

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 20 March 2008

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 20 March 2008

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

Housing

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S3M-1603, in the name of Johann Lamont, on housing.

09:15

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): It is a privilege to lead this housing debate on behalf of the Labour Party. We in the Labour Party are proud of what was achieved in the first eight years in the Parliament. Much of that work was recognised as groundbreaking, but we acknowledge that there is much more to do.

It would be foolish for anyone to say that everything that we did was perfect, but it is equally foolish for the current Administration to say that there was no consensus and no agreement and that what we did was a complete disaster, because that is simply not true.

Labour's charge against the Government is that the running thread of our experience of it is that it overclaims and underdelivers, favours spin over substance and, at its very best, produces more broken promises. If the minister has been effective at anything, it has been at creating the impression of action and perhaps securing some positive headlines. However, the truth behind the headlines is a little less substantial.

The much heralded housing supply task force will not produce a report or recommendations for action; it was not involved in shaping the budget; it was not part of developing the document "Firm Foundations: The Future of Housing in Scotland"; and at least one member of the minister's group has expressed grave concerns about the budget allocations in relation to the social rented sector.

The Government is consulting on Scottish planning policy 3 on affordable housing at the same time that it has set up a body to consider how to unblock the planning system. The "Firm Foundations" document does not even mention Scottish planning policy 14, which looks at setting a benchmark for 25 per cent of units in a new development to be affordable housing.

The minister wants the world—or at least his own back benchers—to think that the right to buy has ended, but of course the change that he has

introduced has been so narrowly defined that it will affect very few people. It undermines the balance that was struck in the modernised right to buy, which was supported by the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland, which recognised the need for flexibility in regeneration communities, where ownership can make a difference, and suspension of the right to buy in hot spots where there is pressure.

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): Is the member saying that the Labour Party's position is that it is opposed to the abolition of the right to buy on new-build properties?

Johann Lamont: The Labour Party's position is that we recognise the strength of the right to buy and we want to see the difference that the modernised right to buy has made. That position is supported by the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland.

We are told that local authorities will build council houses, but the reality is that very few of them will be able to do that. On the other hand, the Administration is completely silent on how it will support those local authorities that have debt and voted against stock transfer on the advice of the Scottish National Party.

On low-cost home ownership, the Administration is following what has already been done, but with no sense that action is needed in areas other than economic hot spots or that there needs to be equitable access to first-time-buyer support.

On what else is the minister silent? On homelessness, he asserts that he supports the target, but he removes certainty by outsourcing all responsibility to local authorities. Given that tax cuts are this Administration's one key priority, what pressure will there be on local authorities to provide the bricks and mortar, where possible, while removing or reducing the advice, support and specialist provision that helps prevent homelessness? What will be demanded of single outcome agreements in relation to homelessness? The Administration says nothing about the needs of areas of regeneration. Indeed, Communities Scotland's expertise is to be removed from the community planning partnership table altogether. There will be no access to community regeneration funding and the wider action budget will be flat-lined—those are the very things on which community housing associations have built their credibility. The minister is silent on the Scottish housing quality standard when community organisations are telling us that they will have to deliver it by increasing rents.

Then there are the two big ideas of this Administration. Its first target is, "We will build more houses than the last lot did." Secondly, it

claims that it will drive efficiencies into the affordable housing market by opening it to competition. If there is a spine on the Government back benches, it should prepare to feel a shiver down it now. On 28 November 2007, the minister said:

"My intention is not to be nice to one particular part of the sector or another; it is to ensure that we deliver more homes for people. That is the fundamental point. ... That is why we have suggested some changes and why I think that competition is important. I think that who eventually owns and manages properties is of less importance than the fact that we have them."—[*Official Report, Local Government and Communities Committee*, 28 November 2007; c 300.]

That flies in the face of every lesson of housing history in Scotland. Given that we know that community ownership has delivered changes in our communities, it is not credible to say that ownership does not matter.

At a time of turbulence in the housing market and a credit squeeze, is it wise for the Administration to be vague on the proportion of houses for social rent? Given that the Administration's own figures show that construction inflation has increased by 35 per cent, is it credible to pretend that its target of building 35,000 houses a year by the middle of the next decade is achievable?

The challenge for SNP back benchers is to confront their front bench's agenda. The Administration has a strategy on efficiencies—who could be against that—but it is predicated on higher rents, and on the presumptions that bigger is better, that competition delivers change and that building houses is the same as having a housing strategy. We know from experience that that is not the case. We know that the Administration is undermining community-controlled housing associations. Would it not be an irony if the legacy of the SNP was to lure cross-border raids from big, asset-rich, English housing associations to take over the work that local housing organisations have done? History shows that the disastrous consequence of national building programmes that distribute funding from the centre with no priority for wider action is houses that no one wants to live in and which we have to demolish. The minister has to understand that asserting his love of the housing association and co-operative movement is not the same as delivering for it and that asserting his commitment on homelessness is not the same as delivering on it.

I turn finally to the first-time buyers grant of £2,000—the great promise. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, Nicola Sturgeon, is non-committal on it and would like us to be her alibi for not delivering it. If she believes in it, she should argue for it. If she does not, she should say why not. The First Minister said:

"The SNP is going to work through all of its manifesto commitments over the four-year term of this Administration."—[*Official Report*, 6 September 2007; c 1493.]

The Administration should stop dodging and tell us whether the first-time buyers grant of £2,000 is a broken promise, a promise yet to come or a cynical election promise made with the collective fingers of the SNP firmly crossed behind their backs. We deserve to know. That is why the motion includes a demand for a statement.

The fundamental charge against the Administration is that it spins, rather than recognises, our history. It should come clean, understand that a housing strategy is about more than building houses and begin to talk about targets for social renting, the needs of the homeless and the role of community organisations as partners in change.

I move,

That the Parliament regrets the SNP government's lack of a coherent housing strategy; notes that the Housing Supply Task Force has no timetable or remit to produce recommendations for action; notes in particular the absence of robust evidence on funding and efficiencies in delivering its housing targets; further notes concerns about the impact of a single regional developer model, as outlined in the Firm Foundations consultation, on community-controlled housing associations and housing co-operatives; agrees that the Scottish Government should make a statement to the Parliament as soon as possible, clarifying its plans for the clear SNP manifesto commitment on a £2,000 first-time buyers' grant, and urges the Scottish Government to act to secure long-term improvements in housing rather than the short-term appearance of change.

09:23

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): I thank Johann Lamont for that mature and reasoned argument. It is a bit rich for the Labour Party to accuse us of having low ambitions for housing, given that, over the last three years of its Administration, it built 0, 0 and 6 council houses. I think that we can beat its record on council house building without any trouble at all.

I welcome a debate on housing. We brought a housing debate within a few weeks of coming to power and we see housing as a major priority for the Government. Our top priority is of course the creation of a successful country with opportunities for all Scotland to flourish through increasing sustainable economic growth.

Perhaps I should remind Parliament where we found ourselves last May. For a number of years, property prices had been rising at an alarming rate, which was making it difficult for many people to become home owners. Average house prices had risen by 72 per cent in only four years, while the increase in house building under the previous

Administration was of only 2 per cent over the same period. Not enough houses were being built. Put simply, far too many people in Scotland were finding it difficult, if not impossible, to satisfy the basic aspiration of having a decent home that they could afford in a place where they wanted to live.

It was clear that we had been left a legacy of housing problems that had built up over many years of neglect. In the months since May, the Government has made it clear that increasing the housing supply in all tenures—I make no apology for including all tenures—is key to meeting our nation's housing needs. We want a significant increase in house building throughout the country that creates vibrant, mixed, environmentally sustainable communities.

In "Firm Foundations", we quantified our house-building aspirations by proposing that national building rates should be increased to at least 35,000 each year by the middle of the next decade. That is not tinkering with policy but a major shift in what we seek from our house-building industry.

The proposal aims to change totally current approaches to development. Our ambition has been widely welcomed. Earlier this month, *Building* magazine reported:

"since the SNP seized power, Scotland's construction industry has been bursting with optimism ... the feeling from developers and house-builders in Scotland is palpably different to that in England."

We need to nurture that confidence and draw on it to address the supply crisis in which we find ourselves.

"Firm Foundations" sets out the framework in which we have pressed forward on several fronts in recent months. To assist first-time buyers more, we launched a £24 million funding package for our open-market shared equity pilot in property hot spots.

Johann Lamont: On 21 January, the minister confirmed that the Government intended to roll out the pilot to six areas. Is that the same pilot roll-out as Rhona Brankin announced in March 2007, when she was the Minister for Communities?

Stewart Maxwell: I am happy to confirm that the roll-out is not the same, because the Lothians pilot on which it was to be based was flawed in several ways. The Lothians pilot fuelled aspiration and did not meet need. We changed the programme before we rolled it out to hot spots, so it is not the same.

Under the umbrella of our new low-cost initiative for first-time buyers, the pilot will enable hundreds of first-time buyers to take the first step towards home ownership when that is the right move for them. By helping tenants of housing associations

and local authorities to achieve home ownership, the pilot can help to relieve pressure on the stretched rented sector.

To respond to the housing pressures in rural areas, we announced just last month that we will establish a scheme to enable rural landowners to apply for housing grants to help them to build new affordable homes on their land. The £5 million that we will direct to that pilot scheme could improve the sustainability of some of our more fragile rural communities.

The housing supply task force that we created last summer, and which I chair, represents a fresh approach to tackling obstacles, such as land supply and planning issues, that have hampered the delivery of sufficient housing. Far from lacking a remit or an inclination to make a difference, as the Labour Party's motion implies, the task force has made steady progress over the winter, as a glance at the papers on its web pages confirms.

The task force brings together a diverse range of housing supply interests and has dug into the detail of what affects housing delivery around the country. The task force's focus is—rightly—on delivery rather than report writing and I am determined that, through its actions, it will begin to unpick obstacles that have got in the way of development. We will issue a public statement next month about what we have learned from our work so far and how we propose to proceed in the months ahead.

Finally, I will deal with investment in our social housing stock. We have to tackle our predecessors' failure to secure value for public investment in social housing. It has been clear for years that demand for social housing far exceeds supply and that the cost to the public purse of delivering new stock is growing unsustainably. Others might have been content to ignore those hard facts, but we are not, because doing nothing denies families the homes that they desperately need.

We are determined to obtain much better value for our investment and—crucially—to do so while retaining the strengths and benefits of Scotland's unique mix of housing associations, including community-controlled associations and co-operatives. To achieve that, we propose to identify through a competitive process a few lead developers to undertake all new social housing developments in a given area over a number of years.

The developers will build not simply for themselves, but to meet the need of other associations—including community-controlled associations and co-operatives—to acquire new stock. They will build the stock, but community associations will own and manage it. We will save

money by proceeding in that way. A key criterion for a successful lead developer will be its ability to show how it would meet local associations' requirements on cost, design and standards—not least in regeneration, rural or island areas.

We have been quick to make our proposals and have already begun to take actions that can make a difference to the lives of people who have been let down by the housing system and the previous Administration.

I move amendment S3M-1603.3, to leave out from “the SNP government’s” to end and insert:

“the failure of the Labour and Liberal Democrat administration to tackle the chronic shortages of housing; notes the Scottish Government’s commitment to increase the rate of house building across all tenures from 25,000 to at least 35,000 houses per year by the middle of the next decade; welcomes the fact that the Housing Supply Task Force has brought together stakeholders from all sections of the housing sector to tackle blockages in the housing system; recognises that it is important to achieve value for money in, and increase the provision of, social rented housing while retaining the benefits of community-based provision and encourages the Scottish Government to continue to work with social housing providers to achieve that goal; further recognises the efforts of the Scottish Government to work together with housing associations, local authorities and the private sector to tackle the legacy of housing shortages; endorses the Scottish Government’s commitment to the 2012 target on homelessness, and calls on the Scottish Government to make a statement on Firm Foundations by the summer recess.”

09:30

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to discuss housing policy. The minister spoke of optimism, but that is no substitute for bricks and mortar. The proof of the pudding will be in the eating.

Like all members, I am only too aware from my mailbag of the massive and increasing problem of the lack of affordable housing throughout Scotland. As politicians, it is our duty to take the lead in offering practical and realistic solutions, because the situation is ruining many people’s lives.

As the Scottish Conservative party’s communities spokesman, I have had the pleasure of meeting a wide cross-section of housing interest groups and discussing their concerns and ideas. One issue that arises time and again is the lack of dynamism in our planning system, which remains cumbersome and slow, despite recent reforms that were supposed to improve it.

Just the other day, one housing expert told me that in Edinburgh alone, about 5,000 affordable housing units that have been granted permission are stuck in the planning and delivery pipeline. That situation is crazy, but it is—sadly—replicated throughout the country. Do ministers recognise the

widespread concern about the planning system’s role in the lack of delivery of affordable housing? If so, what action will they take to respond? Is the housing supply task force considering that? In the past, ministers have launched ambitious targets for the number of affordable housing units that they want to be delivered each year, but a gap has existed between the rhetoric and the delivery of new affordable houses. Planning is a major factor in that.

As for affordable housing in rural areas, like the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association, I welcomed the Government’s recent announcement of grants for rural homes for rent. The Government is recognising what the Scottish Conservatives have long argued—that the private sector has a key role to play in providing affordable homes for rent in rural areas and especially in remote rural areas. I hope that that is just the beginning of positive co-operation between the Government and the independent housing sector and that ministers will expand the scheme after the pilot study, if it is assessed to be successful and to provide value for money. I am also interested to hear whether ministers plan to expand the rural empty properties grant scheme, which has successfully brought back into use redundant and disused properties on many estates.

I am disappointed that the SNP wants to restrict a tenant’s right to buy the home in which they live. We believe that everyone should be able to buy their home if they wish to, so we want to protect the right to buy for the next generation of home owners. That is why we lodged our amendment.

