers of interpreters. However, the work has not stopped there. The organisation has also helped to raise awareness in Malawi of the needs of deaf people.

Deaf Action has worked closely with the Malawi National Association of the Deaf. Together, they met national ministers. One of the Deaf Action employees is deaf, and the experience of working with a deaf person and his interpreter was a positive experience for all concerned. I know from my own interaction with some of the Government

ministers in Malawi that that was a first for them and they regarded it as quite a privilege. Accordingly, they volunteered to champion the work.

Deaf Action was able, because of its connection with the Government here, to open doors that would otherwise have stayed closed. As a result of contacts that have been made for it, Deaf Action in Malawi has been able to apply to the high commissioner for support that will go directly to MNAD to enable it to continue its work.

I understand from reports that I have had that Deaf Action regards its experience of meeting MNAD as humbling, not least because some 60 deaf people from all over Malawi travelled—at great personal cost, and using the limited infrastructure that Alasdair Morgan so vividly described—to come together with their Scottish counterparts. They gave a detailed explanation of their needs and difficulties, which enabled Deaf Action to draw up an appropriate training plan for Malawian interpreters.

It is reassuring that people who have been recruited to train as interpreters come from every region of Malawi, and not just from around the areas that are close to the two major cities. I understand, too, that MNAD entered into a very democratic process in selecting those who would be trained, which is a good sign of grass-roots democratic activity.

The work of the deaf community in Malawi, with help from friends around the world, cuts across all areas of the co-operation agreement, and of course it chimes with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, articles 9, 13 and 24 of which deal specifically with the rights of deaf people. I very much hope that the work will continue, so that as we strengthen the policy areas of health, education, civil society and the economy, we ensure that all Malawians can take advantage of those improvements and make their important contribution to the progress that is undoubtedly happening in Malawi.

15:47

Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): In the early years of the Scottish Parliament, some members hesitated and were reluctant to engage in making international policy, even international development policy. That view extended to the functions of both the Parliament and the Executive. That reluctance was driven by several factors, but the principal factor for some members was the view that international development policy was reserved. However, this debate—as has been the case with other debates on international development policy—demonstrates that the

Parliament has moved forward in recognising that we have a responsibility and a part to play in international development.

The role played by the Scottish branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association was a significant catalyst in changing our thinking about the role of this Parliament. It also had an impact on the Government at the time. The CPA recognised early on that there was a strong desire on the part of Parliaments in other parts of the world to engage with the new Scottish Parliament and Scotland's new-found democracy, and it considered how we could build on such relationships. However, it also recognised that engagement should occur in a purposeful manner, and should not consist of a group of MSPs fleetingly visiting one country and saying, "That was great. You're doing really well. Please come and visit us some time." Instead, it should be about engaging in a meaningful and enduring way, which has been reflected in the on-going relationship between this Parliament and the Malawian Parliament.

As members have done, we must acknowledge that despite the criticisms from some quarters—even within the chamber—and from that other Parliament at Westminster at the time, the then First Minister, Jack McConnell, recognised that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive had a purposeful role to play. That position was endorsed by the minister in charge of international development at the time, Hilary Benn, who made it clear that international development is everybody's business. It is important that we continue to recognise that within the Parliament.

The relationship with Malawi moved on—as other members have mentioned—to the co-operation agreement that was signed in November 2005 between the two countries. It is clear that, since then, the relationship between our Governments and the Parliament has matured and strengthened to our mutual benefit. I believe that it will endure if there is the continuing will to ensure that it does so.

With the on-going review of the Government's international development policy, we will no doubt see changes in the existing strategy. They may take the new Government into areas where the previous Executive did not go, but no matter what happens I am sure that they will provide new opportunities in other areas. I hope that, at the end of the review process, the relationship with Malawi that we have developed at both an institutional and political level will be retained as a key part of the policy.

I welcome the fact that, contrary to what Mike Pringle said, the Government will double the amount of money in the Scottish Government's budget that is invested in international

development. I welcome the fact that the Malawian funding has been ring fenced—it is one area of ring fencing that I am happy with and would not like to be subject to an outcome agreement.

I acknowledge that, as Murdo Fraser said, the money that the Scottish Government can invest in international development and the approximately £3 million investment in Malawi are modest, given the scale of the difficulties that that country faces, therefore we should focus, albeit not exclusively, on two areas: health and education. Malawi has some of the poorest health indicators in the world for a range of conditions, but significant progress can be made. I hope that during the Government's review we will consider providing more targeted support to key areas where we can improve capacity and access to services.

I refer to capacity and access in that order because it is important that, before promoting greater access to health and education, we ensure that there is significant capacity to cope with it. I understand that point from my experience of visiting a school in Malawi. When the Government introduced free education provision, the school, which had 14 classrooms, saw its pupil numbers increase to 9,500 overnight. It clearly did not have the infrastructure to cope with the increasing access to the service. I hope that we will consider that point during the policy review.

I hope that, at the end of the review, there will be a greater focus on the good development practice of the organisations that we support to ensure that they engage in a meaningful way at a local level and that they are open, transparent and accountable in how they operate, to ensure that they create sustainability at a local level rather than for themselves.

15:53

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Lab)): I am delighted to take part in today's debate. Unlike many other speakers, I have not had the opportunity to visit Malawi. My impressions come from images on television and what I have heard from people in my constituency.

Among those people is Vicky McKenzie, a primary 7 teacher at Lairdsland primary school in Kirkintilloch. Last year, Vicky and her pupils took part in a videoconference with children attending the David Livingstone international school in Blantyre. Both classes had prepared PowerPoint presentations, and a great time was had by all as they conversed through the magic of technology. Indeed, I am told that several other teachers made a point of being in the classroom at the time. They had lots of visitors that day. It is intended to repeat the exercise later this year. This time, pupils from other primary schools in Blantyre—those not so

fortunate as to have computers or broadband connections—will be invited to take part.

In May, three teachers from other primary schools in East Dunbartonshire will travel to Malawi through the Link Community Development programme. They are going to the Dedza region near Lilongwe, where they will teach at local schools for two weeks.

Like other parts of Scotland, East Dunbartonshire has developed links with schools in Malawi, but I am delighted to say that visits are not all one way. In September, three head teachers from Malawi are arriving in Scotland to visit our schools, as part of the co-operation agreement that was signed with Malawi in 2005, one of the four main areas of which was the development of educational links. The agreement referred to

“further developing teacher exchange programmes and supporting the development of training of trainers for local delivery”

and

“facilitating academic links and twinning initiatives between local government, schools and higher education institutions”.

For the Scottish children who are involved in such initiatives, the relationships are important. The children from Lairdsland primary school and other schools send to Malawi parcels of books, pencils, photos and class work. They have even sent a camera, so that they can receive pictures along with messages and other materials.

In Labour's election manifesto last year, we pledged to develop volunteering opportunities abroad, as we all know that giving children a decent start in life with access to good-quality education is the route out of poverty. As we have heard, people in Malawi do not worry about class sizes of 18 for primary 1 to primary 3; class sizes of 80 to 100 are normal. As has been said, completion rates are among the worst in Africa and girls tend to lose out in secondary education and in further and higher education.

I ask the minister to consider a new teacher exchange programme in addition to the programme that Link Community Development organises, which sends Scottish teachers to Malawi for only short periods, sometimes in the teachers' holidays. Perhaps we should establish a new programme that would give Scottish probationary teachers who are without a job and who are sitting at home waiting for the call to do supply work the opportunity to work in Malawi. They could go there for six months or a year as part of a development programme. The exchange could be two way. I understand from talking to teachers in my constituency that many teachers in Malawi do not have a university education; they

have an education diploma. Perhaps we could offer teachers from Malawi a placement in Scotland that is linked to a training programme to improve their skills further. Such exchanges could be life-changing events for both sets of teachers.

Another of my constituents, 18-year-old Collette Oliver, is taking part in the leadership programme that Sir Tom Hunter is establishing. She was the school captain at St Ninian's high school in Kirkintilloch and she has taken part in a range of activities organised through the Hunter Foundation. One of her most memorable experiences was spending three weeks in Malawi helping to build a school.

Bricks and mortar are one thing, but helping youngsters to build a future is another. Scottish education is world famous. The Government has committed £3 million a year to Malawi, which includes funding for the school improvement programme. A teacher exchange programme would help to achieve our aims, and I strongly urge the minister to consider the idea. By using young Scottish teachers in that way, we would do much to enhance educational opportunity in Malawi, while giving young Scots a fantastic opportunity for career development. That could only help our children when those teachers return.

15:57

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Scotland's new relationship with Malawi is undoubtedly one of the great achievements of devolution. I thank the Scottish Government for providing the opportunity to discuss that relationship and I congratulate the minister and the representatives of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association on their successful trip to the country in the recess. I pay tribute to the work and experience of members who have done much to strengthen the relationship between the two nations.

Malawi is known as the warm heart of Africa and—perhaps not coincidentally—as the Scotland of Africa. I am not sure whether that is attributable to the warmth of its people, its landscape or its erratic weather conditions. Malawi is rich in heritage and culture. In a part of the world where borders that were established in colonial times do not necessarily respect traditional ethnic or cultural boundaries, it has much in common with its near neighbours—traditions and customs, dances and languages, families and friends. It is a source of inspiration to us all. Malawi also stands out as an African nation that has made a successful and peaceful transition to multiparty democracy from one-party rule in the mid-1990s.

As we know, the country is marked by widespread and endemic poverty. On the United

Nations human development index, Malawi ranks 164th and is the 14th poorest country in the world. Nearly two thirds of Malawi's population live below the poverty line of \$2 a day, 40 per cent do not have basic reading and writing skills and 14 per cent are infected with HIV/AIDS.

Those statistics shame us all. It is scandalous that the UN should still have to compile such indicators more than 30 years after the richest countries promised to allocate at least 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product to international development and when we are halfway towards the millennium development goals target date of 2015. In the 21st century, we have the knowledge, the resources and the ability to end poverty wherever it exists. I am pleased that the Scottish Government is showing some political will in that respect.

It is worth noting that despite the huge challenges that exist, Malawi stands as a proud member of the international community and chooses to work in partnership with our country and other countries to develop its economy and society.

Statistics tell only one side of the story. We must look beyond the bare facts for the human face of development. I have not yet been lucky enough to travel to Malawi, but a number of my friends and colleagues have done so, and they have told me about the challenges that its rural areas face. The people in its northern and southern regions often think that their opportunities are squeezed by the more prosperous central region. As an MSP for the South of Scotland, I can understand that.

I have also heard about the innovative projects and programmes that are making a real difference to people's lives in Malawi. The Eva Demaya project, for example, is based 15 miles from the nearest tarmac road and the northern town of Rhumpi, and it relies on solar power for electricity and boreholes for water. However, a genuine partnership exists between a Scots-Dutch couple and the local community that is making a real difference to people's daily lives. The centre provides a mix of conventional western treatments alongside traditional Malawian healing and homoeopathic methods. In addition, it provides food, decent clothing and employment opportunities in an area in which all three are in short supply.

The Chesney Trust for Education in Malawi is another project that was founded by a Scots volunteer who visited Malawi and fell in love with it. Away from infrastructure such as roads and electricity, which we in Scotland take for granted, the trust is building a school with a special unit for hearing-impaired children—Patricia Ferguson mentioned hearing impairment—that will also serve as a focus for local employment and

development. We can find many similar examples, which is why Scotland's relationship with Malawi has rightly been described as a partnership. Many MSPs can give similar examples of constituents who have built links with Malawi.

In the South of Scotland, St Michael's academy in Kilwinning was one of the first schools in Scotland to establish a link with a school in Malawi—St Peter's school in the northern capital of Mzuzu. The partnership has had a transformative effect on St Peter's school. Equipment, buildings and resources have been provided that otherwise would simply have been out of the school's reach. However, it has also had a transformative effect on the school in Scotland. The partnership gives real meaning to the concept of global citizenship and enables young people from both countries to broaden their horizons. When young Malawians come to Scotland or young Scots visit Malawi, what is remarkable is not that they notice the differences in their material lives, but that they discover the similarities of their experiences. They do not like doing homework, they are on the look out for a boyfriend or a girlfriend, and they want to be the next champion in their favourite sport. From that, we can see that genuine partnership works both ways. There should be a two-way street. For that reason, I encourage the Scottish Government to ensure that when it distributes grant funding it considers not only how Malawi can learn from Scotland, but how Scotland can learn from Malawi.

Agencies such as Oxfam in Scotland, the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund and others that have been mentioned understand that people in developing countries are not only looking for charity—they are looking for justice. Much of the development work that is taking place in Malawi and throughout the poorer parts of the world seeks to strengthen communities by building capacity and empowering citizens with knowledge and capital. Community-based health awareness and care programmes, credit unions and women's centres offer models of local development work that we can learn from and can consider applying in some of Scotland's most deprived communities.

In conclusion, we all agree that the partnership between Scotland and Malawi is one of the great achievements of devolution so far. The new Scottish Government has clearly demonstrated its commitment to building on that positive and healthy international relationship, which is based on global co-operation and respect and does not seek to perpetrate the stereotypical images and notions of the past.

16:03

Jack McConnell (Motherwell and Wishaw (Lab)): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

In June 2001, President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa said in an address to members of the Scottish Parliament:

"I should like to believe that ... those who represent the Scottish people will raise their voice and say, 'We cannot have such an extraordinary situation of enormous wealth in one place and extraordinary poverty in another.'"

In the years that have followed that speech, we in Scotland have expanded our international activity to promote Scottish business, create jobs and improve the wealth of our country through new promotions in North America, China, Europe and elsewhere, but it was right that we decided that we should not only take something from the rest of the world, but give something.

Four years after the speech, in the run-up to the G8 summit at Gleneagles, the Parliament spoke out with the people of Scotland. The Parliament and the people of Scotland joined demands to make poverty history, supported the millennium development goals and said not only that poverty and premature deaths are wrong for those who are directly affected, but that they damage all of us. In seeking to expand the work of the Parliament and the Scottish Government into the areas that affect us all, as internationalists as well as Scots, we refreshed an old friendship with the people of Malawi.

Malawi is a country where more than one in 10 of the population has HIV/AIDS and where more than one in 10 children dies shortly after they are born. It is also a country with the highest maternal mortality rate in the world. Most of Malawi's schools do not have electricity, so they can open only during daylight hours, and a large number of children—if they can get to school at all—learn from memory because there are no books, pencils, desks or chalk with which to write on the blackboard.

A Malawian said to me that, 150 years ago, Dr Livingstone did not discover Malawi—Malawi discovered Dr Livingstone and Scotland. A hundred years ago, Scots went to Malawi in large numbers to build schools, hospitals and roads to ensure that the country had, at the start of the 20th century, an infrastructure that would allow it to develop. Fifty years ago, Scots stood with the people of Malawi and demanded that the United Kingdom Government help to prevent Nyasaland—as it was called then—from becoming part of Rhodesia, with all the problems that there would have been in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s if that had happened. Now, 50 years on from that, Scots are standing with Malawians again.

I do not believe that international development and our relationship with Malawi should be dominated by party politics or disputes about who has what responsibilities. The kids in those classrooms do not care about the distinction

between reserved and devolved issues; they want us to help, and we should help. I do not believe that any level of government should discourage another from becoming involved in helping those, elsewhere on the planet, whose need is greater than ours. I also do not believe that the Scottish Parliament should use such issues for party purposes. I therefore praise the minister and her colleagues for continuing the work in this area. She has recognised that the relationship between Scotland and Malawi is bigger than party politics, and she will have my support as long as she continues to do so. I wish her well and I hope that the relationship between the Scottish Government and the Government in Malawi continues to improve and develop.

However, the relationship was never about politicians; it has always been about people. It is about ensuring that people can come together, and throughout Scotland the number of schools that are involved in the relationship has risen from 10 to about 150. There are medics who are training Malawians in anaesthetics, tackling epilepsy and midwifery. There are academics in Scotland who—at the University of St Andrews, the University of Strathclyde and many other universities and colleges—are working to ensure that people in Malawi have the skills to compete in the 21st century. Scottish businesses of all kinds are now helping people in Malawi to build their own businesses. Many other organisations and individuals in Scotland are helping, too, and we should praise and congratulate them all.

It was always our job to encourage and inspire Scots to become involved—not to do it for Malawi, but to help Malawians do it for themselves. In seeking to achieve that, I ask the minister to consider how we can further improve what we do, for example, in supporting volunteering through the work of Voluntary Service Overseas; in supporting the delivery of goods, as an immediate measure to help Malawians; and in continuing to support professional training.

Two hundred years ago, the Scots who led the enlightenment—Hume and Smith, and Robert Burns, who never travelled further than Newcastle—saw that Scotland, even then, was becoming part of an interlinked, interdependent world. They recognised that, for Scotland to succeed, we had to reach out and that, for Scots to be all that they could be, they had to be part of that world and not hide from it. I believe that, today, we are achieving that again.

While there is in Malawi a village without water and a classroom without electricity or even the internet; while there is a mother dying in childbirth or a child dying immediately after birth; and while there are still people who cannot have the basic

vaccinations that we take for granted, our work in Malawi—and, indeed, elsewhere—is not finished.

Back in 2005, this was about the kind of people that we are, as Scots. I believe that, in the past three years, we have done a good thing. However, there is much more for us still to do. I am sure that the Parliament will be united in moving forward to do it.

16:09

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): As one of the members who were privileged to visit Malawi last week, I was struck by something to do with the point on which Jack McConnell just finished: as citizens, as members of Parliament and as members of the Government, we are able to make a real difference. Other members of the delegation were able to identify positive changes that had taken place since their previous visit two years ago. It is important for us to be able to tell our constituents, civic Scotland and those who are raising funds for and have built links with Malawi that they are making a difference to one of the poorest countries in the world.

We met far too many people and saw far too many projects for me to mention them all now, but other members have referred to the core issues of health and education. I would add fair trade and business development to that list. We were incredibly impressed by some of the local health projects that are tackling the poverty, malnutrition and poor water quality that Malawians experience. A particular issue is the status of women, who still die routinely during childbirth. That is unthinkable to us, with our modern standards of health care.

A huge amount of positive work is under way. We met people in villages in Chikwawa, where the incidence of cholera has been reduced; in those villages, people have not died of the disease in the past year. That project is also reducing the number of people who die from malaria and improving the survival rate of women giving birth. People appreciate and strongly support such projects. The volunteer health workers whom the projects fund are trying to work with the Malawian health system, which is crucial.

We saw the work that is being done at Mulanje mission hospital to support nurses' training. To attract nurses to work at the hospital and to retain them there, the hospital has ensured that they have somewhere to stay. We were struck by the fact that 15 per cent of Malawi's adult population have HIV. The impact of that is devastating. Work with orphans, to get them into schools, is crucial.

I refer to the twinning links that exist between Malawi and schools in my constituency such as Stenhouse primary, Dalry primary and Tynecastle high school. It was exciting to see the benefits of

those links on the ground. A girls hostel has been built in Embangweni, and a huge amount of work has been done to support the links between our schools and Malawian schools. The benefits are tangible and are appreciated by teachers, parents and pupils. However, there is much more that we need to do. More books are required, so that children do not have to share 10 to a book. Basic facilities such as seats in classrooms are also needed, to enable kids to concentrate. There is a lack of dining facilities and there is poor sanitation—a lack of clean water and toilet facilities. I hope that the minister will look at how we can build on our educational programmes.

Government support for fair trade—the work that DFID is doing in Malawi—is crucial, but there is much that we can do as individuals. We need to tell our constituents that the people whom we met in Malawi—the Kasinthula cane growers—have had their lives improved already. Much more can be done if we think about buying fair trade goods. We need a relationship that is built on trade justice, fair wages and investment in local communities. That is a really practical way in which we as parliamentarians and, crucially, as citizens and leaders in our communities can help to ensure that the improvements that are taking place in Malawi and that need to happen in the future continue.

16:13

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): As many members have said, there are few countries with closer cultural ties to Scotland than Malawi. My friend Malcolm Fleming, who visited the country recently on behalf of Oxfam, got into conversation with a family and asked their daughter what she was studying in history at school. He was astonished to find that she had been memorising the dates of all the schisms in the Church of Scotland. She had reached 1843 and was still working on the rest.