Will the minister confirm that the Government is abandoning its first-time buyers grant? According to *The Sunday Times*, of the 400 respondents to the “Firm Foundations” consultation, 90 per cent opposed the grant, including the Council of Mortgage Lenders, the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Homes for Scotland, the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers, the Royal Bank of Scotland and Cala Homes. Like the Scottish Conservatives, they all realise that, although the grant is well-intentioned, it would add to house price inflation and would help nobody. The Conservatives’ policy of removing stamp duty on houses with a value of up to £250,000 for first-time buyers would help such buyers much more. After the next general election, we expect that policy to take effect all over the United Kingdom.

The lack of affordable housing is one of the major domestic issues that faces modern Scotland and it must be addressed. Many responses to the “Firm Foundations” consultation offer insight into the problems that prevent the delivery of affordable housing as well as welcome new ideas

and solutions. I look forward to the Government's providing a definitive response to the consultation.

I move amendment S3M-1603.1, to insert at end:

"further believes that the right to buy should not be further restricted, and calls on the Scottish Government to encourage councils to bring forward plans for housing stock transfer to take advantage of the debt write-off which is available from HM Treasury and promote new investment as a result."

09:34

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): The Liberal Democrats welcome the motion that Johann Lamont has lodged on behalf of the Labour group, as it covers many of the shortcomings of the SNP Government and some of the fundamental flaws in its policies. However, the Liberal Democrat group has lodged an amendment in my name that will add to the Labour motion, highlighting further flaws in the Government's thinking on housing provision in Scotland.

The Liberal Democrats believe that housing is a basic human right and that we must build environmentally sustainable homes, producing cleaner, safer communities. The Government must not only invest in social housing but help to meet the ambitions of individuals who want to get on to the housing ladder. Additional spending on affordable housing supply is, at best, less than 20 per cent of what is needed. The housing budget will be cut by 6 per cent in real terms in year one, before recovering in later years.

The SNP is clearly looking to abandon its pre-election pledge to give first-time buyers a £2,000 grant to buy their home. Although we are glad that it intends to drop that ill-conceived policy, it was a reckless and populist pledge to make in the first place. It is set to be another SNP broken promise, much like the promise to dump student debt. The Chartered Institute of Housing is quite right to say that the funding would be better utilised through the local improvement finance trust programme.

Much of Labour's motion relates to the Government's "Firm Foundations" document. That is perfectly reasonable, given that consultation on "Firm Foundations" closed recently and that the Government is due to give its findings at some, as yet undetermined, point in the future. "Firm Foundations" sets out the Government's intentions in a number of areas, but in many cases those intentions are so vague as to be almost useless. Recently, when I asked the Government how many affordable homes will be built between 2008 and 2011, Stewart Maxwell replied that he

"expects that the ... budget... will deliver more new affordable homes ... than planned for 2005-08."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 4 March 2008; S3W-9149.]

How helpful of the minister to give such a vague response on this crucial issue. No wonder people are upset about the lack of Government support to tackle Scotland's housing crisis.

The Government is seeking to increase the rate of new housing supply in Scotland to at least 35,000 a year by the middle of the next decade. That sounds laudable, but the Government has not made any attempt to break down, even roughly, how many of those homes will be provided in the private sector, how many will be provided in the public sector, how many will be for rent or how many will be for part or full ownership. Shelter Scotland estimates that, far from meeting its target of 30,000 affordable rented homes, the output in the three-year period that is proposed by the Government will be around 21,500. That is barely two thirds of what Shelter Scotland regards as adequate—just adequate—to address Scotland's homelessness crisis. Liberal Democrats are concerned that the current housing budget will fail to provide enough affordable homes to rent in the run-up to the 2012 deadline for abolishing all unintentional homelessness in Scotland.

The problem affects not only homeless people but many people on the general housing lists who need accommodation for the first time, as they cannot afford to buy, or larger accommodation as their families grow. They are further disadvantaged by the Government's inability to provide enough sustainable housing to meet people's needs. That is why today the Liberal Democrats have lodged an amendment calling on the Government to get serious about tackling the housing crisis and to provide much more than a 9 per cent real-terms increase in funding for affordable homes in Scotland, covering both the private and rented sectors. We hope that the amendment will receive support across the chamber, to show that at least some of us are determined to see real and lasting improvements in our social housing sector.

I move amendment S3M-1603.2, to insert after "housing targets":

"believes that the Scottish Government's provision of a real terms increase of 9% in affordable housing over the period of the comprehensive spending review falls far short of what is needed to address the affordable housing shortage."

09:39

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): It gives me great pleasure to speak in favour of today's Labour motion. As a number of speakers have indicated, housing is a major issue in Scotland. That was brought home to me at my surgery on Monday night, when a young woman came in with a housing issue. She felt intimidated

by antisocial behaviour and was staying in an overcrowded house. All that she wanted was a quality house, in a safe environment, in which to stay. Providing that is the challenge that we all face.

I was interested to note that the minister said that housing is a priority, but I believe that the SNP has let the housing sector down by reneging on its pledge to provide grants to first-time buyers, by a lack of detail on funding and by cutting the housing supply budget by 6 per cent in real terms. "Firm Foundations" does not give enough priority to communities. It talks up the regional developer model—a kind of Tescoisation of housing policy—and is insufficiently committed to community-based housing organisations. An excellent example of such organisations is the West Whitlawburn Housing Co-operative in my constituency. I remember campaigning in the area in the 1980s, when the lifts did not work, the housing quality was poor and the people whom one met at the door did not match up with those on the electoral register. However, in 1989 a housing co-op was formed. With the commitment of the community, there has been a real turnaround in the area, with stability and good-quality housing. That shows what can be done by co-ops and community-based housing organisations. Those models should be given priority over the regional developer model.

The Government's policy is to identify savings and efficiencies that drive up investment and produce greater numbers of houses, but those efficiencies have not been quantified. I suggest that many of them will take at least three years to kick in. Some of the new arrangements will not be in place until 2009, but the Government has budgeted for them to start to kick in in 2008. We are still waiting to hear the detail of how the reorganisation of Communities Scotland will take place. That undermines the housing target that the SNP has set—it is illogical, as the numbers do not add up.

I caution against seeking economies of scale. West Whitlawburn Housing Co-operative has a concierge service for residents who run into difficulties, with a response time of 40 seconds. In larger local authorities, the response time is 40 minutes. The West Whitlawburn initiative has saved four lives in recent years. Cutting it would not be an efficiency saving—it would cost lives.

I also caution against moving housing association grant funding away from community-based organisations. That will put pressure on rents, which will affect poorer tenants. It will also impact on the ability of organisations to meet the Scottish housing quality standard.

We all agree that housing is a major issue that affects many lives and communities. It is clear that

the SNP's credibility has been called into question in the area. We need to involve communities and to ensure that efficiencies are not made into cuts. The document is called "Firm Foundations", but perhaps it should be called "Shifting Sands". It is time to get this matter right and to produce a housing policy that delivers for Scotland's communities.

09:43

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): It is accepted wisdom that, when initiating a debate, members should ensure that, whatever the subject chosen, they do not needlessly leave themselves open to criticism. If the Labour Party had asked me for advice, I would have strongly advised Johann Lamont not to debate housing today, because—how can I put it—it is not Labour's strongest hand of cards.

The first line of Labour's motion reads:

"the Parliament regrets the SNP government's lack of a coherent housing strategy".

I respectfully suggest to Labour members that they would not recognise a coherent housing strategy if it stared them in the face. The one thing that the Labour Party never had during 10 years in government was a housing policy, never mind a coherent one.

I am not the only person who thinks so. As I was reading *The Herald* newspaper in August last year, I choked on my tea when I read:

"Wendy Alexander has been taken aback at the strength of feeling about affordable housing, in her tour of Scotland listening to Labour Party activists. ... the leader-elect said the housing issue had surprised her most in feedback from the party, and that Scotland had fallen behind England in finding solutions to the housing crisis."

Taken aback? Wendy Alexander should have been taken apart by Labour activists. She was the minister responsible for transferring Glasgow's housing stock to the Glasgow Housing Association, making promises to tenants that she knew she would not keep.

To be fair to Wendy Alexander, she was talking about the crisis in the previous five years in which the number of home starts rose by 7 per cent, whereas it rose by 18 per cent in England. Five years before last August, Wendy Alexander was not a housing minister, but Johann Lamont and Margaret Curran were. They are the members who have to take part in today's debate for the Labour Party in the knowledge that Wendy Alexander has criticised them for their lack of any kind of policy.

Between 1997 and 2007, the Labour-led Administration—the Liberals are not off the hook on this one, either—built an average of 4,300

homes a year in the social rented sector, despite a 1999 manifesto pledge to build 6,000 houses a year. The Labour-Liberal Executive built fewer houses in each year between 1997 and 2007 than the Tories did in 1995. That is why the current Government inherited a housing crisis, albeit one that it will tackle.

Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): I, too, recollect past times, Tricia Marwick. I remember your being on a television programme with Rhona Brankin, my successor as housing minister, and saying that the answer was the first-time buyers grant. Do you still believe that?

Tricia Marwick: I am sorry, I did not understand—

Margaret Curran: Let me make it absolutely clear. You were on BBC television some years ago—

The Presiding Officer: No, I was not.

Margaret Curran: I apologise. Tricia Marwick said on television that the answer to Scotland's housing problem was the first-time buyers grant. Is that still her position?

Tricia Marwick: I do not remember the programme, but the first-time buyers grant in isolation has never been the solution to Scotland's housing problem. We need a coherent housing strategy. The minister lays down the foundations for just such a policy in "Firm Foundations".

Shelter Scotland, which has been critical of the Government, not least about the amount of money given to housing, recognises and is encouraged by the priority that the Scottish Government has given to housing. The housing supply task force, coupled with an explicit commitment to increase general housing supply by 2015, is the clearest recognition for decades that housing production has lagged behind the need to replace housing stock.

The SNP Government will take no lectures from the party that now finds itself in opposition; that party was fortunate enough to be in government for 10 years, during which it did not tackle the Scottish housing crisis but added to it. The Labour Party should judge the SNP Government after 10 years, not 10 months—we will transform Scottish housing in the way that it should have been transformed decades ago.

09:48

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): As we have heard, there is no doubt that the shortage of affordable housing is one of the greatest problems facing Scotland in the immediate future. The Government will have to address not only the perennial problem of the lack

of affordable housing, but the fallout from the current worldwide financial crisis.

The crisis will not affect city workers alone; it will affect everyone. The credit crunch means that borrowing will become more costly, for a mortgage, a loan or a credit card. It will be tougher to get a mortgage and tougher to get it at a reasonable price. That is why it is vital—as the motion says—that the Government comes up with a coherent and effective housing strategy. I am not sure why the previous Executive did not have such a strategy. Perhaps it did, but insofar as it effected any real change in the Highlands, there might as well have been no strategy at all.

For many consecutive years, the housing problem in the Highlands has only worsened. Many thousands of houses have been built, only to be snapped up by speculators who made a profit before the developments were complete. Government and local authorities must take a far more aggressive approach to the supply of affordable social housing.

There are three main causes of the shortage of affordable housing in the Highlands. The first is the one that we hear about regularly—lack of funding. Government needs to provide increased funding to councils and housing associations to overcome the problem. There is no doubt that we need more council housing. The second cause is the sale of existing council housing stock. We need to consider seriously a permanent extension to ending the right to buy in areas where there is a severe shortage of housing for rent. The third problem is the lack of land for building new, affordable housing. To address that, all public bodies need to look at their land holdings and release land that is suitable for affordable housing for use by housing associations or councils. Huge areas of land in Scotland are held by public bodies. Much of it lies unused, but it could be used to solve the problem of affordable housing supply in Scotland.

We require to address the delays and bureaucracy in the planning system. That would encourage developers to meet the increasing demand for social housing for rent. If we are serious about housing Scotland's homeless, we must take action now.

I am advised that there are in excess of 300 houses lying empty at Kinloss in the Moray constituency—in fact, the actual number is 354. Those houses are surplus to the needs of the Royal Air Force base at Kinloss and are for sale as a block. That seems an ideal opportunity for the Government and the local authority to join forces to acquire and manage the properties. There are 1,300 homeless applications on the Moray Council list. If we achieve nothing else today, we should agree to instruct the Scottish Government to

negotiate with the Ministry of Defence and Moray Council to bring those houses into productive use.

09:52

Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP): I will concentrate on the Glasgow Housing Association, which is a hangover gift from the previous Administration and continues to be an albatross round the necks of local housing associations and tenants in Glasgow, as well as a salutary lesson in avoiding mass housing stock transfer for all those other areas of Scotland in which the same plan has been attempted or even suggested.

Johann Lamont: Will the member give way?

Bill Kidd: Johann Lamont is a wee bit early yet.

The GHA is a failing organisation. In recent months, the finance director, the development director, the senior housing manager and middle-ranking managers have all gone. Those people are housing professionals who joined the flagship Labour housing project because they believed that eventually—they did not think that it would take for ever—it would deliver to the local housing associations and allow local people to have control over their housing. It is a flagship Labour housing project whose flag is now fluttering at half mast.

Johann Lamont: I hear what the member says about the GHA. Does he acknowledge that the model that is now being promoted by the GHA, as the lead developer for Glasgow, should caution us against the notion that a lead developer can create change? Perhaps the member will advise his minister of the problem of diseconomies of scale.

Bill Kidd: I will let Johann Lamont advise the minister and see what he takes from her advice.

The GHA was established by the Labour Party under Wendy Alexander, and successive Labour housing ministers kept it running as an organisation with no desire to deliver on its establishment promise to ensure that using local housing associations would be the way forward.

The SNP Government has begun the second-stage transfer process that will allow housing associations to benefit from the GHA's establishment, as was proposed but never delivered by the previous Administration, which had a record of proposing but never delivering and of breaking many promises from previous manifestos.

However, analysis of the GHA business plan for this year has shown that it has no intention to transfer any further properties after those in the original 16 transfer proposals. That is a result of the centralised and unrepresentative set-up that was established under Labour, which is now trying to avoid responsibility for its part in the whole

shabby deal. Some 20-plus community-controlled housing associations in Glasgow and the west of Scotland have, only now, under the SNP Government, received guidance from the GHA to allow them to finalise their second-stage transfer submissions. However, those associations have felt that it is incumbent on them to commission a report on the GHA valuation process and its fairness or otherwise. This, they say, is because Labour set up the GHA as an organisation that does not even have a duty to respond to freedom of information requests.