Although the example that I have given may be bizarre, both the previous Executive and the present Government have recognised the strength of the connections that exist. Scotland has a real opportunity to make a significant mark by promoting sustainable development in the developing world. Other members have outlined the contribution that Scotland has made and the statistics relating to Malawi, which might be thought to speak for themselves. However, I would like briefly to highlight the human aspect of the situation and the reasons why Scotland is involved with Malawi in the first place.

I have not been to the country, but my friend who has says that it left a lasting impression on him. When he was there, he met 17-year-old

Steve Julio and his brothers, who live in a rural part of Chiradzulu province. Steve said:

"When our parents were alive, we never really had any challenges in meeting basic needs".

He continued:

"The challenges started when dad died as he was the main breadwinner.

But mum still tried. Working our vegetable garden we grew and sold tomatoes to have a little to keep going."

However, in June 2004, their mother also passed away—one of hundreds of thousands of Malawians, and millions of Africans, who have succumbed to HIV and AIDS. Perhaps a failure of imagination on our part means that we do not understand the scale of that or what any of it means. Perhaps the only way of putting it is to say that the last time that Scotland saw death and dislocation on that scale may have been during the plague some seven centuries ago.

However, disastrous as the situation is, it is important to say that Malawi is not merely another reason for a wasteful and lazy western world to feel appropriately guilty; Malawi wants to work. I hope that, through Scotland's active engagement in Malawi's civic life and health and education services—our funding for which is rising from £3 million to £9 million by 2011—we will show which side of the argument Scotland takes. Scotland is remembered fondly by Malawi. The least that we can do is return that compliment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): We move to the wind-up speeches. I call Iain Smith—Mr Smith, you have six minutes.

16:15

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): Thank you, Presiding Officer. It is difficult to sum up such a debate when so much that one might want to say has already been said. I am sure that the minister will have even more difficulty, because there are another three speeches before she makes hers.

I am particularly struck by the speeches from members who have been to Malawi. I have not had the good fortune to have visited Malawi but, a few months ago, I went to Sierra Leone, which is another country in Africa that suffers from significant poverty—I think that it is the third-poorest country in Africa. Civil war has left its infrastructure devastated and it has gone from being one of the richest countries in Africa to being one of the poorest, thanks to the corruption of its officials.

Many of the problems that Sierra Leone faces are the same as those that Malawi faces—perhaps to a greater extent in some areas. When one goes there and scratches the surface of the problems for a few days, one wonders how on

earth it is possible to do anything meaningful. The problems are immense. There are infrastructure problems, such as the lack of a secure, fresh, clean, safe water supply or a secure power supply to communities. The contribution of the many individuals, organisations and, indeed, Governments that try to tackle some of those problems is incredible. The Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament make a small contribution to that process, but the much greater contribution that the whole of Scotland makes to the process in Malawi is significant.

The minister mentioned the key issues in the co-operation agreement to which even greater focus needs to be given as the agreement is revised over the next few months: health, education, governance and sustainable development. Those issues are important and interlinked. It is not possible to deal with sustainable development if the population is not healthy or educated, and it is not possible to deal with education or health issues until we deal with governance and civil society issues to ensure that the other matters can be taken forward. That is a very difficult cycle to break, and one in which small steps must be taken.

We must realise that Scotland's financial contribution is minuscule compared with what is going in overall. I am sure that the minister realises that as well as anyone. DFID's contribution to Malawi over the next three years is intended to be \$560 million—for some reason, DFID puts the figure in dollars—a year.

Linda Fabiani: I point out that Scotland contributes to DFID's contribution in proportion to our population. The important thing is to ensure that the additional funding from Scotland is targeted where we can best add value.

Iain Smith: It is even harder to make a summing-up speech when the minister intervenes to make the point that one is about to make, but I thank her for doing so. I was going to make the point that Scotland contributes towards that \$560 million of aid from its taxation. Scotland can make a significant contribution, but the financial amount is small and we must ensure that we use the money effectively to add value to what is done elsewhere. Rather than trying to pretend that we can make all the difference ourselves through our contribution, we must work with others.

Malcolm Chisholm made an important point about trade injustice, which Sarah Boyack picked up on at the end of her speech. It surprises me how little that point has come across in the debate. We need to highlight trade injustice.

The European Union has a large overseas aid and international development budget, but it also has a series of policies that directly work against

international development. We should, not only through lobbying in Europe but through the UK Government, seek to change many of those policies to ensure that we deal with European trade injustice and give developing countries a fair crack of the whip. In Scotland, for example, we could look at our public sector procurement policies while, on an individual level, we could consider buying fair trade produce.

Murdo Fraser quite rightly referred to Malawi's historical links with David Livingstone, and highlighted not only the importance of civic society and governance but what we can do in that respect. It is important that the Scottish Parliament continues its relationship with Malawi and helps to support civic governance. Indeed, in Sierra Leone, I worked with parliamentarians on their serious governance problems.

Health is a key aspect. The HIV/AIDS issue is very important, and members have highlighted the prevention of disease as a major issue. Instead of simply dealing with illnesses when they emerge, we can for a relatively small amount of money prevent many of them. Of course, trained and qualified medical personnel will be needed in Malawi to deliver such programmes. Compared with what we might expect, the number of qualified nurses in Malawi is staggeringly small, and we must ensure that the country continues to receive more support in that respect. Support is already available not only through the DFID programme but through the poverty reduction budget support system, which helps to provide better wages to health service workers. Such approaches are crucial if we are to tackle some of the country's key health issues and break the cycle that I mentioned earlier in my speech.

16:22

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): In winding up for the Conservatives, I, like other members, feel privileged to take part in this debate.

It is three years since I visited Malawi with the first Scottish Parliament delegation. At that time, my defining image of the country was of coffins lined up outside carpenters' shops in the villages and shanty towns that we drove through. It seemed as if the country's only growth industry was coffin making. Other members have listed various depressing statistics about Malawi but, for me, the most depressing is the fact that life expectancy is still under 40 years. As Malcolm Chisholm and others have made clear, Malawi is one of the world's poorest countries with one of the world's most rapidly increasing populations.

That said, as we have also heard this afternoon, all is far from doom and gloom. Malawians are

resilient people. As Murdo Fraser reminded us, the country is remarkably beautiful and, even in the most unlikely places, flowers bloom and against all odds hope prevails.

When school groups ask me what I believe to be the Scottish Parliament's most important achievements, I have to say that high on what is a fairly short list is the special relationship that has been forged with Malawi. Indeed, I echo the tributes that have been paid to Jack McConnell's pivotal role in forging those links. Although he attracted much undeserved flak from sections of the media and accusations of empire building, he was right to press ahead and sign the co-operation agreement, and Malawi, with its links to Livingstone and other Scottish missionaries, was the right choice to make. I thought that Jack McConnell's speech was the most thoughtful and telling that we heard this afternoon. I hope that, when he heads out to Malawi as the new high commissioner, he will have time for a game of golf at that pretty little course in Lilongwe—perhaps using one of the sets of clubs that were donated by the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews.

I welcome the new Government's pledge to double the amount of funding for international development over this session of Parliament and its commitment to provide a minimum of £3 million to Malawi. Of course, even if the whole £9 million for international aid was devoted to the country, it would, as Michael Matheson and others have pointed out, still be a drop in the ocean compared with other funding sources.

However, I believe that Scotland has a genuine opportunity to make significant change in Malawi, and although I recognise that there are many voices clamouring for a share of Scotland's tiny international development budget, it is my view that the lion's share of it should continue to go to Malawi. With the experience that we gain from the various programmes in which Scotland is involved in Malawi, we might be able to think about extending those programmes to similar, neighbouring African countries. It is right that all such matters will be considered in the European and External Relations Committee's forthcoming inquiry, but my instinct is that we should not dilute our aid effort by spreading it too widely or where it might simply be lost or swamped by the aid efforts of far bigger funders.

Of course, Scotland's contribution should not simply be about money. What has impressed me most has been the way in which the Scottish people and Scottish institutions have taken Malawi to their hearts. We have expertise in matters such as health, education, economic development and governance. It is encouraging to hear from members such as Sarah Boyack that many schemes are now showing positive results, but I

agree with those speakers who made the point that when the Scottish Government chooses to support people in Malawi, sustainable development must be the priority. There is little point in funding projects for three years or so and then letting them wither away. Why raise people's hopes if they are only to be dashed again? I am glad that the minister appeared to agree.

When I came back from Malawi back in 2005, I wrote an article for a national newspaper in which I spelled out the basic problem of a lack of skills in areas such as agronomy, irrigation and construction, which arose simply because there was a missing generation of Malawians to pass on those skills. To my surprise, I was inundated with letters from Scottish carpenters, bricklayers and electricians, all of whom were willing to go to Malawi to teach those trades and who wanted to know how they could sign up. I am still not sure whether there is sufficient funding available to cover the travel and accommodation costs of such volunteers, but it seems to me that, if we do not take up those offers and make it easier for people to contribute, in whatever way they are able—including through service on the ground in Malawi—we will lose a huge opportunity to tap into the good will of the Scottish people, and Malawi will lose something far more valuable than money. David Whitton was certainly on to something with his proposed scheme, which would allow trainee teachers to serve in Malawi. That idea should be given consideration.

Murdo Fraser mentioned the pioneering work of Livingstone and the other great Scottish missionaries. It would be nice to think that a new generation of Livingstones might help to stem the tragic tide of coffins, to which I referred at the beginning of my speech.

16:27

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I make no apology for being proud of the role that the Scottish Parliament and our people are playing through the partnership with Malawi. Like other members, I pay tribute to Jack McConnell, who performed a driving role, and to the new minister, who seeks to continue our relationship with Malawi.

I use the word “partnership” because that is what it genuinely is. It brings genuine and tangible benefits to all. It absolutely does not represent a traditional approach to aid, in that it is not—nor do I believe that it should be—delivered exclusively by NGOs, as other aid development projects are. Some people would take us down that road. It is a partnership that is not simply about money. As many members have said, in real terms, the amount of money that Scotland provides is small, although it helps to stimulate grass-roots

development and provides added value through skills transfer, whether in health, education, governance or—following today's announcement by the minister—the voluntary sector.

For me, skills transfer means the provision of long-term tangible and sustainable benefits. Those people who learn from Scots who go to Malawi are able to pass their skills on to their colleagues. That cascade effect represents great value for the cost of facilitating someone to go and transfer their skills. Such benefits cannot be bought. The truest test of the partnership's success lies in the people who are involved in sharing skills, knowledge, experience and resources.

The partnership permeates all sections of Scottish and Malawian society. It involves the women of St John's guild in Carluke, who knit baby jackets and blankets to be given to maternity units in Malawi, where—as I saw at first hand last week—they act as makeshift incubators for premature babies or those who have taken ill. In areas where electricity is not available, the warmth of knitted materials ensures that those babies are able to get the heat that they need to develop and to have a greater chance of surviving.

The partnership is villagers in Stonehouse and their partners in Mulanje who are working together to develop sustainable projects, whether by supporting people to rear, buy and sell chickens, which provides food, employment and income long into the future, or by developing clean water supplies, which enables health improvement and therefore community development and better education for young people.

The partnership is the children from Blackhall and Carnwath who are sharing knowledge and understanding with friends in schools in the Zomba district, thereby developing a new generation of real global citizens. It is also the young people from Kirkmuirhill who are working with young people in the Nkata Bay constituency to share vocational skills and to participate—we hope—in an educational exchange. In Scotland, those young people from Kirkmuirhill are seen as poor and disadvantaged, but they are young people who believe that they can learn from and share with their friends in Malawi.

I returned yesterday with other MSPs from our visit to Malawi, which was, without doubt, a humbling and challenging experience. However, it was also an experience that showed the progress that has been made in the time since we were last in the country. I am grateful to the CPA for enabling me and other MSPs to participate. As a person and as a politician, I have grown from that experience. I came into politics because of a basic belief in social justice—a belief that inequality and injustice were wrong and that they must be tackled

and changed wherever they happen, across the world as well as in here in Scotland.

Few can forget the emotion of the opening ceremony of the first session of the Scottish Parliament, when members burst spontaneously into song with Sheena Wellington and sang together:

"That Man to Man the world o'er,
Shall brothers be for a' that."

That is not a quaint sentiment, but a real desire to change the world. In this partnership, we have an opportunity to take small, but—I believe—significant steps.

Our visit had many facets, one of which was health. We visited Mulanje mission, where, 30 years ago, one of my constituents was a doctor. She would doubtless be amazed at the changes and developments that have taken place. She would also be delighted at the report that we received that, from last year's figures, the maternal mortality rate is going down, for the first time. As a result of free access to maternity services and the support that the Scottish Parliament is providing, through our Government, for primary health care services, people now have better access to food, clean water and antenatal care. At Orphan Care Malawi, we saw the real progress of children whom we first met in 2005.

Another facet of our visit was education. We visited a number of schools and the proposed site of the Edinburgh girls high school, which my good friend Janet Chesney is developing. Only a fraction of girls who are eligible to attend secondary school in the northern region of Malawi are able to do so. I commend both Janet for her work and the Synod of Livingstonia, which is prioritising education for girls in its developments. We visited two of its schools and to see the Synod's work at first hand.

Governance was another facet. We had many meetings and discussions with our colleagues in Malawi. We agreed to take forward twinning between our members to share knowledge and understanding. We also stressed the need for mutual respect between Government and Parliament. That is something that we do not always get right in this place, or something that we always find easy, but it is something that is absolutely crucial to a successful multiparty democracy.

Along with the minister, we attended the launch of the youth business Malawi trust. That shows that we can work in partnership and that good models of successful entrepreneurial skills development in Scotland can play a part in developing the lives of young people in Malawi.

For me, one of the most challenging parts of the visit was our visit to the Old Bandawe mission. In

addition to worshipping in the church, which was established by Scottish missionaries, and being welcomed by the great-great-grandson of the man who had welcomed Dr Robert Laws in the 1800s, we had the opportunity to pay our respects at the graves of the Scots who journeyed with him. Almost all of them—parents, children and babies—died of malaria.

It was challenging and, in many ways, depressing to realise that malaria remains one of the biggest killers in Malawi today. Malaria is a preventable and treatable disease, but the cost of basic essentials such as mosquito nets remain out of the reach of many ordinary Malawian people. The difficulties involved in going to hospital also mean that people often leave it too late for treatment to be effective. It is surely a shame on all in the developed world that, 150 years on, the disease continues to ravage Malawi.

I commend the Government and the previous Executive for the work that they have done in Malawi. However, the partnership is about the people of Scotland—it is about who we are in the world and what we say to the people of the world. I hope that our partnership with Malawi will continue, and that my children will be able to do the things that I can do now.

16:35

Linda Fabiani: As Iain Smith said, it is difficult to cover everything that members have spoken about, so I make my excuses in advance in case I do not cover some of the points that were made. However, I will pick up on some specific issues.

As always when we discuss Malawi and international development, I have been struck by the consensus in the Parliament about the way in which we are headed and about our moral obligation to and friendship with Malawi, which Karen Gillon talked about. Another issue that many members have spoken about is Malawi's potential. As we have heard, it is a beautiful country. Last week was a nice time of year to go there, with beautiful verdant scenery around us when we travelled, very like that in Scotland. I have seen Malawi looking very dry and different, but the beauty is there.

Aileen Campbell touched on a feature of Malawi that has huge potential but which has never been made the most of—the peace. It is a small African nation in a region of Africa that, sadly, suffers from a lot of turmoil. Within that, there is the oasis of Malawi, with friendship and peace. Individuals going there from Scotland feel a sense of security. That has huge potential.

Alasdair Morgan talked about infrastructure and tourism. The capacity for tourism has not yet been truly tapped, but I hope that it will be. Through a

programme that was started by Patricia Ferguson and continued by the present Government—despite our review, we have been meeting all the previous commitments—the Malawi Institute of Tourism has undergone capacity building. That is an economically sustainable developmental approach, which is important.

On commitments from the Scottish Executive, I assure Malcolm Chisholm that the £4.5 million that was agreed previously has now been expended or allocated in this financial year. I will attend the European and External Relations Committee fairly soon to discuss such matters in more detail. One important point is that the money has been allocated with the agreement of the Malawian Government. It has always been crucial in the partnership that we have that it is for Malawians to decide what is best for them. We work in partnership and in discussion and come to joint agreement—it is not for us to impose anything.

I can confirm that, over the next two years, we have doubled the previous baseline budget of £3 million a year for international development and that, in year 3 of the spending review period, the budget of £4.5 million will be doubled to £9 million. As many members have said, within that, a minimum of £3 million is ring fenced for Malawi. That has given clarity about the funding for Malawi, which the Malawian Government has welcomed. The time was right to consider our agreement and to make changes as appropriate, which is what I wanted to do.

Karen Gillon summed up the matter well when she said that we have a partnership with Malawi. When I spoke to people in Malawi last week, I was keen to stress that we do not consider that we are aid donors to Malawi; instead, we are friends who are working together after a long history of shared interest. It is important that we do not set ourselves up as an aid donor to Malawi—the relationship is about friendship and partnership, not aid. We have often heard about the brain drain in all sorts of professions from countries such as Malawi. When we consider that, we must ask who is aiding who. We must be careful and specific in the language that we use.

Part of the added value from the partnership with Malawi and from the additional money that comes from Scotland to projects in Malawi can be about mobilising other partnerships. For example, we funded a project last March with Opportunity International. The opportunity bank in Malawi is about microfinance and about people being able, for the first time, to open bank accounts and gain the self-respect that can come from seeing their money rising. Our Government funding for that was matched by two different Scottish entrepreneurs, so the money was tripled right away. That then unlocked more than £400,000

from the European Union for the same project, so the small amount that went in from Scotland had great potential to open up much more funding.

On the issue of sustainability, we have the Scotland-Malawi business group. There is a board here in Scotland of respected Scottish businesspeople, and there is a board in Malawi of respected Malawian businesspeople. They are working together to ensure that young entrepreneurs have the mentorship that they require and can access loans that allow them to build up their businesses. That then allows them to sustain themselves, their immediate family and their extended family—and kinship is very important to people in Malawi; it sustains the way people live in the absence of any welfare state. Such sustainable ways of working are building the country up. Many people have spoken about added value and capacity building within the different professions. They are crucial.

Also important is the strong commitment that we see here, right across the chamber and right across civic society in Scotland. I agree with Jack McConnell and others about that.

Government cannot do everything and we should not pretend that we can. However, we can spearhead a message of friendship and partnership that can continue into the future. We can celebrate the wonderful relationship that we have had historically with Malawi, have currently with Malawi and, I believe, will have with Malawi far into the future, way beyond when Karen Gillon's children have grown up.

Education and Skills Bill

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-1224, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the Education and Skills Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation. Maureen Watt will speak to and move the motion.

16:42

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in support of this legislative consent motion on the Education and Skills Bill. The main focus of the bill is the proposal to raise to 18 the age at which young people in England can leave education or training. The Scottish Government is committed to encouraging young people to stay in education and training after the age of 16, but we do not consider that raising the compulsory leaving age in Scotland would be the best way of bringing about that change.

However, we are not debating the merits of raising the leaving age today. The LCM deals only with the data-sharing aspects of the bill. Those data-sharing aspects will allow information on further education qualifications to be matched to Department for Work and Pensions information and to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs information. Such information will allow those organisations to monitor the labour market outcomes—including earnings and employment rates—for those taking part in further education courses. Such analysis is not currently possible in Scotland.

One of the aims of the Scottish Government's skills strategy is to ensure that investment in the skills of people living in Scotland allows those people to contribute as much as possible to sustainable economic growth. We therefore believe that it would be helpful to extend the bill's data-sharing provisions to Scotland. That would allow Scottish ministers, if they so wished, to share information on further education qualifications and to allow analysis to be carried out. The data would be shared for research purposes only and would not be used to identify individuals for any reason.

The Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee supports the Scottish Government's approach. I trust that Parliament will do so too.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Education and Skills Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 28 November 2007, to make provision within the legislative competence of the Parliament and to alter the executive competence of Scottish Ministers in respect of using and sharing information in relation to skills and

training of people in Scotland, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

16:45

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words on the Education and Skills Bill legislative consent motion. It concerns an issue that is close to my heart and in which I take a close interest. We all recognise that positive learning experiences benefit not just individuals but businesses and the wider economy. The importance of information sharing and database building cannot be overstated, which is why I am pleased to support the LCM.