Add to all that the grossly unfair treatment that has been suffered by GHA-factored owner-occupiers, some of whom have been landed with bills of £6,000 to £8,000 for upgrading work on their homes, which must be paid within 12 months or they will face court action. That is why I and other SNP MSPs are asking the Minister for Communities and Sport to order an independent financial review by Audit Scotland of a prime example of Labour's failed housing policy in action.

09:56

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): In the first two sessions of the Scottish Parliament, we improved tenants' rights, the standard and quality of our homes, the regulation to protect tenants and the legislation to protect home owners. We also completely modernised the right to buy and introduced standards and targets to support homeless people back into housing for the long term. We tackled all those issues as a priority. We introduced legislation that recognised that all housing providers have a part to play in delivering affordable and quality housing and that communities and tenants must be involved fully in all that is done.

Here we are, almost one year into the third session of the Scottish Parliament and almost one year since the SNP minority Government came to power, and what have we heard from it on housing? Precious little. The Government has published a consultation document, in which it announced its intentions on cherry-picked issues. The Government says that it has abolished the right to buy, but that is not true. The SNP said in its manifesto that it would give first-time buyers £2,000—incidentally, that was about the only housing policy in its manifesto. Where is the £2,000? I can tell the people who were persuaded that it would be on offer that that was not true and that the SNP is not to be trusted on housing, just as it is not to be trusted on student debt write-off and on delivering the other promises in its manifesto.

The "Firm Foundations" consultation ended on 25 January. Two months later, we are still waiting

for the response. The Government amendment calls for a statement to the Parliament on the issue by the summer recess. I know that the First Minister has downgraded housing and that the Minister for Communities and Sport does not have a voice in the Cabinet, but that is not good enough. We deserve to have a debate on the Government's intentions sooner rather than later. We need debate, action, hard targets and a strategy for delivery. We do not need words or the short-term appearance of change that the minister would like us to believe in. We need more houses, particularly more rented houses.

The "Firm Foundations" consultation document states that the Government does not

"intend to repeat the mistakes of the past with large, single-tenure housing estates, poorly connected to jobs and services or dependent on the private car for those connections and designed in a way that does not foster a sense of identity or community."

Everybody would sign up to that. However, that statement contradicts directly the SNP's preference for a single regional developer model. The argument that a single developer would reduce cost does not add up. As members have said, creating an effective monopoly will lead to rent increases, coupled with poor investment in maintenance and care, and a lack of involvement of tenants or the communities that we seek to build.

Where is the SNP support for low-cost home ownership in areas that are not deemed economic hotspots? It is non-existent. The reality of the SNP housing policy is an empty sheet of paper. We must have action. I call on members to support the Labour motion.

10:00

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): It would be beneficial to consider the past housing situation and what we hope to and should achieve in the future. To do that, I will comment on the Labour motion and the amendments. The Labour motion, in the name of Johann Lamont, states:

"the Housing Supply Task Force has no timetable or remit to produce recommendations for action".

If Johann Lamont had read the task force's minutes, she would see that it has agreed

"To identify and tackle impediments to increasing the supply of housing across all tenures—all with a view to ensuring that people across Scotland have the opportunity to access suitable housing that meets their needs and demands."

That is a pretty sensible approach.

Cathie Craigie: Will the member take an intervention?

Sandra White: Sorry, but not now.

The task force should be allowed to get on with its work and the Labour Party should stop interfering, as it had no task force and no idea whatever about housing.

Cathie Craigie: What?

Sandra White: Cathie Craigie can shout, but that is true.

I will reiterate a point that Tricia Marwick made, as we should not forget it. In each of the eight years when Labour and Lib Dems were in power in a so-called Government, they built fewer homes than the Tories did in 1995. Labour's manifesto pledge was to build 6,000 houses a year, but it did not even reach that. Labour members sometimes have very selective memories—they do not want to think about what they did not do, rather than what they did.

The Labour motion refers to community-controlled housing associations, which is a real novelty. As Bill Kidd mentioned, in Glasgow, Labour gave us the GHA, an idea that was thought up by Wendy Alexander, who is now the party's leader. The GHA is not accountable to anyone, but Labour members proudly say that their party introduced community housing. That is unbelievable—they should hang their heads in shame over what they have done to the people of Glasgow. As my colleague Bill Kidd said, tenants, owner-occupiers and even local housing associations are all suffering because of the Labour plans for the GHA.

Cathie Craigie: Will the member take an intervention?

Sandra White: No—I am sorry. I do not have much time.

Johann Lamont talked about being proud. There is nothing to be proud of in visiting the GHA on the people of Glasgow. Recently, I read a local newspaper in Glasgow in which Bill Aitken of the Tory party demanded an investigation into the GHA. Robert Brown of the Lib Dems has demanded such an investigation. Those people supported the GHA.

Johann Lamont: In a previous debate, Labour lodged an amendment that called for Audit Scotland to examine the GHA's improvement programme for owners. Why did the SNP, including the member, vote against that amendment?

Sandra White: Johann, it is a bit late to be coming in through the back door.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Ms White, the member's name is Johann Lamont.

Sandra White: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Johann Lamont has a cheek coming in the back door, when she set up the GHA, knowing full well that it would cause trouble. She should not lecture me on the GHA, which she set up.

The Tory amendment mentions extending the right to buy. The right-to-buy legislation is one of the worst pieces of legislation. It decimated the social rented sector, so I certainly do not support that part of the Tory amendment. To give credit where it is due, Labour tried to address the issue with measures such as that on pressured areas. However, the SNP Government has abolished the right to buy—yes, Cathie Craigie, abolished it—for all new-build social rented housing. We have taken action on the issue, when Labour failed to do so.

We should remember that, in three years under a Labour-Lib Dem Government, local housing organisations and local authorities built 12 houses. Members of those parties should hang their heads in shame over that. The SNP Government is determined to improve housing for the people of Scotland and, as a member of the SNP, I will ensure that that happens.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the winding-up speeches.

10:05

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): It is not uncommon for Government ministers to make extensive use of quotations from important and knowledgeable sources to form the basis of their speeches. However, rarely in my nine years in the Parliament have I heard a minister found their speech entirely on a quotation from *Building* magazine.

The debate is not about questioning the right or the willingness of the SNP Government to have in its manifesto a range of important promises. The important issue—I hope that Stewart Maxwell will address it in his closing remarks, as he did not do so in his opening remarks—is that, now that the SNP has been in government for a year, it must start telling us how it will convert its manifesto promises into positive action. A year on from the election, the SNP is liable to be held to account and must do better than it has done so far in the debate to explain its position on housing. The debate is not about the Government's top-line or headline figures; it is about the positive steps that it is taking to give effect to what it has said.

The Labour motion mentions the lack of targets for the work of the housing supply task force. Sandra White read out a quotation from the minutes of a meeting of the task force but, with all due respect to Sandra White, what she read out was no more than a remit. No targets were set. All that we have are the headline figures. We still do

not have a coherent idea of what the task force will say.

Tricia Marwick: The member talks about targets. What housing targets did the Labour-Liberal Executive set in 1999? Why did it spectacularly fail to meet any of those targets, never mind actually build houses?

Ross Finnie: The debate is on the member's Government, its targets and what it is delivering. That is the position, and I make no apology for it.

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): The member is adopting the year zero approach.

Ross Finnie: No, we are not.

"Firm Foundations" raises an interesting point that was developed by Bill Kidd. He made much of what is wrong with the Glasgow Housing Association, but his party's document appears to emasculate community associations through its adoption of the single regional model. *[Interruption.]* That is what the document says—it is there in black and white. There is a complete dichotomy between the SNP's position on the GHA and what "Firm Foundations" says, the effect of which will be to emasculate community associations. That is what the adoption of a single regional model will result in.

The fundamental issue is that the Government, to meet its ambitions, must provide the means to produce the ends. That is where the Liberal Democrat amendment comes in, in which we say to the Government that its provision for affordable housing, in the budget for which there will be a real-terms increase of only 9 per cent over the period of the comprehensive spending review, falls far short of what is needed to address the affordable housing shortage. That is not just our view—it is the view of the majority of the major housing organisations, which have been deeply critical of the Government's allocation to affordable housing.

The motion and the Liberal Democrat amendment make perfectly legitimate and correct criticisms of the Government's failure to translate its vaunted ambition into a statement of how, one year into government, the SNP will give effect to its intentions. I call on the Parliament to support the motion and our amendment.

10:09

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): The title of the Government's consultation document, "Firm Foundations", is a misnomer, because the SNP's housing policies are built on some extremely shaky foundations.

First, there is the manifesto promise to introduce a £2,000 first-time buyers grant, which we know will never be fulfilled. Secondly, the SNP is determined to restrict further the right to buy, even though that flagship policy of the most recent Conservative Government has done more than any other policy to make housing affordable for hundreds of thousands of our fellow Scots. Over the past 27 years, some 480,000 households have taken advantage of the right to buy and more than £6 billion has been raised, which has been reinvested in new stock and the improvement of existing stock. Finally, the SNP's policies are built on the shaky foundation of its failure to accept—because of its unwillingness to encourage housing stock transfers—the hundreds of millions of pounds that are on offer from the Treasury in the form of debt write-off to facilitate new investment in affordable and social housing.

The Government's plan to end the right to buy for tenants of new social housing is part of a strategy that is designed to encourage councils to build homes for rent. It is a fair criticism of the previous Executive that its record in that respect was truly dismal. Over the nine full years from 1998 to 2006, fewer than 500 council houses were built in Scotland. By contrast, in the nine years from 1989 to 1997—which were years of Conservative Government—more than 10,000 houses were built by councils. Whereas 500 council houses were built under Labour and the Liberal Democrats, 10,000 of them were built under the Conservatives.

However, let us not dwell on our past achievements, however glorious they may be. Let us look ahead to the aspirations of the SNP Government. What does "Firm Foundations" tell us? On page 42, it tells us that the SNP wants to build between 500 and 600 council houses a year. In other words, over the next nine years, it aspires to build around 5,000 homes—which, of course, is only half the number of council houses that were built in the equivalent period under the Conservative Government. Although it comes as no surprise to me that an SNP Government aspires to do only half as well as a Conservative Government, I thought that it might have set its aspirations a little bit higher.

Given that in opposition the SNP did its best to undermine the previous Executive's policy of housing stock transfer, it is perhaps no surprise that it should adopt what is best characterised as a passive approach to the subject now that it is in government. Frankly, the SNP should be ashamed of itself because, in many areas, by encouraging tenants to vote no, they have set back the improvement of our housing stock by years.

Be that as it may, we are where we are. The fact that a transfer to a single all-Edinburgh housing

association of the totality of the City of Edinburgh Council's housing stock was narrowly rejected a few years ago does not preclude the transfer of homes in particular estates to small community-based housing associations and the partial debt write-offs that would follow. The SNP is in government and it runs the City of Edinburgh Council in partnership with the Lib Dems, so it can introduce new proposals that will lead to the write-off of Edinburgh's housing debt and new investment in the city.

All that the SNP has to do is to accept the Treasury's rules for debt write-off. That might be a bitter pill for the SNP to swallow, but it is medicine that must be taken. It ill becomes a Government that likes to complain about tight financial settlements from the Treasury to turn its back on the hundreds of millions of pounds that are on offer to improve the housing stock in this city, in Highland, in Stirling, in Renfrew and all over Scotland. When it comes to housing, the Government's protests about financial stringency ring very hollow indeed. For all those reasons, I urge the Parliament to support our amendment to the Labour motion.

10:14

Stewart Maxwell: As I said in my opening speech, I welcome the opportunity to remind members of the failing housing system that was bequeathed to this Government and to summarise what we are doing to create a system that meets Scotland's housing needs.

In the few minutes that are available to me, I will try to cover some of the points that members have raised. As usual, Johann Lamont had nothing much to say and began with a complete misrepresentation of the Government's position. I intervened on her to ask her directly whether Labour supported the abolition of the right to buy on new-build property, but she did not answer. She was asked about the debacle of the transfer of stock to the GHA, but again she did not answer.

The numbers 51, 53, 0, 0 and 6 represent Labour's record on council house building during five years of the previous Administration, which is nothing to be proud of. As Tricia Marwick said, Labour members should hang their heads in shame rather than hold housing debates, because they are on more than shaky ground. The SNP is not on the shifting sands that Mr Kelly mentioned; Labour has sunk below them.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Were housing association new builds included in the statistics that the minister read out? I distinctly recall him taking great pride in opening new housing schemes in my

constituency that were funded by the previous Government.

Stewart Maxwell: If the member had listened, he would have heard me say that the numbers 51, 53, 0, 0 and 6 represented council house building. Members who are proud of building 100 houses or so in four or five years should be ashamed of themselves. I am sure that the member was not in the chamber when Tricia Marwick pointed out that although the previous Administration set a target of 6,000 new houses per year in the social rented sector, its record was a little more than 4,000 new houses per year, which is lamentable.

Jamie McGrigor talked about planning. Consultations on SPP3 and the national planning framework are going on and we are making the planning system for house building more flexible. Part of the housing supply task force's remit is to consider planning blockages that cause problems in rural and other areas. I am glad that Jamie McGrigor welcomed our proposals for rural areas and mentioned the "Firm Foundations" consultation.

Jim Tolson and James Kelly talked about the budget. The figures were wrong, which is beside the point. We will increase the budget for affordable housing by £131 million over the next three years. The total budget for affordable housing in 2008-11 is more than £1.5 billion, which is 19 per cent higher than the previous Administration's planned budget for 2005-08. Those are the facts. If the Liberal Democrats thought that the housing budget was so terrible and such a priority, why did they not lodge amendments to the budget, to increase moneys for affordable housing? They did not lodge such an amendment to the housing budget—in committee or in the chamber—so they should not tell us what is important.