Before I joined the Parliament, I used to challenge the perception that training is a cost rather than an investment. The Parliament needs to challenge that perception too. I fully support the measures contained in the bill, which will build confidence that money and time invested by Governments, employers and individuals will achieve long-term results. It is important that we match up the training opportunities we provide with economic priorities for Scotland. The measures contained in the bill will do that. I would argue that that is even more important in Scotland, because enterprise and economic issues no longer sit in the same portfolio as lifelong learning.

Employers are key to the agenda, and any information that encourages their wider involvement is welcome. The Government has placed much emphasis on the role of skills development Scotland in moving forward the lifelong learning agenda. I admit to having some concerns about the workload and clarity of the new organisation. It would be helpful if the minister would confirm whether it will take forward some of the activities identified in the bill.

The minister mentioned aspects of the bill that will not apply to Scotland but which deal with issues that are relevant throughout the UK. It is important to mention that the bill raises the participation age—rather than the school leaving age—to properly address vocational opportunities for people aged between 14 and 18. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report into Scottish education highlights that we need to provide more vocational training for 14 to 18-year-olds. I would be interested to hear whether the Government intends to do that. The bill also provides for free training in basic literacy and numeracy up to level 2. I would be interested to hear how the Government intends to take that forward in Scotland, as it is another area where I believe we can do better. The bill lays much of the groundwork that will support the introduction of an apprenticeship reform bill at Westminster, which

will give a right to a modern apprenticeship to all 16 to 18-year-olds who meet the entry requirements.

Those are all issues that were identified by the Leitch review. They are not exclusive to England—although there is legislation to tackle them there—and they are very relevant to Scotland. I and, I am sure, colleagues throughout the Parliament will be interested to hear how the Government intends to address the matters that I have mentioned.

I look forward to hearing more about the Government's plans to address high-quality skills development in Scotland, as well as the role of skills development Scotland as progress is made in that direction. I assure the minister that I make these points not to seek political advantage but out of concern that, without appropriate legislative measures, we will find ourselves lagging behind not only our international competitors but other parts of the UK in terms of workforce development.

16:48

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Colleagues in Parliament will already be aware from my comments in the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee on 23 January that I have pledged my support and that of the Scottish Conservatives for the legislative consent motion. The routes that young people take between school and further education and employment these days are increasingly diverse and complex. Therefore, any information that can better inform us about that process, and the better matching of education data and data for income and benefits, should be greatly welcomed. That information should be welcomed on two fronts: first, because it better informs us about the reasons why young people select particular courses and employment options, which has important implications for the Scottish economy; and secondly, because it provides us with far more insight into young people's expectations of our educational institutions.

The minister will know that, during committee discussion of the bill, members sought reassurance that the necessary safeguards will be put in place to guarantee the correct use and appropriate protection of the data. I ask the minister to put on record this afternoon that she is confident that that is the case. It is essential for the Government to be able to assure us that the public can have full trust in the process, so that we minimise any risk of computer disks going missing in the post or getting stolen out of a car boot.

Although the Education and Skills Bill mainly sets out provisions that apply only in England, it is important to establish what the potential

implications could be in Scotland. Rachel Sunderland from the Scottish Government schools directorate assured the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee that she

"had a number of discussions at official level"

about some potential

"cross-border issues",

especially concerning

"young people who are resident in Scotland and ensuring that there were no implications for them, or for schools, businesses and learning providers in Scotland"—[*Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee*, 23 January 2008; c 565.]

if that young person went on to educational courses or employment in the south.

I seek assurance from the minister that there are no loopholes in that respect. If the law in England is to be changed to ensure that Scottish students remain in full-time education until they are 18, questions arise about students domiciled in Scotland who wish to take up an opportunity in England. Perhaps the minister could put on record whether she is confident that any loopholes there will be ironed out.

16:51

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Liberal Democrats support the measures in the UK bill that will allow better information to come to the Scottish Government on the post-school economic activity of young people over the age of 19. Clauses 71 to 75 are the key parts of the bill that will give applicability across the whole of the UK, if we agree to the legislative consent motion. Liz Smith sought clarification on this point, as will I. Clause 74, which would apply to Scotland, creates a new criminal offence on the misuse of data transferred across the border between the UK bodies and the Scottish ministers. Clarity is required as to whether a new criminal offence should be created in Scotland through a legislative consent motion procedure. I am certain that Scottish National Party members have commented on that approach in the past.

The measures in the bill give powers to Scottish ministers to give the UK Government information in devolved areas of education and training. That is all well and good, and that will receive cross-party support today, as will the use of the legislative consent motion procedure itself. It is a proportionate means of bringing about the proposed measures. I note the shock and horror in the reaction of SNP members to the Prime Minister's recent comment that Westminster may legislate in areas that are currently under the authority of the Scottish Parliament. That should

be balanced by the fact that, since the present Scottish Government came to office, four bills have been introduced to the Parliament, compared with five legislative consent motions giving power to Westminster to legislate on our behalf.

During the meeting of the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee on 23 January, I asked the Minister for Schools and Skills whether

"Giving permission to the DWP and HMRC to access educational data in Scotland is purely within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament."

The minister indeed confirmed that it was. I asked why the Government had brought about the procedure. The response was that, if it did not do so,

"That would mean that the Scottish Government would have to draft a bill and put it to the Scottish Parliament ... We thought that the legislative consent motion was a more direct and less complicated route than drafting a bill for the Scottish Parliament."—[*Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee*, 23 January 2008; c 564, 563.]

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Does the member agree that it is an interesting paradox that there have been more bills at Westminster affecting Scotland in the current session than there are bills here?

Jeremy Purvis: I readily agree. It is even more interesting because, in 2005, Stewart Stevenson, who is now Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, attacked me for supporting a legislative consent motion. He said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I prefer to legislate by the democratic decision of the people in this place, who understand Scotland's needs and traditions."—[*Official Report*, 2 February 2005; c 14155.]

The LCM before us now was lodged by Fiona Hyslop, who said on 29 January 2002 in connection with the Sewel motion procedure:

"despite devolution Scotland is still suffering from a democratic deficit."

She said that the Executive at the time

"appear content to pass through Westminster initiated legislation on the nod without allowing the Scottish Parliament to have a full and frank debate on the subject matter."

Nicola Sturgeon went further in 2004, saying:

"Sewel motions have become an abuse of Parliament."

Yet LCMs are apparently an "abuse of Parliament" that is "less complicated" for the SNP than introducing legislation here.

The Government needs to provide clarification on the issues of substance, such as the cross-border issues. The minister confirmed in committee that if a child is resident in England but schooled in Scotland, they will be subject to the application of the bill. Is that still the case? If so,

what discussions have Scottish ministers had with their UK counterparts about that? What guidance will be given to Scottish providers? What funding will be given? To whom and by whom will it be given? Will a new criminal offence be created through the passing of this legislative consent motion on the use of data?

16:55

Maureen Watt: I will first address some of the comments from members, whom I thank for their contributions. I agree totally with John Park that employers should see training not as a cost but as an investment. By gathering these statistics, we will be able to share with employers information on rising employment rates, wage rates and cost-effective investment in their businesses. John Park also made points about taking forward the skills strategy, literacy and numeracy. I really do not think that the debate on this LCM is the time to debate such issues. However, I say to him that Scotland is not lagging behind in terms of the number of modern apprenticeships per population.

Liz Smith raised issues of data security. This Government takes data security extremely seriously. Although there is absolutely no guarantee that there will be no data security problems, various precautions are taken to minimise the risk of them. The data will not identify any individual and will be confined to people working in this area of data collection and statistical analysis.

Liz Smith and Jeremy Purvis mentioned loopholes. As I said in committee, civil servants are having discussions with officials in England about that. If a young person is resident in England but attends school in Scotland, the proposed duty will affect them, irrespective of where they go to school—it is all about the country of residence. If a young person is resident in Scotland but their parents live in England, the young person, as a resident of Scotland, will not be covered by the legislation. If they are employed in England but resident in Scotland, they will not be covered by the legislation, but their employer may be covered. Given that the legislation is not due to come into force until 2013 and 2015, the Government will continue to have discussions about such issues with our counterparts.

Jeremy Purvis: I am grateful for that clarification. If there is a duty on Scottish providers to provide education or training in Scotland for post-16 England-resident pupils, who will pay for it?

Given that we have now had a number of months of the new SNP Government, will the minister confirm that more legislation on devolved

issues is going through the Westminster Parliament than is going through this Parliament?

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Minister, I must ask you to answer that and wind up fairly quickly.

Maureen Watt: I can confirm that this Government is doing the job that it has been elected to do. I also confirm that as long as Scotland does not have all the legislative competence that we in this Government require, we will govern cost effectively for the taxpayers of this country.

The Presiding Officer: You should close now, please, minister.

Maureen Watt: I hope that the whole Parliament will agree to the LCM.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-1378, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 21 February 2008—

after

2.15 pm Themed Question Time
Health and Wellbeing

delete

2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate:
Democracy in Local Health Care

and insert

2.55 pm Ministerial Statement: British-Irish
Council Summit

followed by

Scottish Government Debate:
Democracy in Local Health Care—
[Bruce Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-1389, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 27 February 2008

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Ministerial Statement: Accident and
Emergency Reviews

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Glasgow
Commonwealth Games Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Glasgow
Commonwealth Games Bill

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 28 February 2008

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time
Rural Affairs and the Environment;
Justice and Law Officers

2.55 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Graduate
Endowment Abolition (Scotland) Bill

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 5 March 2008

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 6 March 2008

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time
Finance and Sustainable Growth

2.55 pm Scottish Government Business

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business—[*Bruce
Crawford.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-1379, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Judiciary and Courts (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be completed by 23 May 2008.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Bruce Crawford to move motions S3M-1381 and S3M-1380, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board Order 2007 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Quality Meat Scotland Order 2008 be approved.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

The Presiding Officer: The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S3M-1224, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the Education and Skills Bill, United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Education and Skills Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 28 November 2007, to make provision within the legislative competence of the Parliament and to alter the executive competence of Scottish Ministers in respect of using and sharing information in relation to skills and training of people in Scotland, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that motion S3M-1381, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board Order 2007 be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S3M-1380, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Quality Meat Scotland Order 2008 be approved.

Supporters Direct in Scotland

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-1295, in the name of Marilyn Livingstone, on Supporters Direct in Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the work of Supporters Direct in Scotland; recognises its contribution to Scottish football and believes that supporters' trusts provide the best mechanism for involving communities in their football clubs and that the Raith Trust in the Kirkcaldy parliamentary constituency is an excellent example of where supporters' trusts promote community empowerment and strengthen local football teams, and believes that they should continue to be supported.