One or two members mentioned Shelter Scotland. I am sure that all members have a copy of Shelter's submission to the housing debate, which says:

"Shelter has been encouraged by the priority which the Scottish Government has given to housing. The Housing Supply Task Force, coupled with an explicit commitment to increase overall housing supply to 35,000 by 2015, is the clearest recognition for decades that housing production has lagged behind the need to replace the housing stock."

Ross Finnie: Will the minister give way?

Jim Tolson: Will the minister give way?

Stewart Maxwell: I am sorry; I do not have enough time. I am in my final minute.

Tricia Marwick was quite right to say that previous ministers with responsibility for housing, Wendy Alexander, Johann Lamont and Margaret Curran, are responsible for the mess that we

inherited. They should be ashamed of their record in office and they should not criticise us for what we have done in our 10 months in government to start to sort out the mess that we were left with.

John Farquhar Munro made a thoughtful speech about housing problems in the Highlands and how they affect people who want to be tenants. I hope that he accepts that we are trying to deal with rural housing problems. We hope that initiatives such as the rural housing grant will help. Jamie McGrigor mentioned the rural homes for rent pilot. We hope that the pilot will be successful and that the initiative can be developed.

Cathie Craigie said that we have done nothing in 10 months. We had a debate on housing in our first month in government; we set up the housing supply task force; we published the "Firm Foundations" consultation document; we set up the low-cost initiative for first-time buyers; we started the rural homes for rent pilot; and we set a target to build 35,000 houses—an increase of 40 per cent in overall house building during the next decade.

Our approach to achieving value for money has been misunderstood or misrepresented. If we carried on with the previous Administration's policy on housing association grant, HAG would reach £100,000 per unit, which is utterly unsustainable. The previous Administration buried its head in the sand; we are tackling the situation. It is a disgrace that the previous Administration let things get so out of control.

Ross Finnie took an interesting year zero approach to everything that happened before the election. He did not want to talk about that—indeed, when asked his response was, "It's nothing to do with us."

David McLetchie made an entertaining speech, but it is unfortunate that it was inaccurate in a number of areas, including on stock transfer.

The Government is determined to improve supply, quality and choice across all tenures and to work in partnership with local authorities and other stakeholders in the housing sector who face up to the problems that the previous Administration ducked, to provide the long-term improvements in housing that I am sure that we all support.

10:20

Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): I thank members for a lively, if not consensual, debate. I take issue with comments that were made about our record and will—all too briefly—run through big issues that were tackled in the past nine years and about which there was a degree of consensus.

People who have been involved in the housing debate for some time must know that organisation after organisation acknowledged the priority that the Parliament gave housing. We did groundbreaking work on homelessness, which has been acknowledged throughout the world, when we gave homeless people new rights, introduced new approaches and were determined to consider the causes and consequences of homelessness. It is deeply disappointing and concerning that the SNP minister made so little comment on homelessness.

On regeneration, we inaugurated a new generation of tenant leadership. We linked housing and community renewal and gave strategic focus to regeneration throughout Scotland. The unparalleled levels of investment cannot be denied. We facilitated new home ownership models and new interventions in rural areas and we introduced the Scottish housing quality standard, which the minister did not mention.

It is inevitable that the new Administration's activities raise key questions, which are reflected in all the amendments. The Tories are concerned about stock transfer. It is reasonable to ask the minister: does the SNP support stock transfer or does it not? If it does not support it, what is the alternative? Have many SNP members changed their minds about ownership not mattering? That is not what people such as Sandra White and Bill Kidd said in Glasgow. I will never run away from issues to do with the GHA, because I would like to think that I was a transparent and honest minister. However, the SNP cannot run away from the fact that the GHA wiped out £1 billion of housing debt in Glasgow and inaugurated profound levels of investment, which the SNP would have denied to tenants.

SNP policy raises other key questions. How will the minister deliver the Scottish housing quality standard? What is his target for socially rented accommodation? I note that he is sticking firmly to his policy on lead developers, despite the trenchant comments that housing associations have made. The minister must answer the charge that the SNP Administration is undercutting the innovative and uniquely Scottish approach to housing regeneration—it is ironic that the SNP, of all parties, should be doing that.

The minister's dismissal of housing associations' record on house building will deeply disappoint the movement. I invite back-bench SNP members who criticise our record to come to the east end of Glasgow, where I will show them the new houses that have been built. They should not undermine the socially rented sector in the way that they do.

I have as good a memory as Tricia Marwick has, so I remember debates about rent guarantees,

which the SNP thought were fundamental to housing policy. What is the minister's projection for rent increases? Will there be increases throughout Scotland as a consequence of SNP housing policy?

In principle, we have no objection to the housing supply task force. For the record, and in response to Sandra White, I point out that we set up the homelessness task force and the housing improvement task force, which has been acknowledged throughout Scotland. The key difference between the SNP's approach and ours is that those task forces produced action plans and we ensured that targets were set as a result.

It was deeply disappointing that homelessness featured so little in the minister's speech. A big contribution that Labour and the Liberal Democrats made in government was our work to ensure that it was understood that homelessness was not just a housing problem but required investment in key organisations to deal with its root causes. This week's news about cuts to organisations such as the Cyrenians, which has an outstanding track record in dealing with homelessness, must be deeply disappointing to people who are active in the homelessness movement. That is a shameful record for the SNP to have after one year.

The housing debate is important and I am sure that many members acknowledge that, as the minister has done. It is legitimate for Labour to question in our motion the Government's commitment to the £2,000 first-time buyers grant, given that the grant was a central policy commitment in the SNP manifesto. As other members said in the debate, it is time for the SNP to end the confusion on the grant. The SNP was cynical to raise the hopes and expectations of many of those who are engaged in helping people on to the property ladder. At a time of such turbulence in the housing market, the time is right for the SNP to make clear its intentions.

For the life of me, I cannot get an indication from any SNP minister or MSP on whether the grant will go ahead. The minister owes it to the Parliament to explain the Government's intentions. Was the grant a good idea for housing policy in Scotland, or was it not a good idea? Does the SNP believe in the policy, or does it not believe in it? The SNP should stop dodging the issue and answer directly. Not one SNP member answered the questions put to them in the debate.

The time is right to compel the SNP to come to the chamber and answer the charge. I hope that the SNP will support the Labour motion at decision time. If Parliament passes the motion, it would be incumbent on the SNP Administration to make a statement to Parliament. It should tell Scotland's

elected representatives, and the Scottish people, whether it will introduce the first-time buyers grant.

I hope that the SNP will support our motion. I also hope that, for once, we will get a straight answer from Stewart Maxwell.

Schools of Ambition

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-1601, in the name of Rhona Brankin, on schools of ambition.

10:27

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): It took a newspaper report to reveal that the Scottish National Party planned to scrap the hugely successful schools of ambition programme. Since it clearly had no plans to make a formal announcement, it is important that Labour should subject its decision to scrutiny in the chamber.

The schools of ambition programme was introduced in 2005 to give schools an opportunity to raise their ambitions, expectations and standards. The programme was initially for 20 schools, but such was its popularity among local authorities, teachers, parents and pupils that 52 schools now benefit from the programme, each of which will receive at least £300,000 of extra funding over three years. Such was the success of the programme that Labour committed to creating more schools of ambition so that more schools throughout the country could benefit.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education reports on individual schools of ambition demonstrate ably the success of the programme. Two weeks ago, St Ninian's high school in Kirkintilloch, which was one of the first schools to benefit from the schools of ambition programme, received an outstanding report. It was awarded seven excellent and 10 very good ratings, which is a record for a Scottish secondary school.

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): Will the member take an intervention?

Rhona Brankin: No. I would like to get into my stride. I am happy to take an intervention later in my speech.

St Ninian's used the extra money to improve its modern languages department. The HMIE inspection report praised the outstanding quality of modern languages provision at the school.

Only yesterday, I visited Newbattle community high school in my constituency of Midlothian to hear at first hand about the transformation that the school has undergone as a result of its schools of ambition status. The school serves the former mining villages of Mayfield, Easthouses, Newtongrange and Gorebridge and has seen major improvements in recent years. The head teacher and staff have real ambition for their pupils; they jumped at the opportunity to become a school of ambition.

Newbattle community high school is now two years into its three-year plan. Colin Taylor, the head teacher, told me how the programme had enabled the school to innovate and reach for new horizons: record numbers of fifth-year pupils are now returning for sixth year; standard grade results are the best in the history of the school; the number of pupils who are applying to be senior prefects has doubled; and pupils have a greater leadership role in the school.

Pupils told me that the schools of ambition programme had given them pride in their school, renewed self-confidence and a sense of ambition. As someone who spent many years working in education, it was a genuine pleasure to see such enthusiastic and motivated pupils taking a real pride in their school and in their achievements.

The school's move to being a school of ambition has made it a school where teachers want to work. Every probationer teacher who was given a placement at Newbattle wants to work there permanently. I talked to teachers who were absolutely passionate about the opportunity that the extra funding has given the school. They told me that the programme had given experienced and younger teachers real leadership roles to play.

Those are real success stories. However, in SNP Scotland, we are moving from schools of ambition to poverty of ambition.

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram): Oh, no.

Rhona Brankin: The minister may groan, but I look forward to hearing what the SNP will do about the schools of ambition programme.

MSPs, teachers, parents and pupils have now discovered that the SNP will scrap the scheme. It is doubly disappointing that we found out about its plans only through the pages of the press.

That said, the SNP Government's disrespect for Parliament and for Opposition MSPs is not a new phenomenon. On 5 March, a spokeswoman for the Scottish Government told *The Herald* newspaper,

"There are no plans to continue the scheme at present";

yet, the same night, on "Newsnight Scotland", we heard a different story from Fiona Hyslop. She said:

"It's a nonsense to say we are not continuing it."

Scotland's parents, pupils and teachers deserve to know whether the schools of ambition programme is being ditched, or not. What a pity that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning has not come to the chamber for the debate. She does not have the backbone to admit that she is ditching the scheme, perhaps as a result of the appalling deal that she secured for the

education sector in her budget discussions with John Swinney.

Let us look at the facts: in 2005-06, schools of ambition funding was £1.1 million; in 2006-07, it was £3.2 million; and this year it will be £5.7 million. Next year, it is projected to be £6 million and, in 2009-10, it will be £5 million, after which the funding tails off to just £500,000 in 2010-11, with no funding whatever planned after that. If that is Fiona Hyslop's idea of continuing a programme, she is living in a fantasy world. Let us be clear: the money is not new SNP money; the Government is simply giving schools the money that the previous Executive had committed to them.

As a diversionary tactic, the cabinet secretary has talked about making all high schools schools of ambition, but that will simply spread the resources thinly across all of them, diluting the benefits to schools. What she said is not backed by one penny of new money. Indeed, as Judith Gillespie of the Scottish Parent Teacher Council rightly pointed out, if the money had been distributed among every school in Scotland, it would have made no impact whatever. If it had been spread among 381 high schools, schools would have received about 25 quid a day across the six-year period of the programme. If that is how the Government intends to raise aspirations and standards in schools, I am sorry, but it is not good enough.

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

Does the member agree with the comment that Fred Forrester, formerly of the Educational Institute of Scotland, made in *The Herald* last week? He said:

"The notion that all secondary schools have equal need of targeted extra funding is palpable rubbish".

Rhona Brankin: Absolutely. I agree with him. However, I am afraid that the SNP Government does not seem to recognise the need to make real, big differences in education.

We know that £21.6 million is not coming in 2011. John Swinney has effectively muzzled the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, leaving her to hide behind the cover of a future spending review. Under the SNP Government, from 2011, absolutely nothing is coming forward. We know that from the way in which the funding tails off at the end of the spending review period.

The debate is important for every pupil, parent and teacher in Scotland, as it is for anyone with an interest in improving our schools. The schools of ambition programme has demonstrated that targeted intervention can build aspiration, unleash potential and raise standards. Labour has ambition for our schools and for our young people. No

amount of SNP rhetoric today can change the fact that the SNP plans to dump the scheme.

It is not too late for the Government to show leadership by committing to continue the schools of ambition programme. I hope that the minister will make a commitment today to continue the programme beyond the spending review period. I hope that she will say that the Government will increase the amount of money that is available so that the programme can continue.

I urge members to support the motion in my name.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the important contribution that the Schools of Ambition programme has made in giving schools greater freedom to develop creative and innovative approaches to school improvement; notes HM Inspectorate of Education's positive comments on the programme's effect on pupil motivation; deplores the Scottish Government's decision to axe the Schools of Ambition programme in the face of such success, and calls on the Scottish Government to continue the funding of existing schools of ambition and to identify further individual schools that would benefit from becoming schools of ambition.

10:35

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): I am amazed that Labour initiated a debate on the back of a press article whose accuracy it did not even check. Rhona Brankin was wrong when she spoke on the radio this morning about school buildings, and she was wrong when she spoke about St Ninian's in her speech. The St Ninian's that got the excellent school report is St Ninian's in East Renfrewshire. The school of ambition is St Ninian's in East Dunbartonshire. We can take everything that she says with a pinch of salt.

It is important for me to set the record straight with a few facts about the Government's support for the schools of ambition programme. There has never been a question about the Government's support to continue the funding of schools of ambition for the lifetime of the comprehensive spending review. We have increased the commitment to £11.5 million from the previous Administration's spend of £10.6 million. Each of the 52 schools of ambition will still receive at least £100,000 a year for three years.

Now is an opportune time to reflect on the origins of the schools of ambition programme, including the reasons why it was set up and the intended outcomes. It was intended to support fast-track transformation in selected secondary schools, which would transform educational outcomes, increase ambition in the schools, instil belief and ambition in pupils and improve life chances. The schools involved would act as

flagships for innovation in their local areas and nationally.

Rhona Brankin: Will the minister take an intervention?

Maureen Watt: No, thank you.

Even at the inception of the schools of ambition programme, it was not universally welcomed. David Eaglesham said that it struck him as a cosmetic exercise and that it was meaningless to target just 20 schools. He said that the proposal was against the traditions of Scottish education and would not be effective.