17:04

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and to express my support for the work of Supporters Direct. I attended my first football match in 1969, along with my dad and my brother, and football has been a passion ever since. I have been hooked on the game all that time, so it is an honour to open this debate, which focuses on the topic of football.

I speak in favour of the motion in the name of Marilyn Livingstone. I know that she supports the work of Supporters Direct and that she is a strong supporter of the work of the Raith Trust in her constituency.

Football is very important throughout Scotland's communities. It is very much the staple diet of people's lives and conversations—in fact, I believe that some members are heading off tonight to a football match, and I wish them a happy, enjoyable and successful evening.

There is no doubt that the attendance at football matches has changed a lot since my first game in 1969. One of the positive developments has been the increase in the number of women who now come along to the football. When I used to go in the 1980s along with my cousin Rose-Marie, she was the sole woman in large parts of the ground, but when I took my daughter Carys to her first game a couple of years ago, I am pleased to say that that situation had changed. That is positive for football and for Scottish society.

A range of clubs is involved in football throughout Scotland, as can be seen in my constituency. On the professional side, there is Clyde—a team that has moved to Cumbernauld, but which still has strong links with the Rutherglen constituency in which it resided when it won the Scottish cup in the 1950s. On the junior side,

Rutherglen Glencairn and Cambuslang Rangers have both been very successful, and we are lucky enough to have successful amateur sides in Eastwood United and Rutherglen Amateurs.

There is no doubt that the financial impact of the game looms large these days. Indeed, in the next round of English Premier League contracts, the English Premiership clubs will get £40 million of television money. We live in a time in which some players earn more in a week than the people who go to watch them earn in a year—a time in which the combined debt of Scottish Premier League clubs is £200 million.

Against that backdrop, the importance of supporters and communities is very important. As Jock Stein said:

“Football without fans is nothing”.

From that point of view, the work of Supporters Direct is absolutely essential, because it promotes a co-operative approach, and it promotes work in the community. It gives supporters voices, through the supporters trusts, and it gives an element of accountability and democracy. Football supporters feel strongly about their clubs, and it is important that they have a vehicle through which to communicate their feelings to the directors about the way in which the club is run.

One of the successes of Supporters Direct has been the setting up of 35 supporters trusts throughout Scotland, which have 15,000 members. Supporters Direct has been instrumental in saving six clubs—Morton, Clyde, Clydebank, Dundee, Raith Rovers and Falkirk—and it has facilitated the investment of £2 million in clubs. Supporters Direct has also moved into rugby union, and it is considering how it can move forward supporters trusts in that field. There is a lot of support for the trusts throughout Scotland and across the political spectrum.

Tonight's debate comes at an appropriate time for Supporters Direct. It is currently funded by the reduction in pools betting duty, but that funding runs out at the end of March. It has submitted a funding programme of £140,000 a year over the next three years to the Scottish Government; there have been a number of meetings and discussions but, at this point in time, no hard cash. Time is clearly running out, and I take the opportunity of this debate to call on the Scottish Government to provide the funding that is necessary for Supporters Direct to do such essential work throughout Scotland.

The minister could respond to the debate very positively by giving a positive commitment on funding for Supporters Direct. This is an excellent debate to take part in—it has allowed me to showcase the work of Supporters Direct, and that would be reiterated if Marilyn Livingstone were in

the chamber. The debate has to have a purpose; as I said, it gives the minister a chance to come forward and score a goal by providing funding to Supporters Direct, and by giving it a platform to develop its future and to roar forward to success in 2008-09.

17:09

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): In recent years, Scottish football clubs have not exactly been blessed with significant financial investment, and we sometimes look with envy at the obscene amounts of money that are poured into football south of the border by television companies. Without the welcome and essential sponsorship that our clubs receive from Clydesdale Bank, Inn Bru and Setanta, many of our clubs would be in dire straits. It must be with great concern that we observe the latest situation at Gretna Football Club.

In supporting the motion tonight and having looked over some of the speeches that were made in previous debates, I believe that the emergence of Supporters Direct and football trusts was inevitable. We had better get used to the fact that the long-term survival of many of our clubs lies in the hands of their dedicated supporters. Some of our biggest clubs almost went out of business in recent years—James Kelly mentioned a few, and we could possibly add Motherwell to the list—perhaps because of too heavy a reliance on external funding from TV contracts. Wages rocketed on the back of the deals, and clubs faced closure as a result.

We perhaps now have a more realistic and practical approach to the financing of our clubs, although many rely on the efforts of their supporter organisations to sustain them from season to season. Self-sustainability is the key these days. The kick-start funding that Supporters Direct received in 2002 was widely welcomed, and it enabled many supporters groups to establish themselves and become self-financing. Many have gone from strength to strength.

The wish of football club supporters to have a say in the running of their clubs is not new, but the emergence of Supporters Direct and the trusts gave a clearer focus to the efforts, and we now see supporters represented on the boards of a number of our clubs. That can surely only be a positive step.

For their own reasons, which are not always particularly sound, many football club boards have resisted welcoming supporters on to the board, preferring in some cases to invite people with no local connections, no investment to offer and no record of ever having attended a match of the club concerned. However, progress is being made.

It is perhaps appropriate that this debate is taking place when the football club of Barcelona is once again in Scotland to pit its wits against Celtic. As many members know, Barcelona, with well over 150,000 owners, is actually owned by its supporters. They all have a say, and they meet in their own assembly to deliberate on how to develop the club and to foster wider community initiatives in Catalonia.

At the other end of the financial scale, the trust of the football club of Forfar Athletic has the honourable intention of keeping a watchful eye on and helping to reduce the club's overdraft. The common factor is that the supporters of both clubs love their football club and are committed to its continued existence and development. That spirit and dedication remain constant in football, no matter the location or size of the club, and that spirit must be welcomed and harnessed by the football clubs that have not yet invited supporter representatives on to their boards.

From what I can see, many trusts in Scotland will fundraise to buy shares in the club—to get their voices heard at annual general meetings and so on. It seems to me that that is more of a barrier placed in front of them rather than an open invitation to have a say in the running of the club. It would be welcome to hear that more football club boards in Scotland were beginning to co-opt supporter representatives on to their boards to help them face the challenges of the future.

The trust at my own club, Kilmarnock, has just announced that it will be making available £2,000 to the local community in the form of a community bursary. That will be connected not necessarily to football schemes but to community initiatives in general. There have been other initiatives, such as 50 for the future—a fundraising scheme to identify and support new players for the club—which has been very successful.

Scottish football club trusts have proven over the years that they have the dedication and know-how to support their clubs. They have drive and imagination, and their fundraising efforts have been first class. I have great pleasure in supporting the motion, and I look forward to the rest of the speeches.

17:13

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): Bayern Munich's visit to Pittodrie last week was a great occasion. For young fans, such as my daughter Sophie, it was a first chance to see the Dons match up to one of Europe's biggest clubs. For those of us old enough to have been at the previous game between Aberdeen and Bayern Munich 25 years ago, it was a chance to remind

ourselves where we were sitting the moment that winning goal was scored back in 1983.

Tomorrow night is the return leg, but tragically one great Dons supporter has not lived to see whether Jimmy Calderwood's team will match the achievement of Alex Ferguson's, as Alexandra Stalker of AFC Trust died at the weekend.

Alex Stalker was what the supporters trust movement is all about. She loved the game, and she was a passionate follower of her team, but more than that she was dedicated to ensuring that the game and the club belonged to football supporters and the wider community—not just in Aberdeen, but wherever professional football is played.

I was privileged to know and work with Alex Stalker in the past seven years, after the AFC shareholders association turned itself into a supporters trust in March 2001. For much of that time, she played a critical role on the trust's committee. She was not afraid to speak out on behalf of her fellow supporters, while her calmness in difficult moments commanded respect from all sides.

Alex Stalker understood well that supporters trusts are about more than just a single football club; they are about shifting the balance of power in the football industry to ensure that supporters have their say and can influence decisions. She recognised that a strong supporters trust is one of the best defences that a community can have against its football club falling into the hands of people who have no real interest in its future. That was why she promoted links through Supporters Direct, encouraged new trusts at clubs in Scotland and England and even—I am told—helped to get the supporters trust up and running at Celtic Park.

That wider approach is not just about trusts themselves. The AFC Trust and others have supported initiatives such as Show Racism the Red Card, which uses football to break down barriers. There have been other initiatives by fans, such as the Dnipro kids fund, which Hibs fans set up after their team played FC Dnipro in 2005. Dons fans supported children in the same Ukrainian sanatorium when Aberdeen were in Ukraine at the end of last year.

Of course, there are issues nearer home for trusts and supporters. For example, Aberdeen Football Club has been at Pittodrie for more than 100 years, but it is exploring options to relocate to the edge of town. Different views are held about that. My view is that moving the football stadium out of the heart of the city would be bad news for fans—no more walking to the game or catching the service bus into town for people who want to leave the car at home or do not have a car. However, people have different views, and what is

important is acknowledging that supporters have those views and listening to them.

Football supporters should make their voices heard. That is why the AFC Trust and its equivalents elsewhere are important and why Alex Stalker would have wanted more people to join and become involved. The supporters trust movement offers the right vehicle for fans to get their views across and for clubs to hear from the people who matter most.

I hope that the debate helps to reinforce that message, not just in Aberdeen, but throughout Scotland. Beating Bayern Munich again would be a wonderful achievement. Securing the future health of all our clubs and a say for supporters in the game's future might take a little more than 90 minutes, but it will be well worth the effort and will be a tribute to all those who have gone before.

17:18

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Marilyn Livingstone is to be congratulated on securing the debate. I am sorry that she could not speak to her motion, but James Kelly did an excellent job as her substitute. I, too, am a substitute—for Jamie McGrigor. With so many subs, it is a good job that the debate is about football. Family illness prevents him from being here, but I am pleased to have been asked to come off the bench as his replacement.

The debate takes place at an appropriate time, as yet another Scottish football club—Gretna—seems to be in financial difficulties. I hope that matters are not as serious as they appear to be. Of course, we will want to pass our good wishes to Gretna's Brooks Milesen, who is in hospital. Gretna is not the first, and will certainly not be the last, Scottish club to face money troubles.