The programme provided a means of testing Scottish schools' capacity to innovate. Supporting them to realise their ambitions and enabling them to do what they always wanted to do has provided a rich source of learning that applies to all schools. I expect that that learning will enable all schools to become schools of ambition. We cannot underestimate the power of peer-to-peer learning in effecting change. We aim to make that the focus of our sharing strategy and to raise awareness of the learning opportunities that are available through schools of ambition in a variety of ways to reach as many different audiences as possible. We are supported in that aim by the Hunter Foundation, which has pledged its help.

Rhona Brankin: Will the minister take an intervention?

Maureen Watt: You did not take one from me. I am not taking one from you.

We have distributed widely the first annual research report on schools of ambition, which outlines the emerging learning. We have redeveloped the schools of ambition website and relocated it within Learning and Teaching Scotland to share practice. We will hold conferences in June to demonstrate the wide range of approaches that the schools of ambition are taking and their relevance to every school. The conferences will be open to local authority management staff and teachers.

We are also bringing together pupils from schools of ambition to host their own conferences, where they will share their views on the impact of the programme. The first conference has just taken place in Shetland, and pupils from 18 schools of ambition shared their experiences. The next conference will be held in Edinburgh on 17 June. Each school of ambition will produce a resource that tells the story of their transformation. It will comprise a mixture of statistical evidence, an analysis of the impact of transformation and some personal testimony. A magazine on schools of ambition will be produced and distributed to every school staffroom.

We intend that every teacher will know about schools of ambition and every school will be able to share in the learning and use it. We want every school to become a school of ambition.

I move amendment S3M-1601.2, to leave out from “deplores” to end and insert:

“recognises that the Scottish Government has increased funding to Schools of Ambition in the Comprehensive Spending Review period 2008 to 2011 from £10.6 million to £11.5 million, and notes that two conferences will be held this summer which will share emerging lessons and demonstrate the variety of approaches taken by schools of ambition in order to embed these across the system which can help all local authorities and all schools to develop their own ambitious programmes for transformational change.”

10:39

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I think the minister was getting her St Ninian's schools in a twist—there are, of course, two. The one that Rhona Brankin mentioned is in Kirkintilloch, and had a glowing HMIE report on 4 March this year that highlighted the success of the schools of ambition funding that the school has received.

However, I want to say a little about another school of ambition. Last Thursday evening, I had the great pleasure of attending a gala dinner at Blairgowrie high school in my region. It is an annual event that is attended by more than 100 members of the community. What is remarkable about the event is that all the catering, service and entertainment are provided by pupils at the school. In recent years, the school has developed an excellent reputation for catering and hospitality under the able stewardship of Lynn Smith, who is the head of home economics.

Relationships have been developed with local hotels whereby chefs will mentor talented pupils who might want to consider careers in catering, and pupils have access to a programme whereby they can work in the kitchens of those hotels to learn vocational skills. That excellent initiative helps to provide skills for the workforce in a part of the country where tourism is the major industry. It is also an excellent example of the success of the schools of ambition programme. Blairgowrie high school has been able to access £100,000 a year for three years to help to support and develop such initiatives, and specifically to fund the construction of a new training kitchen in the school for pupils who are interested in a career in catering.

Rhona Brankin's motion

“deplores the Scottish Government's decision to axe the Schools of Ambition programme”.

The word “deplores” was carefully chosen and is appropriate. The SNP Government's decision to

scrap the programme is indeed deplorable, because the programme has been a success. It has helped schools such as Blairgowrie high school and schools throughout Scotland, many of which draw pupils from catchment areas that include pockets of deprivation, in all manner of different ways.

As the Conservative education spokesman, it is not my function to praise slavishly the initiatives of the previous Labour and Liberal Democrat Executive, any more than it is my function to praise the initiatives of the SNP Government. Almost uniquely in the Parliament, the Conservatives have the opportunity to consider such initiatives dispassionately and to judge them on the evidence. Based on that evidence, I have no hesitation in saying that the schools of ambition programme has been a success, and I deeply regret that it is about to come to an end.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I am sorry. I simply do not have time.

We can only wonder at the SNP's motivation. Perhaps it is simply that the programme was a successful initiative by the previous Labour and Liberal Executive, and that for reasons of narrow partisan party politics the SNP Government wishes to bring it to an end.

However, perhaps there is something more sinister at play. We know that the SNP is wedded to a one-size-fits-all principle in Scottish education. It finds the idea of any sort of diversity within school education deeply offensive. It cannot stomach the thought of schools' being funded directly from the centre and making local decisions about how money is to be allocated. My amendment covers both points. Motivated by political dogma, the SNP has decided to scrap a successful programme.

The real message of the decision is that the SNP Government has no ambition for Scottish education. Its message to schools and headteachers is, “Don't get above yourselves. Don't try to excel. Don't try to develop specialisations or expertise. If you do, we'll haul you down and reduce you to the lowest common denominator.”

The Scottish Conservatives do not believe that the SNP's approach is the way ahead for Scotland's schools. Let us keep the successful schools of ambition programme and send a clear message today that Parliament has more ambition for Scotland's schools than the SNP Government will ever have.

I move amendment S3M-1601.1, to insert at end:

“and to continue to provide Schools of Ambition funding directly to schools and to support decisions being taken on the expenditure of such funds at school level.”

10:44

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): For clarity—and perhaps to declare an interest—I point out that the St Ninian's that we are talking about is the one in Kirkintilloch. Why do I know that? I have an interest because it is my former high school.

Over the months since May, we have had numerous debates around education and skills. In each and every one of them, the Scottish National Party Government has been at great pains to point out how ambitious it is for Scotland. Just yesterday, we heard about its determination to ensure that Scotland's education system remains at the top of the international table of success. I am sure that I am not the only person who detects a note of irony in the fact that the first overt—I say “overt” advisedly—SNP cut to our education system has been inflicted on a proven success which, ironically, is called schools of ambition. What are these people about?

Before SNP members get a little bit annoyed about that, I stress that we fully accept that each school in Scotland is ambitious for its pupils, its staff and the community that it serves. We also recognise that not every school starts from the same place, and that factors that are outwith the control of the dedicated staff, pupils and community mean that some schools face greater challenges than others. That recognition was at the heart of the original schools of ambition programme. To be fair, some of the work is now being included as part of the curriculum for excellence.

However—here is the catch—the SNP Government, in scrapping the additional support that the schools of ambition scheme provided, has failed to recognise that not all schools start from the same point, or that not all will travel at the same rate with the curriculum for excellence. Some of them need additional support, resources and—perhaps most of all—a positive indication from Government that their difficulties have been recognised and that they are being given a chance to make a difference to the whole community, despite the extraordinary challenges that they face. I am puzzled because yesterday the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning sat nodding vigorously in agreement with me—like the dog in the Churchill Insurance advert—when I made exactly the same point about how we assess attainment in schools. It would be good to

get some consistency at least from the Government, if nothing else.

The Government has promised to continue to fund the 52 schools that are currently involved in the scheme. If the Government is as ambitious for all Scotland's schools as it says it is, that funding should be extended across the whole high school and primary school system. The SNP is not going to do that, but simply using the current funding across all Scotland's schools would provide something like £1,800 a year, which is barely enough to buy a set of pencils and some jotters. Referring to one of the points that Rhona Brankin made, what difference will that make to the progress that those schools will make? None.

The Government has said that it will fund the original scheme; we heard that from the minister. I want to know exactly what the schools of ambition programme for the whole of Scotland will provide. That seems to be what the Government is offering. What resources will be provided to all schools? I do not think that there will be any, and I do not think that we will hear an answer to that. Let us have some straight answers from the minister. Is the Government promising that every school with ambition—effectively, that means every school in Scotland—will get an extra £100,000 a year to develop the key themes in the Government's development plans? Is it offering every school the additional funding, or is it just offering them a set of rubbers, so that they can rub out yet another SNP broken promise?

I move amendment S3M-1601.3, to insert at end:

“and considers that head teachers play a crucial role in leading excellent schools and turning around schools that face challenges, and therefore calls on the Scottish Government to provide additional support and incentives for head teachers to improve their schools, including enhanced contract terms with more flexibility and increased rewards for outstanding leadership.”

10:49

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I was quite interested by the start of Rhona Brankin's speech, when she suggested that we should believe everything that is written in a newspaper. This whole debate is founded on a newspaper article.

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Brian Adam: I ask Mary Mulligan to let me develop the point. In spite of the fact that the cabinet secretary wrote a letter to said newspaper, it is choosing not to accept what the cabinet secretary has said.

I am not aware that the Government in the previous two sessions made commitments beyond

the comprehensive spending review period. It is absolutely clear that the SNP Government is continuing the programme throughout this comprehensive spending review period.

Mary Mulligan: No—

Brian Adam: Let me develop the point. In fact, more money is being spent on the programme by this Government than was committed by the previous Government, and it is being spent in the context of a very tight financial settlement. That hardly equates to a cut, an abolition or a broken promise.

The SNP was clear about how it felt about the matter when it was in opposition. We firmly believe that we should have ambition for all our schools. We do not believe in selective education—selection, targeting and means testing—unlike the Labour and Tory parties.

Rhona Brankin *rose*—

Brian Adam: No, thank you.

We want the best for all our children, not just for those attending one in seven schools. Members have given examples from their constituencies of individual schools that have benefited from the programme. What about those that have not? How many of them is the Labour Party promising to bring up to the standard to which, it believes, it has brought the 52 schools in the programme?

Murdo Fraser: Will Brian Adam take an intervention?

Brian Adam: Let me develop the point. One of the reasons for the programme was that philanthropists wanted to help with our education system—I refer to the Hunter Foundation in particular. They hoped that their contribution might be matched by those of many others. Undoubtedly, theirs was a helpful contribution. It was additional money—not Government money—without any particular ties. That is very welcome in education. The SNP Opposition welcomed it. Ewan Hunter's comments of this week give the lie to the idea that there are problems in that regard. We have not received significant money aside from that from the Hunter Foundation.

We have given more than the previous Government promised—the Government should get the credit for that. Members who talk about broken promises should consider the number of schools that their parties claim to have built, but did not; the number of schools that they closed, which they certainly did—in fact, in excess of the number of new ones that were built; their failure to deliver their promises to reduce class sizes; and their failure to deliver on education in general.

I commend the Government's amendment.

10:53

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate. The schools of ambition programme, which was established by the previous Labour-Liberal Executive, has been an outstanding success, inspiring and challenging pupils, teachers and schools throughout Scotland. It has allowed the schools that are most in need of change and reform to implement locally agreed proposals for transformational change—change that is aimed at enabling schools to stand out in their locality and nationally as innovators and leaders, which can increase young people's self-esteem, ambitions, opportunities and life chances. It has allowed schools to build success and experience and to drive up standards. The programme not only benefits the 52 current schools of ambition, but enables schools throughout Scotland to share in their success, which benefits the whole education system and every community.

The recent decision by the Scottish Government to withdraw funding for that successful programme is shameful. It affects not just the schools that are involved in it, but all Scotland's schools and each and every pupil whose school has begun to change. It is astounding that the SNP Government is scrapping a scheme that not only has broad support from parties throughout the chamber and from the education establishment, but which is driving up standards across Scotland's schools and giving students up and down the country greater opportunities and prospects.

Surely it is too early for the Government to say that there will be no future funding for the programme, when its evaluation is at such an early stage. Early evidence is already showing real signs of great improvement in attainment. Such signs include successes such as those that have been achieved at Cardinal Newman school in North Lanarkshire, which has pioneered vocational education that is aimed at boosting pupils' awareness of business and enterprise. That not only expands choice for pupils but allows teachers to learn new skills and techniques, which makes a real difference to everyone at school. Already, the school has won official recognition for its work, winning the *Catering in Scotland* innovation in training award, the Scotland and Northern Ireland Restaurant of the year award and the Scottish Qualifications Authority star award.

Other successes include those that have been achieved by Taylor high school in North Lanarkshire, which is specialising in technology and is enabling each pupil directly to experience DVD production, podcasting and digital recording, and is allowing all pupils to develop electronic portfolios of their work. Such initiatives are important. Only yesterday, the Education, Lifelong

Learning and Culture Committee heard, as part of its inquiry into the creative industries, evidence about the extent of the skills shortage in that area.

Those are just a couple of examples, but across Scotland, the evidence demonstrates that the schools of ambition programme is transforming schools and the learning culture, raising young people's aspirations and self-esteem and making them more successful and motivated learners by enabling them to develop life skills that prepare them fully for the challenges of the 21st century. Such radical transformation is possible only because support is targeted where it can make the most difference.

The SNP Government has said today that it wants every school to be a school of ambition. That is laudable, but does that mean that every high school in Scotland can expect to receive an additional £300,000 over three years, with no strings attached?

I listened carefully to what Maureen Watt had to say this morning. The only thing that she offered to those schools in North Lanarkshire that are schools of ambition or aspire to be schools of ambition was a magazine. Quite frankly, a magazine for every high school in Scotland is not going to cut it.

Yesterday's debate on the curriculum for excellence did not offer the certainty, which has been demanded by teachers, about the resources that they require for implementation of that important change to teaching in Scotland. If the Government cannot even provide certainty about that fundamental change in our schools, we can have no confidence that every one of our schools is to become a school of ambition.

The schools of ambition programme is proving to be a success, and we must ensure that that is allowed to continue, not just for the schools that were designated as schools of ambition by the previous Government, but for all the schools that aspire to be schools of ambition.

10:58

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): The Government's policy in respect of schools of ambition is as clear as mud. Maureen Watt told us that the newspaper article that Rhona Brankin talked about is a load of nonsense, but then spent a lot of time quoting comments about why schools of ambition were not a terribly good idea in the first place. Brian Adam spent a good deal of time saying that all schools ought to be schools of ambition, but did not deal with the crucial issue of funding them across the board.

Since 1999, there has been substantial consensus across the chamber about the general

shape and direction of the education system in Scotland. All parties broadly shared a pride in our schools and the achievements of children and teachers, and were signed up to the major initiatives that were undertaken by the previous Scottish Government on the curriculum review, leadership in schools, the school renewal programme, enterprise and education, schools of ambition and many more subjects. However, that is no longer the case. Today, there are strong signs that the commitment of the SNP Government to the programme and to education more generally is faltering. Today's *Herald* notes with regard to the school-building programme, that

"the coming to power ... of the SNP appears to have slackened the pace of transformation".

We know that the much-heralded class-size reductions, which have simplistically been seen as the way to a step-change in education, are only so much hot air because they are not accompanied by funding. We know, too, that the Government's skills strategy has been greeted by widespread indifference, based on the recognition that it is superficial and lacks effective drivers. The common features across those various areas include a lack of a coherent vision and a substantial lack of evidence base or proper sector consultation on the initiatives—both features that mark the SNP Government's activities across the board.

The schools of ambition initiative falls in the same category. By most measurements, those schools have been successful, although they had early difficulties. For example, it took time to get schools to come forward with good projects. Empowering schools in this way was a new concept that took time to develop and realise. However, the central nugget, which is that schools supported by schools of ambition status and funding would pioneer new ways of working and would act as standard setters to others, has been successful and has achieved critical mass. At St Machar's academy in Aberdeen, at the six schools that have been supported by the Hunter Foundation in Glasgow, at St Ninian's high in East Dunbartonshire, at Barrhead high in Eastwood and at many more schools across Scotland, headteachers, staff and children are setting new standards and horizons and are acting as standard bearers for good and aspirational practice.

I welcome the conferences that were mentioned in the Government's motion. It is laudable indeed that the Government wants all schools to be schools of ambition, as we all do. However, if the current funding were to be spread across all secondary schools, each school would receive only a pittance, which would no doubt be welcome, but would hardly be transformational. I

tell the minister today that slackening pace will become the watchword of this Administration if it persists in withdrawing funding from proven projects. Rather than withdraw the funding, which is typically £100,000 a year, the Government should continue the programme and concentrate on identifying more funding to help turn around schools that face challenges, and to support headteachers in the most difficult schools so that they can make a difference, as is called for in the Liberal Democrat amendment.

Pious platitudes, however, about every school being a school of ambition cannot disguise the thin gruel of the SNP's ambition for Scotland's education system. I suggest that the minister and her colleagues might usefully spend the Easter recess—and, perhaps the summer recess—going homeward and thinking again on these matters.

I believe that Scotland's young people require a better deal than they are getting from the SNP Government and I think that Parliament requires clarity about the Government's policy on schools of ambition. Will the policy go on into the future? Is the money being spread across the board? Will the current schools of ambition have continued funding? What exactly is the position? We want some answers from the minister before the debate ends today.

11:02

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I am sorry to see the Labour Party wasting Parliament's time on a debate that is built on false premises and misrepresentation.

I have long been involved in education, so I am interested in seeing real improvements in Scottish education. Therefore, when I read reports about the ending of the schools of ambition programme, I was concerned about how it had been sprung on us with no prior warning from the Government. I do not, however, remember people rushing to the polls last May to vote for parties proposing an extension of the schools of ambition programme. Scotland voted for new choices and new thinking: that is what we are getting from our Government.

Of course, I discovered that the programme has not been scrapped. Not only will it run for the full duration that was planned by the previous Administration, but the SNP Government will spend more money on it than Labour and the Liberal Democrats planned to. However, the falsely reported demise of the programme is not the only falsehood.

The motion refers to "positive comments" about the programme by HMIE. However, a look at the inspectorate's report on schools of ambition reveals that the inspectors made no such

comments. The report on St Ninian's high school in Kirkintilloch said:

"In many departments, staff engaged in high quality debate about the curriculum and approaches to learning and teaching, arising partly from the school's involvement in the *School of Ambition* initiative."

To turn a compliment about the motivation of staff into a ringing endorsement of the whole programme is typical Labour spin.

Robert Brown: Will the member give way?

Willie Coffey: I have only four minutes. The member can press his button if he wants to make a speech.

Mary Mulligan: He has already made a speech.

Willie Coffey: He could have made a contribution on that point, but he chose not to do so.

Doon academy entered the schools of ambition programme following two inspections in 2002 and 2004. It had been making progress that had been hampered by the serious condition of the building—hardly an ideal mechanism by which to enter such a scheme. Of course, the school needed support to recover from that disruption, as would any school. However, local authorities should not have to justify that to officials and ministers in Edinburgh. With the removal of a great deal of ring fencing, local authorities will have more flexibility to respond to such events. At its heart, the motion is simply another repetition of Labour's dreary old song about ring fencing.

The schools of ambition programme appears to have no real criteria beyond a school's having performance difficulties and wanting to improve. There are no generic outcomes defined for the programme and, therefore, no way of assessing its effectiveness. As with all ring-fenced programmes, the existence of unique resources skews thinking in some quarters. Some schools measure their success by their ability to gain school of ambition status. Scotland was and is full of schools of ambition: the problem was that we did not have a Government with ambition.

Yesterday, I witnessed some incredible scenes at East Ayrshire Council, as the SNP-led council saved from closure three ambitious rural schools that had received little or no investment from Labour via its SOA scheme or its selective private finance initiative schemes. Crossroads primary school in my constituency had the princely sum of £18,000 spent on it over the previous 12 years under Labour. Sorn and Littlemill schools also suffered. They were all in danger because of the condition of the school buildings. That is a disgrace, from a party that now pretends that it is the friend of rural schools.

The sight of parents weeping with joy as the SNP council took the decision to save their schools will live with me for many years. Those schools are the real schools of ambition, but that is not thanks to the previous Labour Executive or the previous Labour council. Tom Hunter's words are still appropriate in Scotland: every child deserves the opportunity to succeed and to be all they can be. A scheme that excluded 88 per cent of secondary school children in Scotland hardly delivers on that noble ambition. Our Government has that ambition for all Scotland's schoolchildren rather than only the few, as was the case under Labour's failed scheme.

11:06

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and I will support Rhona Brankin's motion.

I would have thought that Willie Coffey might at least have managed to show some humility in respect of the rural schools in East Ayrshire, given that it was an SNP-led council that proposed the closures in the first place. It is testimony to the parents, the pupils and the local communities that they have been saved from closure. He should hang his head in shame at being a councillor on the council that proposed the closures in the first place.

Willie Coffey mentioned Doon academy in my constituency and the other school of ambition in my constituency, Carrick academy, which I had the privilege of visiting when the schools of ambition programme was launched. I saw how excited the teachers, the other staff in the school, the headteacher and the local community were about being accepted on to the programme.

A few weeks ago, just before we heard that the programme was to be scrapped, I had a further communication from Carrick academy, which asked me to participate in the evaluation. What kind of message does the Government's decision send to schools that are currently involved in the programme and have not even got to the first stage of the evaluation? They know that the work that they are doing is not being recognised or valued and that it will be thrown on the scrapheap. *[Interruption.]* I hear the interventions that are being made by the Minister for Children and Early Years—he will have a chance to respond in due course. Irrespective of whether he says that the funding is currently continuing, the reality is that people already know that a decision has been made that the programme will not continue. That devalues the work that the schools are doing and it sends a message that what they are doing to try to raise the hopes and aspirations of their pupils is not valued.

We have heard during the debate what the real agenda is. Brian Adam said that the SNP does not support targeting. I hope that members all noted that statement. It is remarkable that every other political party in the Parliament—including the Conservatives, who at various times I would not have had much in common with—now supports targeting resources to ensure that we level up rather than level down achievements and aspirations. The SNP is the only party in the Parliament that does not support targeting. How can the SNP try to convince anyone that it is the party of social justice when it is not prepared to put resources into schools in the most disadvantaged areas and schools that need a hand up to ensure that they give every child the best possible opportunity? How can it claim in any shape or form to be the party of social justice?

We know that the programme will not be rolled out and we know that there is not £100,000 per school, because the budget figures tell us that. In 2010-11, there is £500,000 for the whole programme. No warm words about how good the programme is or about websites or magazines—Karen Whitefield exposed how ludicrous such statements are—get away from the fact that no more schools will be added to the programme.

Consider the kind of activities that the pupils in Doon academy and Carrick academy in my constituency were involved in. In Doon academy, the pupils had the opportunity to participate in the Columba 1400 programme, and the roll-out of an information and communication technology strategy across not only the secondary school but feeder primary schools gave every child in primary 6 and P7 a laptop. Alex Neil, who will speak after me, will know that for every P6 and P7 child in the Doon Valley feeder primaries to be able to get a laptop is a socialist principle and an initiative that we should support. Every secondary 3 pupil in Carrick academy has the opportunity to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Pupils were not previously given such opportunities, but that initiative has been taken forward because of the schools of ambition programme. Let us see the Government think again—as East Ayrshire Council was forced to do on rural schools—and come back with a new proposal to roll the scheme out further.

11:11

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): We will not take any lessons on education policy or social justice from the Labour Party—particularly not from Cathy Jamieson. Between 2003 and 2006 alone, Labour and the Liberal Democrats closed 33 schools throughout Scotland, six of which were personally authorised by Cathy Jamieson as the

Minister for Education and Young People—a minister for education without schools.

As far as East Ayrshire is concerned, we heard nothing from Cathy Jamieson or any Labour councillor or representative when we led the campaign to save St Paul's primary school in Hurlford. She is the same member who sat in the Cabinet that planned to shut Ayr hospital's accident and emergency unit, so we will not take any lessons from her.

I am sure that members agree that the key component of educational performance is how well off pupils are, not only in school but at home. After 10 years of Labour government, the folk in the Doon valley, in Girvan and in Maybole are living in relatively more poverty, not less. If anything damages educational performance, it is the concentration of poverty and deprivation. Labour looks after its big pals in the city.

Rhona Brankin: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Neil: Sit down. I will not listen to more rubbish—I have heard enough.

Members should consider the money that has been wasted on PFI. We understand that the Tories want to make a buck or two out of education and hospitals, but Labour and the Liberal Democrats have wasted millions. Not only have they done so over the past eight years, but they have saddled future generations with millions of pounds of debt through profiteering PFI schemes that are being used to finance schools and hospitals. If we did not have PFI, we would have £100 million extra to spend on education in Scotland this year, next year and every year hence.

We will not take any lessons from Labour. It is no wonder that it is languishing at 27 per cent in the polls. People recognise the sheer hypocrisy of Labour's position. It has presided over the situation for the past 10 years. Labour members are merely playing politics with the schools of ambition programme: they do not really care about the folk involved. They have demonstrated in the past 10 years that they do not care about socialist principles. Cathy Jamieson remained a member of a Cabinet that supported the Iraq war. We have spent £4.5 billion as a nation on the Iraq war; Scotland's share is £400 million. How many schools of ambition could have been built with £400 million?

The fact is that it is right for a Government to have the ambition to make every school in Scotland a school of ambition. With the changes that we are making—de-ring fencing, allowing local authorities to keep the money from efficiency savings for reinvestment in front-line services, and

making savings by getting rid of the hated PFI—we will ensure that the money is available.

Rhona Brankin: Where is the money?

Robert Brown: Where is the money?

Alex Neil: They are shouting from the unionist benches, "Where is the money?" What about giving the Parliament our share of our oil money? No child in Scotland would have to worry about ambition.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): We move to the winding-up speeches—if members are not wound up enough already.

11:16

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Presiding Officer, can you remind me what debate we are having? I thought that we were debating schools of ambition. If ever there was an SNP MSP with ambition, it is Mr Neil—but, as with the schools of ambition programme, it all ends in bitter disappointment.

There is, regrettably, a woeful inconsistency in the Government's approach to schooling, and the schools of ambition programme in particular, and today we debate the latest inconsistency. The Government received "Research to Support Schools of Ambition: Annual Report 2007" in October of that year. The report was positive, and its conclusions ended:

"School leaders have reported the development of a new 'mindset', 'way of thinking' and 'language' used in talking about school change and are enthusiastic about the potential of the Schools of Ambition programme to promote 'approved risk taking' and to break down 'traditional barriers' to improvement."

The programme has been a real success, but the Government's response is to end it—there will be not one more school under the programme.

We waited four minutes for Brian Adam to develop his point, which I think was that the previous Government was at fault for there not being more schools in the programme, but his Government has decided to scrap the programme before it has even concluded. I share one thing with Mr Adam: I have no idea what the Government's policy is. Indeed, the Government's policy is so confused that, after the minister sat down, there were even more questions about the Government's approach.

We simply do not know the Government's approach to directing resources. Direct resources are acceptable in some areas but not in others. Let us consider nursery provision and class sizes, for example. In her statement on class sizes, Fiona Hyslop said:

"We need to give more time, more attention and more access to a nursery teacher to our poorest children."—*[Official Report, 5 December 2007; c 4069.]*

However, this week's policy statement from the Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities had not one single message about directing resources to the poorest areas.

In response to a written question by Karen Whitefield asking how much of the £40 million announced by the Government to reduce class sizes was spent in each area, Fiona Hyslop replied on 1 August last year that funding was weighted, and that

"The remaining 5 per cent of the allocation reflects our focus on areas of deprivation in the context of class size reduction."—*[Official Report, Written Answers, 1 August 2007; S3W-1741.]*

So the Government was happy to provide £2 million to reduce class sizes in areas of deprivation, but now it says that the same system should not apply to developing learning in our secondary schools. Of course, the problem with the Government's policy, as we found out under freedom of information legislation, was that more was spent on staff toilets, new boilers, roofs and a long-wheelbase minibus than on reducing class sizes.

The Minister for Schools and Skills visited Hawick in the Borders to announce the free school meals pilot, which is directed towards areas of deprivation. She visited Drumlanrig St Cuthbert's primary school in Hawick shortly after she knew that Hawick high school—a school of ambition—would not receive long-term funding for the scheme. That is utter inconsistency in one town.