Jamie McGrigor recently had a positive meeting with Supporters Direct. As Conservative sport spokesman, he has been consistently enthusiastic about the organisation, as he was in his speech in the previous members' business debate on the subject in spring 2006.

In the relatively short time of five years, Supporters Direct has—impressively—helped to start 35 supporters trusts in Scotland, 25 of which have been assisted to take a shareholding in their clubs. That has brought fresh capital that amounts to more than £2 million into Scottish football at a time of severe financial pressure, as we have heard. That has helped many clubs to move towards a more substantial financial future. Of the clubs involved, 14 have appointed a supporter to their board because of their work with supporters trusts.

As we have heard, Supporters Direct is moving into rugby. All rugby fans will agree, as I do, that Scotland needs all the support that it can get—especially against Ireland this weekend.

The Scottish Conservatives are very much in favour of ordinary football supporters having a say in how their clubs are run. That democratisation of the game is to be commended. I pay tribute to all the football fans throughout Scotland who have become involved in supporters trusts. Their input is valuable.

Supporters trusts have an important role to play in campaigning to open up local facilities and expanding the role of football to boost local health care, education and community cohesion. Indeed, their role in promoting the health benefits of football at local level is crucial and ties in with the Government's aim of increasing participation in sport and improving health. As I am discussing local issues, I should remind members that my local team, East Fife, which is a keen participant in the supporters trust initiative, is currently some 18 points ahead at the top of the third division. Marilyn Livingstone would have enjoyed reminding us that Raith Rovers, which has some fairly distinguished supporters, is a prominent club in the supporters trust movement through the Raith Trust. Of course, that club is also flying high in the second division under the effective chairmanship of my friend David Somerville.

At European level, I am encouraged that the Union of European Football Associations has engaged Supporters Direct to conduct research to determine how to apply the supporters trust model in other European countries. Supporters Direct has achieved much in recent years with limited funding from the Scottish Government. I am aware that it has submitted a three-year funding proposal to the Government that seems to offer real value for money. Acceptance of that proposal would allow it to continue to expand its good work in communities throughout Scotland. I hope that the minister will take the cross-party good will that has been evident in the debate as an indication that there is support for his looking favourably at what has been proposed.

17:21

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am pleased to speak in the debate. I will talk a bit about Raith Rovers Football Club, whose home is in Kirkcaldy, and the model that that club represents to others for genuine fan involvement and engagement. Marilyn Livingstone will, as a committed Raith Rovers fan, be disappointed at not being able to take part in the debate, although she has at times, I think, been a Raith Rovers widow. We seem to see her husband Pete rather than her at many games.

A few years ago, Raith Rovers faced an uncertain future, but the club was saved by a £1.3 million community takeover, which was the first of its kind in Scottish football. When the owner of the club decided to sell, a community consortium worked hard to raise funds. It recognised the value of the team to the community and demonstrated the sheer passion that people can have for their team. That passion was mobilised through the fans group, Reclaim the Rovers. Supporters Direct played an important role. For the first time, a supporters trust member is on the club's board, which is hugely significant, and Raith Rovers is committed to a range of community outreach work to schools and local clubs. Like all clubs, it faces challenges, but people have made enormous efforts in the past, and I am sure that the commitment that has been shown will continue.

In addition to being involved in the trust, fans are involved through an active supporters club, which is run by a committee of lifelong Raith Rovers fans. The committee is elected by supporters and there are two honorary positions, one of which is held by the Prime Minister, who is a lifelong Raith Rovers fan. We can start to see a pattern in fan involvement with the team. There is a huge commitment by members, who are responsible for a number of tasks that are carried out at Stark's Park on match days, including running the official club shop, distributing and selling match programmes and organising the ball-boys and mascots. I do not know whether the Prime Minister helps out with those tasks.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): He used to.

Claire Baker: That is true.

At the weekend, I attended a celebration of Jobcentre Plus in Kirkcaldy. The contribution that Raith Rovers and other teams are making to support unemployed people with long-term or complex needs into employment is to be acknowledged and commended. That further demonstrates the contribution that teams can make to their wider communities, and that they deserve support.

I hope that the Government will begin to give support to Supporters Direct, because it can make a difference to local football clubs. Raith Rovers is a good example of a club that positively captures its fans' enthusiasm and energy. I hope that the support that Supporters Direct offers will continue.

17:24

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): I support Marilyn Livingstone's motion. I recently had discussions with Supporters Direct in Scotland and have been impressed by its work.

As Ted Brocklebank said, there are currently 35 supporters trusts in Scotland. All the Scottish

football divisions as well as one junior football team and two groups of rugby union supporters are covered. More than £2 million has been invested in football over five years, which, as James Kelly intimated, represents around a 400 per cent return on the funding that has been made available.

Morton, Clyde, Clydebank, Dundee, Raith Rovers and Falkirk have all been helped to remain as viable football clubs through interventions from their supporters via the supporters trust model. So far, 25 trusts have taken a financial share in their football clubs and 14 football clubs have appointed supporters to their boards because of the work with supporters trusts. Supporters trusts impact positively on their communities by campaigning to open up access to local facilities and expand the role of football in local health, education and community cohesion. In my role as shadow minister for communities and sport, I support the aims of the organisation. Encouraging communities to become involved in sport ticks all the boxes for me.

Historically, football clubs have always been part of their local communities. When I started to look into the history of my local team, Dunfermline Athletic, I was surprised to read that the club began as a cricket club. In 1874, Dunfermline Cricket Club formed a football section in order to maintain fitness during the winter season. Dunfermline Athletic Football Club was formed in 1885 at East End Park—at the time, just west of the present stadium—and has been part of the community ever since.

Unfortunately, football clubs have grown away from their communities over the years. That could be due to the money that is now invested in clubs from other sources and the fact that people no longer support their local town or city team. Local fans and fans who have moved away but still support their local clubs are being given a say and a stake in their clubs by supporters trusts. Donald Gorrie, the former Liberal Democrat MSP, who was a member of the previous Administration, played a significant role in supporting Supporters Direct. I would be happy for the organisation to continue and extend its good work throughout the country.

On 5 February, Rangers received a cheque from the Rangers Supporters Trust to buy 84,000 new ordinary shares in the club. That was just the first acquisition that it plans to make over the next few years from its GerSave initiative, which allows fans to invest in shares in the club. In return, fans who are members of the Rangers Supporters Trust receive an entitlement to ordinary shares in the club.

The December issue of the Supporters Direct's magazine reported on the kick out bigotry

campaign—Scottish football's united campaign against sectarianism, which was launched in November by the First Minister. Many supporters organisations have also been actively involved in the show racism the red card fortnight of action campaign, including those at Dundee United, Kilmarnock and Clydebank. Many young people were very much part of the campaign, and Supporters Direct must be congratulated on that action. Education will help to change attitudes. Racism must be stamped out, and support for the organisation is a positive step forward.

Many of Scotland's senior clubs have some form of direct supporters involvement, but others do not. I would encourage them to consider supporting Supporters Direct, as the organisation has some positive things to offer all clubs, whatever their size. Successful clubs will always attract support, but what happens when a club is going through bad times?

Supporters Direct is currently funded until the end of March 2008. Its core funding has previously been made available through the remaining finances in the reduction in pools betting duty budget; however, that funding is no longer available and a decision on support for the organisation is still to be made. I know, from speaking to the development manager of Supporters Direct, that it feels that it is getting squeezed in the middle of the Government's refocus. Let us not lose the good work that the organisation has already done, and let us support it in its future work.

17:28

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate Marilyn Livingstone on her motion and James Kelly on presenting it so well to the chamber. In his speech, he showed that there has already been a significant return on the investment that was made by the previous Executive in Supporters Direct. I hope that the Government will take the opportunity to build on that success.

My interest in the subject comes from having been the reporter on football for the Enterprise and Culture Committee in the previous session. The report on football that was agreed by that committee recommended that the support for Supporters Direct be continued, with appropriate funding to enable its work to be expanded. I hope that the cross-party support for that work continues in the current session.

The work of Supporters Direct is important not simply because football is a great passion in Scotland and, for a number of us in the chamber—as George Foulkes knows—a great burden, but because there has been, for too long, too great a gulf between the people who run football and the

fans without whose support, week in, week out, the clubs would not exist. That is something that George Foulkes, in his all-too-short time as chairman of Heart of Midlothian, tried to address. We also know that football clubs are not just about the excitement of the league but can play a much wider role in their communities.

Aberdeen Football Club has led the country in developing community outreach programmes, using football as an educational tool and addressing key issues such as antisocial behaviour. Some clubs, such as Ross County and Raith Rovers, which Claire Baker mentioned, are even involved in running extremely successful programmes to help people who are out of work to find employment.

The benefits of what can be achieved in a community by a well-run club became clear to me when I compiled the committee report on football to which I have referred. That is why good governance of clubs and of football as a whole is so important.

Involving supporters in governance is crucial, not only because they should be involved but because they can provide an important check and balance at board level. For me, the impetus for the report on football came from the need for us to examine how our football clubs and the game as a whole are governed. Political scrutiny of such issues is not welcomed in the sport, but the fact that the way in which the game is governed has not changed materially for decades and that governance is centralised needs to be scrutinised.

The Scottish Football Association is moving in the right direction. The appointment of Gordon Smith is challenging and welcome. Organisations such as Supporters Direct and the Scottish Professional Footballers Association, which have expertise and innovative ideas for developing football, have an important role to play in the future of football and our clubs.

Our clubs, our national game and our society as a whole can reap the rewards of properly involving in governance people who have a passion for their clubs and for the development of football in Scotland. Many examples of that have been given tonight. Lewis Macdonald mentioned the commitment by fans of Aberdeen. Like other speakers, I hope to hear from the minister that the Scottish Government will continue to commit itself to the important goal of involving supporters in the governance of our clubs and the good governance of our game.

17:31

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): When opening tonight's debate, James Kelly referred to his first football

match. I will not admit to when I first went to a football match. Suffice it to say that early in my life I had a big decision to make, because my mother comes from Kilmarnock and my father comes from Ayr.

George Foulkes: You chose the wrong one.

Cathy Jamieson: From an early age, I was no stranger to controversy and had to take hard decisions. I began supporting Kilmarnock and have continued to do so. I have been very involved in ensuring that a supporters trust was set up there and that some of the issues that have been raised today were addressed.