Yesterday, I asked Keith Brown—whom I respect—whether, given the financial settlement, councils had any excuse to cut education budgets. Tellingly, he refused to answer. The SNP knows that, although it is spinning that councils have the best settlement since the ascent of man, schools throughout Scotland are making dreadful decisions about reductions in revenue spending. The reason is that the settlement for local authorities is obviously not as good as the Government has said. For example, in the Borders the revenue grant increase is 3.81 per cent for the coming financial year, which in real terms is a revenue increase of 1.1 per cent, and that includes all of the previously ring-fenced funds that the council used to receive. That means that less than £1 million of additional funding is available for the authority to develop new policies across every policy area.

The Minister for Schools and Skills said that there are to be two conferences to discuss the schools of ambition programme so we should all relax. She did not tell Parliament about the conference in May 2007, the conclusions of which

were overwhelmingly positive about continuing the policy. Indeed, one conclusion from headteachers was to recommend not only that the programme should continue but that more schools should apply to become part of it.

SNP members have been desperate to say that the scheme will carry on, at the same time as they have justified scrapping it. Councillor Coffey made the perfect point and summed up the whole debate: he took credit for the SNP saving a school that it had proposed closing. If that does not sum up the Government's approach, nothing else does.

11:21

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): When the Government produced its famous skills strategy last autumn, the first part of the foreword by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning was deliberately all about how we could make Scotland a nation of ambition. It went on to refer to people who are

"hungry to continually learn new skills"

and stated that the Government would do everything possible to

"motivate and engender a culture of enterprise and ambition in our schools."

So said page 16 of that glossy brochure.

The theme was also picked up by Sir Tom Hunter, who, like most other forward-thinking people, is keen that every single available pound in education is spent on raising aspirations and self-esteem and on changing the mood of Scotland from one of sometimes reluctant learning to one of a can-do attitude. He rightly believes that that is especially important in areas where there is a higher percentage of deprivation. For him, the schools of ambition programme was a much-needed lifeline and an essential starting block for expanding excellence in schools. The key words are "expanding excellence", particularly in developing the skills that employers value so highly and in allowing schools to realise their objectives according to their own circumstances.

HMIE was also impressed, and it commented on the highly effective implementation of the programme in several schools. I say frankly to Mr Coffey that it does not matter whether HMIE believes that it is motivation or the whole effort that has gone up—the fact is that it has increased.

Given what the Government itself says, what one of our leading businessmen and philanthropists says, and what HMIE says, I am at a total loss to explain how the Government can decide to wind down the schools of ambition programme, which has so far benefited 52 schools, whether now or in three years—there is a huge debate about what the policy is now. I am

told that that is being done because the cabinet secretary simply cannot tolerate anything in educational policy that does not meet the standard one-size-fits-all mantra that currently drives the SNP agenda.

In the introduction to the skills strategy, the cabinet secretary wills us to praise those who are hungry for new skills, but at the same time she is prepared to deprive them of food, simply because she thinks that they have too much of a good thing. That is ridiculous logic and, despite the excitable eloquence of Mr Neil, it is socialism at its worst. It does the cabinet secretary's credibility no good whatsoever if she wants us to accept that she is serious about ambition.

Surely we should use the highly successful schools of ambition model—especially as it has worked so effectively in some deprived areas—to build for the future and to offer much greater choice and diversity in meeting the aspirations of our children. The current comprehensive system has failed to deliver that choice and diversity by its constant obsession with one size fits all and by basing everything on the lowest common denominator.

Schools of ambition have proved how we can turn things around for some of our weaker performing schools. The programme has proved what happens when schools receive money directly and they, rather than the Government, decide how best to spend it. The staff and pupils of such schools deserve huge credit for what has been achieved. The Government should celebrate that success and not cut off schools in their prime. The Conservatives ask the Government to reverse its decision and do what Sir Tom Hunter wanted: to stop playing politics with our children's education.

11:25

Maureen Watt: The debate has been interesting. It strikes me that we have reached a consensus. We all agree that the schools of ambition programme is achieving exactly what it set out to do, which was to raise ambition, instil self-belief and confidence, improve life chances for pupils and lead the way for all schools to do the same. When we took office, we promised to bring a new consensus approach to government. In that context, when we were making decisions on the current spending round, continuous support for the schools of ambition programme was not questioned. Funding is still ring fenced and directly available to the schools concerned.

Elizabeth Smith: In that context, will the minister clarify what the Government's policy is?

Maureen Watt: Absolutely. Our policy is to complete the programme.

What concerns exist about the programme? Are members concerned that the Scottish Government is scrapping it? We are not. Are they concerned that we do not value it? We do. Are they concerned that we will not spread the learning? We are doing exactly that, and we will continue to do so.

All members have at least one school of ambition in their constituency. I hope that all members have visited those schools. I hope that when you visited Newbattle community high school yesterday, Ms Brankin, you apologised for the unnecessary uncertainty that you had caused. I also hope that Ken Macintosh apologised when he wrote to every school of ambition.

Rhona Brankin: I certainly did not apologise. Will you apologise to Newbattle community high school for the uncertainty that you have caused for schools of ambition?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members keep going down the same road. Only one person should be referred to as "you" in the chamber—me.

Maureen Watt: Fiona Hyslop wrote to every school of ambition after the erroneous article that has been mentioned was published, and assured them that funding was continuing in this spending round.

Recently, I visited Braeview academy in Dundee, which is a school of ambition. I was impressed by the transformation that had taken place there. I have also visited Queensferry high school, and the cabinet secretary has visited Cardinal Newman high school in Karen Whitefield's constituency.

Karen Whitefield: First, Cardinal Newman high school is in my colleague Michael McMahon's constituency. Secondly, how many new schools of ambition will the Government commit to? How much money will it spend on the magazine that is to be produced? What additional resources will be committed to all Scotland's high schools?

Maureen Watt: I say to Karen Whitefield, Robert Brown and other Labour members that I am surprised that they think that it is good for Scottish education as a whole to concentrate spending on 52 schools and not to have any ambition for the others. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Maureen Watt: I will take no lectures on social justice from Cathy Jamieson. We want early intervention in our schools and we want to reduce class sizes in P1 to P3 so that pupils are not allowed to fail and money does not have to be spent on picking up the pieces.

Hugh O'Donnell took part in yesterday's debate on the curriculum for excellence, which was more than the Labour Party's education spokesman did. He knows that the curriculum for excellence is designed to raise opportunities for every school, so that every school raises the bar in respect of pupil attainment. Record funding is being made available to local authorities to support that.

In the debate we are losing sight of the schools that are involved in the schools of ambition programme and of the people—teachers, staff, parents and business partners—who are working incredibly hard to achieve transformation.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the minister give way?

Maureen Watt: I have already taken interventions.

In the debate we are losing sight of the pupils who are contributing and who stand to benefit, and of the communities that are flourishing. I commend every school, teacher, staff member, pupil, parent and community for supporting the schools of ambition programme. They have accepted the gauntlet that has been thrown down and have been willing to take risks and share their experiences with their colleagues. I commend them for transforming things. They know that they are innovating and sharing with others the best practices of schools of ambition, and I am sure that they are dismayed, as I am, that they are being used as pawns in a purely political game and that they are the latest target of a Labour Party scaremongering campaign.

Representatives of one school of ambition—St Paul's high school in Glasgow—listened to part of the debate. I know that many more people who are involved in schools of ambition are watching our debate on the Scottish Parliament's website. We can combine as a united Parliament to applaud schools of ambition for their hard work, wish them well with their transformational journey, and ensure that what is learned from them is shared with all schools in Scotland.

11:30

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): I, too, welcome the opportunity to highlight the success of the schools of ambition programme, which has, as we have heard, attracted support from members across the political spectrum, except SNP members. Why? More important, why is the Scottish Government unable to say what it expects to happen after 2011? Does funding of £500,000 in 2010-11 show support for the programme? My colleague Rhona Brankin asked that. So far, the SNP Government's only reply has been that it wants all schools to be schools of ambition, which is like saying that we want the sun to shine every day—a nice idea, but how can it be made to

happen? The Government still does not seem to have got its head around the fact that in government, people must take actions that make a difference. How else will the Government encourage schools to be innovative?

Murdo Fraser: Does the member agree that there is complete confusion at the heart of what the Government has proposed? One of the strengths of schools of ambition money is that it goes directly to the schools that are involved. I presume that if every school is to be a school of ambition, the money will simply go into local government budgets and will not be ring fenced, so there will be no guarantee whatsoever that it will go to individual schools. Is that not a major flaw in what the Government is saying?

Mary Mulligan: I will return to funding.

There is a question that the SNP still does not seem to be able to answer. When a school receives a less-than-positive inspection report, how will the Government provide resources to help it to get back on track? The minister must understand that children and young people are individuals, and that some children and young people have difficult backgrounds and home lives, as Mr O'Donnell said. Sometimes, the number of such children in a school means that it needs additional support. How will the Scottish Government provide it?

We have heard that not all schools of ambition are schools with difficulties, but the experience in my constituency is that there have been difficulties. Burnhouse special school in Whitburn, which the cabinet secretary has visited several times and held up as a great example, takes children and young people with social, emotional and behavioural problems. It takes children who are already struggling with their education. Like most MSPs, I read the school's HMIE report with interest. The report was different from most other reports that I had read. It was clear that the school was not providing the education that pupils deserved. The education that it provided was poor for a number of reasons, such as its staffing and building problems. The school was placed on the schools of ambition programme, which provided a real boost to continuing professional development for staff and to upgrading the building. If the minister has not already read the report, I advise her to do so. Margaret Gibson, who is the head teacher, has said:

"The staff have now taken on responsibility. They own the school and the kids own the learning. It's magical and everybody's motivated."

Why does the minister not want that to continue? What will happen to such a school when the schools of ambition programme ends? Will it just be told that, under the historic concordat, local authorities have been given increased resources?

Translated, that means that the local authority will have to find the resources from what it has got, and it might have to take them from other schools, so the local authorities are on their own.

Maureen Watt: Does the member accept that schools of ambition get extra financial resources and support from central Government? We provide that support not just to failing schools that have gone on to the schools of ambition programme but to other schools in the same situation.

Mary Mulligan: I am not aware of those additional resources. In fact, the only thing that the Government seems to have given to schools so far this year is a saltire.

The minister's amendment refers to two conferences that will be held to share emerging lessons. That is fine, but what is the minister going to say at those conferences? Is she going to say that the schools of ambition programme has been a great success, so the Government is not going to continue with it? She might say that the private sector is prepared to contribute additional money to fund ambition, but there will not be enough for every school, so the Government will not accept its support for any school.

Not one MSP in the Parliament is without ambition for all our children and young people, except maybe Alex Neil, who seems to have ambition only for himself. However, it is clear that a majority of us acknowledge the fact that some children and young people need extra support to help them to achieve their potential.

Several SNP members took part in the debate, although I am uncertain that they realised that it was a debate, given that they did not want to take interventions. I say to Mr Adam that we did not just read about the issues in the newspapers; we saw the cabinet secretary on "Newsnight", and she could not answer the question about why there was no commitment to the future of the schools of ambition programme. Maybe Mr Adam gave the game away, as Cathy Jamieson said. The SNP does not believe in targeting and helping those who really need help, and that is the problem.

I am not sure whether Willie Coffey said that he is in favour of the schools of ambition programme or not. He gave a very mixed message.

I say to Mr Neil that more than 200 new and refurbished schools were provided during the final term of the previous Scottish Executive, but no new schools have been commissioned since the SNP came to power. That is the difference between the previous Executive and the present Government.

The minister would stop the schools of ambition programme only if she did not understand the

need for targeted support, or if she was small-minded enough to stop it because it was introduced under the Labour-Lib Dem Executive. However, I do not believe that of the cabinet secretary or her ministers; the real issue is that the cabinet secretary got squeezed in the comprehensive spending review—I see that Mr Swinney has joined us—and, as a result, Scotland's children will suffer.

Will the minister make it clear whether each school in Scotland will receive £300,000 to spend? That is what they would have received under the schools of ambition programme, and the minister has said that every school should get it. If not, the cabinet secretary and her ministers must take responsibility for letting down Scotland's schools. Perhaps they should be considering their position.

11:39

Meeting suspended.

11:40

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

Schools (Catchment Areas)

1. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what rules are in place to allow the alteration of catchment areas for schools where more than one local authority is involved. (S3O-2682)

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): Any proposal to alter the catchment area of a school requires statutory consultation with parents and others. That applies whether only one, or more than one, authority is involved.

Bob Doris: The minister will be aware of an on-going dispute between Glasgow City Council and East Renfrewshire Council over whether students who attend St Angela's primary school in Glasgow can continue to attend St Ninian's secondary school in East Renfrewshire, as they always have done. Depending on which local authority we speak to, catchment areas have been changed without consultation, or they have been reinterpreted but not changed. Either way, more than 20 pupils and their families are anxious, worried and having sleepless nights while the lawyers slug it out. Will the minister work with both local authorities to end the dispute and provide certainty and stability for parents and children who believe, as I do, that they have the right to go to the school that they were always going to attend, St Ninian's secondary?

Maureen Watt: I am aware of the specific issue in the St Ninian's catchment area. School admissions policies are a matter for local authorities and ministers have no role in them. It is not for ministers to adjudicate in such matters. Ministers might have a role if there is a formal proposal to change the school's catchment area, and the school concerned is more than 80 per cent full, which is the case at St Ninian's. It is not for ministers to advise, and parents can, of course, take legal advice if they wish.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the Scottish Government investigate why local authorities have been unable to deliver a better rate of satisfying school placement requests when the number of such requests has fallen?

Maureen Watt: School placements are a matter for local authorities. Parents have a right to appeal

the authority's decision in the local appeals committee.

Association of Scottish Community Councils (Meetings)

2. Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met the Association of Scottish Community Councils. (S3O-2669)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I met the president and secretary of the Association of Scottish Community Councils on 19 November 2007. Scottish Government officials last met representatives of the ASCC on 13 March 2008. The Scottish Government holds regular quarterly meetings with representatives of the ASCC and meets the entire executive council annually.

Gavin Brown: Page 45 of the Scottish National Party manifesto contains a proposal

"to make new local government ward boundaries the structural basis for new community councils".