It is important that we focus on the rationale for the establishment of Supporters Direct in Scotland, which was to ensure that trusts were set up locally. Members have provided good examples from across Scotland of how that approach has worked in practice. The establishment of Supporters Direct was part of an effort to give supporters a say in the running and organisation of their clubs, to ensure that they had a meaningful voice and that, in certain circumstances, they had an opportunity to participate in financial ownership of their clubs.

One of the few issues on which Willie Coffey and I agree is our support for Kilmarnock Football Club. The Killie trust sponsors local youth football teams and has invested in youth development. Willie Coffey referred to the Killie trust bursary, which was launched earlier this month and offers local community organisations the opportunity to bid for money that has been raised. The trust's 50 for the future scheme asks fans to donate 50p until the trust has enough 50p coins to cover every seat in the Kilmarnock stadium. The money that is raised will be shared between youth development and support for local community projects.

I have already mentioned Ayr. People may find this strange, given that I am a Kilmarnock supporter, but I must confess that I was brave enough to attend the launch of the Ayr United supporters trust. I believe so passionately in supporters trusts that I was prepared to make the journey to Somerset Park to be at that launch. To be fair—I always try to be balanced on this issue, although Ayr United supporters are our rivals—the Ayr United supporters trust has worked very hard. In particular, it has campaigned against racism and has sought to ensure that the trust is actively involved in the local community.

In a previous members' business debate that I led, the minister was good enough to respond positively to a movement with cross-party support.

I remind members that the growth of football supporters trusts did not happen by accident but because of the good and positive work of Supporters Direct in Scotland. It had a plan,

targets to hit and funding in place. It is a professional organisation that has given supporters at grass-roots level the support that they need not only to get their trusts up and running but to maintain them and ensure that they are able to continue in future.

We cannot take any of that for granted. We do not want to lose it but must continue to build on it in future. The only way to do that is to ensure that Supporters Direct in Scotland continues as a professional organisation with a forward plan for the next three years. I hope that the minister will be able to give us some positive words on that and that the good work that has been started will continue across Scotland.

17:36

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I congratulate Marilyn Livingstone on securing the debate and James Kelly on the way in which he opened it. I know how involved Marilyn has been in Supporters Direct and, in particular, the Raith Trust, about which my colleague Claire Baker spoke.

Representing a large area such as Mid Scotland and Fife means that one treads a dangerous path when lavishing praise on individual football clubs in the area. However, I am an ex-union official, and I remember that, when union officials were elected, it was impossible to find any who supported Rangers or Celtic, Liverpool or Everton, or Manchester United or Manchester City, but there were plenty who supported Partick Thistle, Tranmere Rovers and Burnley.

I expected Marilyn Livingstone to be here, but I am pleased that Claire Baker mentioned the work of the Raith Trust because, in the interest of balance in Fife, I will speak a bit about what the Dunfermline Athletic Supporters Society—the Pars trust—has done. I declare an interest: having a member of my close family on the playing staff at Dunfermline Athletic FC brings some privileges, which are highlighted in my entry in the register of interests. Unfortunately, my attendance at recent games has not brought the club any luck.

There is no doubt that Supporters Direct has done an excellent job. It has provided financial support to the Pars trust, for example, and a platform for trusts to interact, learn from one another and develop.

Although the Pars trust does not have a place on the Dunfermline Athletic board, it has constructive dialogue with board members and is now the 13th largest shareholder in the club, which is an important position. Such activities can happen only with the support of Supporters Direct, which has ensured that many ordinary supporters have been able to make a positive contribution to Dunfermline Athletic.

As well as giving the fans a voice, the trust has been able to support the youth and community side of Dunfermline Athletic's work, which, as I am sure members all agree, is important. Three years ago, the trust bought the Sammy van, which is named after the infamous Dunfermline mascot, Sammy the Tammy. The van has enabled community coaches to transport equipment around schools and community classes throughout Fife. The trust also bought much of the equipment.

The Pars trust is in a strong position. It will buy a new van for the community outreach programme in the next few months. It has also provided direct support to Dunfermline Athletic during a difficult financial time for the club. Trust members have volunteered their services during busy times, particularly during the three cup finals that the club has reached in the past three years, which is unprecedented in its recent history.

Members will recall that the club faced financial difficulties when it was forced to remove its synthetic pitch a couple of years ago. However, they will not know that the Pars trust set up a half-time competition called Sammy's squares—members will see a recurring theme—which enabled the club to bring in extra revenue to replace the money that was lost through the removal of the synthetic pitch.

Those and many other activities confirm the importance of the work of Supporters Direct and the many trusts about which we have spoken to ensuring that football is a success. I hope that, in future, with the assistance of Supporters Direct, an increasing number of trust members will be involved in boards and have a greater influence at board level in the running of clubs throughout the country. I hope that the Government is in a position to support that.

I think that one of the many ways of ensuring that we have a proper debate on summer football in which ordinary supporters' views are considered is to have supporters themselves operational at board level, and Supporters Direct in Scotland will ensure that that happens.

17:40

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): I thank Marilyn Livingstone for securing the debate and echo Ted Brocklebank's thanks to James Kelly for coming off the bench as a late substitute.

First, I acknowledge Supporters Direct in Scotland's significant contribution to Scottish football and Scottish communities. As with many members' business debates, I was interested to hear about members' lives and experiences as children. Everyone seems to have visited many

football clubs but, as John Park said, no one ever seems to have gone to see Rangers or Celtic. That is just one of those funny things that often crops up.

As I have spoken before in this chamber of my respect for Supporters Direct in Scotland's good work in developing and increasing the number of football trusts throughout Scotland, I am happy to repeat my belief that such organisations can play a fundamental and principled role in football.

Supporters Direct in Scotland has invested considerable hard work and effort in establishing supporters trusts, which are developing clubs as assets to local communities and promoting corporate governance, financial accountability and community responsibility. As football clubs are well known in their communities, they can help to attract people to attend events as spectators and to get more involved as volunteers. Indeed, such local support is crucial to any football club.

We are all aware of the passion of Scottish football fans for the game and their pride in their team's achievements and know that supporters are the lifeblood of Scottish football. Anyone who has been to a football match knows the importance of the relationship between the players on the pitch and the spectators in the stands, and the same holds true not only for old firm games but for local derbies between, say, Kilmarnock and Ayr, which I believe are quite exciting events. Indeed, I am sure that Ms Jamieson has been to many such derbies.

At its best, that bond between players and supporters can inspire both and create a memorable sense of occasion. I experienced that most recently at the UEFA cup group match between Aberdeen and Copenhagen in December. As members might recall, the evening began with Aberdeen two points behind Copenhagen and needing to win if they were to qualify for the knock-out stages. The team's efforts and the fans' passion combined to create an amazingly stirring atmosphere and the remarkable—and, I have to say, very welcome—outcome was a thumping 4-0 victory for the Dons. That kind of night stays in the memory for a long time—and I hope that we get another memorable night later this week when Aberdeen play a second leg against Bayern Munich.

There are many examples of the good work that is being done by supporters' trusts throughout Scotland and I acknowledge the achievements of one such group: the Raith Trust in the Kirkcaldy parliamentary constituency. In particular, I congratulate the trust on raising £30,000 in its first two years and ensuring that much of that money has been invested in youth football to help find future star players.

I applaud the trust's involvement in the successful reclaim the Rovers campaign in 2005, which played a part in the deal to secure the future of Raith Rovers, and endorse the Raith Trust's stated view that football clubs and supporters must give something back to the communities from which they derive their support.

There are excellent examples of such activity at Raith Rovers, which now has a community group that promotes hospital visits and clean-up days at Starks Park and has started Raith TV on the club's website. I have not watched that programme, but I am sure that it is very interesting.

As other members have pointed out, Supporters Direct in Scotland has helped to turn round many failing clubs by, for example, working with the clubs, the community and the supporters and encouraging fans to get more involved. I applaud those achievements, and I encourage that approach as a way forward. After all, as fans make a lifetime commitment to a club, they should have a greater say in how their club is run, and I am certain that clubs, communities and fans working together is the way forward to create a sustainable future for Scottish football.

Over the past six years, Supporters Direct in Scotland has received a substantial amount of biannual funding—what I believe Willie Coffey called kick-start funding—which has been used to set up, establish and resource this valued organisation. As other members have said, Scottish Government officials have met Supporters Direct in Scotland twice in the past six months to discuss future funding arrangements. In the first of those meetings, which took place in August 2007, no firm commitments could be given beyond the expiry of the current funding arrangements due to the on-going spending review.

Officials also discussed the Scottish Government's belief that organisations should aim to be self-sustaining. It is clear that Supporters Direct in Scotland recognises that fact because, in 2006, it stated that one of its key objectives was to establish itself as a financially self-sustaining organisation. Supporters Direct in Scotland has indicated that it has had contact with a possible sponsor. That is a matter for the organisation to pursue. We await the outcome and hope that it will be positive.

In December 2007, Supporters Direct in Scotland submitted a request for renewed, and increased, Scottish Government funding for a further three years from 1 April 2008. Officials met the organisation again in January of this year to discuss its application. In discussion, it emerged that the organisation has not held any formal conversations with the Scottish Football Association or sportscotland. Officials suggested

that such a discussion could be useful and offered to arrange a joint meeting for Supporters Direct in Scotland with the Scottish Football Association and sportscotland to discuss future funding opportunities.

We have now spoken to Gordon Smith, who is the SFA chief executive, and to the partnership manager of sportscotland, both of whom will be happy to attend a joint meeting with Scottish Government officials and Supporters Direct in Scotland. That meeting will be an opportunity to explore future partnership arrangements that will ensure that the organisation can continue to deliver its aims and objectives.

Lewis Macdonald: In that context, does the minister see a continuing role for Government support as well as for the work of the other partners that he mentioned?

Stewart Maxwell: It is too early to say. Discussions are on-going between Supporters Direct in Scotland, the Government and other partners such as the SFA and sportscotland. I encouraged the organisation to come on board by coming to a meeting with the SFA and the other partners to find out how we can progress the funding initiative.

I confirm that I welcome the work of Supporters Direct in Scotland, recognise its contribution to Scottish football and agree that supporters trusts provide the best mechanism for involving communities in their football clubs. I wish Supporters Direct in Scotland well for the continuation of its good work in the future.

Meeting closed at 17:47.

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