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the purpose of community councils is to engage with communities as they exist and not to form areas based on how easy they might be for a local authority to administer? Will he therefore confirm that the proposal on page 45 of the SNP manifesto will be scrapped?

John Swinney: As always, Mr Brown uses the most elaborate and excitable language to discuss commonsense provisions that we should consider objectively. The Government acknowledges—and I accept Mr Brown's remark on the point—that community councils are important because they gather together representative community opinion and they reflect the sense of community that exists in different parts of Scotland. Although the Government wishes to encourage the efficient administrative organisation of local arrangements, it will always be mindful of local communities' interests. That is why our actions in the past 10 months have given such prominence to supporting the development of the local sector in Scotland through the positive relationship that we have established with local authorities and the substantial increase in influence that local authorities have in local governance.

Water Charges

3. Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made in reviewing water charges. (S3O-2698)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): We have just consulted on the charging principles that we wish to see the Water Industry Commission for Scotland apply when determining caps for 2010 to

2014. An analysis of that consultation will be published in due course.

Andrew Welsh: Having personally raised the issue in parliamentary questions and in a members' business debate in the previous parliamentary session, I again stress to the minister the potentially devastating effects on churches, voluntary organisations and village halls if their exemption from water charges is removed. Given that the problem affects around 2,600 halls and volunteer organisations throughout Scotland, will he ensure that the continuation of the exemption is a priority in any review of water charges?

Stewart Stevenson: I recognise the member's long-standing support for churches, charities and voluntary organisations throughout Scotland. He can be sure that we will take careful note of the substantial number of approaches that we have had on the subject and the many consultation responses that we have received. I am conscious that, in changing how we assess the responsibilities of business organisations under the water charging regime, we must not unduly and unreasonably disadvantage other very important organisations in our communities.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I was a member of the Transport and the Environment Committee that recommended that the exemption be applied. At that time, the exemption was argued for on the basis of the level of disruption that would be caused to churches, scout groups and other small organisations if they were suddenly exposed to significant increases in water charges. That situation has not changed. If the exemption were withdrawn now, such organisations would be faced with exactly the same situation—

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I must press you for a question.

Des McNulty: I hope that the Government will respond in a similar way by extending the exemption and making it permanent.

Stewart Stevenson: I am happy this week to agree with Des McNulty's analysis, which I think is pretty much spot on. A range of opportunities is available for dealing with the matter in the context of water charging, but members should be assured that the importance of the issue to organisations throughout Scotland is recognised by all political parties in the Parliament.

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): Is the minister aware that my constituent the Rev Jock Stein currently has an e-petition before the Parliament on that very issue? Can the minister assure me that, when the e-petition is considered, account will be taken of the representations that have been made not just by members on a cross-

party basis within the Parliament but by members of the public and by all sectors?

Stewart Stevenson: I congratulate the Rev Jock Stein on his efforts on behalf of churches and others on the issue of exemption from water charges. We will certainly take account of information that comes from that source.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): As the minister will know, voluntary sector groups are concerned about the onerous conditions that require to be met before water and sewerage charge relief can be obtained under the current exemption scheme. Can he assure me that, as well as considering whether the exemption should continue—I certainly believe that it should—the Government will reconsider the burdensome conditions that currently exclude many charities and other organisations from the scheme?

Stewart Stevenson: I am aware that the present scheme has a number of inconsistencies and unexpected side effects. For example, when organisations move, they lose their right to an exemption. Those and other similar matters will be considered in our response to the consultation.

Schools (Citizenship)

4. Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to promote citizenship in Scotland's schools. (S3O-2696)

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): One of the four key capacities of the curriculum for excellence is educating all our young people to be responsible citizens.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I welcome the work that is being done within the curriculum for excellence to teach citizenship issues such as equality, political awareness, social and environmental justice and fair trade. Does the minister agree that those positive developments in the curriculum would be jeopardised if we were to inflict on our pupils Lord Goldsmith's divisive proposal—championed by Gordon Brown—for the swearing of an oath of allegiance? Will that proposal not merely underline differences rather than celebrate diversity?

Maureen Watt: We will not introduce citizenship ceremonies for young people in Scotland. There is no support for such a ceremony among the vast majority of our parents and young people. I totally agree that the responsible citizenship capacity in the curriculum for excellence is the way that we should go. In terms of diversity, I had great pleasure in attending yesterday's graduation ceremony for new Scots who, instead of having to take an oath of allegiance, were congratulated on completing a Skillnet course that will help them to

play their full role in Scotland. That is the way that we want to go.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (Specialist Schools)

5. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive what efforts it is making to increase the number of places at specialist schools for children with autistic spectrum disorder. (S3O-2703)

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram):

The placement of children with autistic spectrum disorder in special schools is a matter for local authorities in collaboration with parents. The priority is to tailor the educational provision to meet the needs of the individual child, whether in a mainstream setting or in a special school or in a mixture of both.

Claire Baker: As the minister will be aware, the number of children with autistic spectrum disorder is rising so it is important that we ensure that such children can access appropriate education. Will he respond to concerns that the promised £10 million additional support fund has not been delivered? How can the Government guarantee that money that was intended for additional support needs will be spent on improving such provision?

Adam Ingram: The member may be interested to know that there are some 1,106 pupils with autistic spectrum disorder in around 12 special schools that specialise in meeting the needs of such children. As she indicated, the number of such children is increasing. She will be well aware of the historic concordat between the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities whereby all moneys that were previously ring fenced have been rolled up and made available for local authorities to spend on issues such as supporting children with additional support needs.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I thank the minister for attending the launch of the National Autistic Society's "I exist" campaign on 26 February.

Given the recognised gap in support that opens up when ASD pupils leave the school system, what is the minister's department doing to assist such adults during that period?

Adam Ingram: I acknowledge the member's interest in the issue. Indeed, I welcomed the invitation to the launch of the "I exist" campaign, whose aims I endorse.

As the member will be aware, both reports on additional support needs and ASD that were produced by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education highlighted the problems of transition planning that arise for children's services and adult

services when people leave school and enter employment or training. The Government is focusing very much on those issues, particularly in the run-up to our legislative review of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Does the minister accept that many parents struggle to have their children's condition recognised if it does not fit easily into one of the categories for additional needs requirements, such as ASD? Such issues arise even before parents reach the stage of making placing requests for special schools or additional support in mainstream schools. Will he ensure that the early years strategy provides clear support for parents groups—such as Borders additional needs group in my constituency—which provide support to parents at critical times such as when there is dubiety over the recognition of the child's specific disabilities and needs?

Adam Ingram: The member is correct to emphasise the need for early intervention. Work is needed in the early years to identify, recognise and assess such needs. I acknowledge that there is a gap at the moment in meeting the additional support needs of very young children. We need to fill that gap.

Magazine (Policies and Achievements)

6. Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any plans to distribute a magazine outlining its key policies and achievements to households across Scotland and what the reasons are for its position on the matter. (S3O-2667)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):

The Scottish Government has no current plans to distribute a magazine outlining its key policies and achievements to households across Scotland, but such matters are kept under review. Should such a magazine of achievements and key policies be circulated, it would be a very lengthy document.

Jackson Carlaw: Naturally, I am immensely relieved by that answer. Given that we are among friends, I am sure that we can all agree that, policies introduced with Conservative support aside, such a magazine would, in any event, have been a singularly brief publication.

Given the minister's view, does he accept that that is precisely how tens of thousands of council tax payers' money is utilised by councils throughout Scotland? Does he agree that in an era in which increasingly sophisticated council websites are readily accessible, there is no longer a need for public money to be wasted on the

printing and postage of such publications to council tax payers at their own expense?

John Swinney: If we apply elsewhere the logic that Mr Carlaw has just deployed in relation to the use of local authority resources—I will return to that in a moment—we can look forward to the next election campaign in which Mr Carlaw is involved being entirely web based. I presume that the people of East Renfrewshire will not be subjected in any way to grubby pieces of paper being put through the door on Mr Carlaw's behalf.

These matters are entirely for local authorities to decide on. It is their duty to decide whether it is appropriate to make some communication to their constituents about their work. I point out that, in a number of cases, the publications contain valuable information about the availability of services and that not all our citizens have access to the technology that Mr Carlaw envisaged in his supplementary question.

Economic Development (Fife)

7. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to promote economic development in Fife. (S3O-2710)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): We place great importance on supporting and increasing economic development opportunities throughout Scotland, including in the kingdom of Fife. "The Government Economic Strategy" sets out how we will focus on creating a more successful country through increasing sustainable economic growth. The strategy sets out an approach to growth that is cohesive across all Scotland's regions.

Helen Eadie: As the cabinet secretary will be aware, all businesses in Fife are feeling seriously threatened by a variety of issues, such as the unplanned bridge closures, uncertainties about the changes to Scottish Enterprise and the effect of the move to city regions. What thoughts does he have on how we can reassure businesses in Fife? Will he acknowledge that there are massive problems for the confidence of such businesses? Will he agree to meet me and representatives of Fife Chamber of Commerce to discuss all those issues?

John Swinney: Of course I would be delighted to meet Helen Eadie and representatives of Fife Chamber of Commerce to discuss those issues. I can reassure them that the Government has taken the decision to establish a new replacement crossing on the River Forth. I suspect that the fact that the Government has taken swift and decisive action within six months of being in office to secure that crossing will build significant confidence in the community of Fife.

On Scottish Enterprise, the Government is determined to ensure that we have effective, locally accessible economic services available to businesses in Fife. That will be at the core of what the Government takes forward in relation to the Scottish Enterprise reform agenda.

The Government's decision, which was part of our budget proposals, to reduce and then remove for a large number of small businesses the burden of business rates will be welcomed warmly across the kingdom of Fife.

Local Government Funding

8. Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the funding settlement for local government in 2008-09 will be sufficient to maintain services at current levels. (S3O-2718)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Record levels of funding together with additional flexibility for councils to allocate resources should, under the terms of our concordat, result in improved front-line services right across Scotland.

Hugh Henry: That is a fascinating answer. The minister said that record levels of funding should be sufficient to improve front-line services. In Scottish National Party-led Renfrewshire Council, we are seeing four libraries being closed, two nurseries being closed, school budgets being cut and at least 50 to 60 teaching posts being lost. That is a shameful record, given the current financial climate that Mr Swinney described. Does he endorse the actions of Renfrewshire Council?

John Swinney: I recognise that Renfrewshire Council has effective and dynamic leadership that has taken Renfrewshire forward constructively. Among the many strong budget decisions that the council has taken are the identification of £1 million to reduce class sizes, a £42 million programme of school modernisation, more than £2 million for recycling and waste management and money for care homes, carers, upgrading roads, tourism and a variety of other projects. I suggest that Mr Henry stops looking on the bleak side and starts examining the strength of investments that local authorities throughout Scotland have made.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab):

To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S3F-615)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Later today, I will have meetings to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Through Wendy Alexander, I thank the 66 per cent of Labour voters who are highly satisfied with the Government's performance.

Ms Alexander: We know that the First Minister knows everything that there is to know about his popularity, but how much does he know about his flagship policy? Last week, he failed to tell the Parliament how much that policy would raise, but yesterday, the information was sneaked out in answer to a parliamentary question. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order.

Ms Alexander: Was a deliberate decision taken to withhold all those numbers from the official consultation document?

The First Minister: Answering parliamentary questions is usually an open and above-board way to proceed. As has been explained, the detailed figures were issued in the answer to a parliamentary question and are available in the Scottish Parliament information centre. I suggest that Wendy Alexander starts to read and examine the figures. If she does, she will find out why a tax that is based on the ability to pay is fundamentally better than Labour's unfair council tax.

Ms Alexander: There was no answer on whether a deliberate decision was taken to withhold all the numbers from the official consultation document. Of course, we all know that the First Minister wants the detailed scrutiny of his flagship policy to go away. The Scottish National Party's plans would replace one collection system with three new ones: a new system for collecting local income tax; a separate system for taxing second homes; and another new system to collect water and sewerage charges.

The SNP has nothing to say about the substantial extra cost to employers, and no numbers are in the official document. When he proposed abolishing the council tax, even Tommy Sheridan could estimate how much that would cost, so why cannot the bank manager and the economist who now run Scotland, with all the

resources of the Government at their disposal, do the same?

The First Minister: I am trying to work out who the bank manager and the economist are. However, according to Labour voters and just about everybody else in Scotland, they seem to be doing a better job and to generate more confidence than Wendy Alexander's team would. Running Scotland involves managing a budget of £30,000 million. I remind Wendy Alexander that she had difficulty in managing a budget of £16,000.

Ms Alexander: The First Minister is rather like Tommy Sheridan in one respect: if he were Scottish chocolate, he would eat himself. People out there are not really interested in the spite and the sarcasm; they just want to know how much his nat tax will cost them. This is a case not of can't say, but of won't say, which deliberately leaves every Scottish employer and worker in the dark.

This is the First Minister's flagship policy—the biggest tax change for a generation. Does he really expect us to believe that at no point in the past 10 months did Mr Swinney ask for any cost estimates for the three new collection systems that ministers propose?

The First Minister: The estimates for collection are in the figures that have been published in the parliamentary answer to which Wendy Alexander referred. I suggest that she reads parliamentary answers before asking more questions. I understand well why she would wish to insult me but, for the life of me, I do not see the point of her insulting Tommy Sheridan—that seems to be a counsel of despair. The detailed figures have been published—I suggest that she reads them.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): Tell us where they are.

The First Minister: Just a second. If Wendy Alexander reads the figures, she will recognise and learn that taxation based on the ability to pay is fundamentally fairer than taxation such as the council tax, which the Labour Party managed to increase by 62 per cent from March 1997 to last year. That is why there is such overwhelming support for a fair system of local taxation.

Ms Alexander: A little more dignity and a little more accuracy would serve the First Minister's office well. His proposals require three new tax collection systems. The official document that he has produced contains not a single estimate for any of them. The parliamentary answer that was published yesterday contains a guesstimate for one of them. That guesstimate was made without anyone even speaking to HM Revenue and Customs, the organisation that the First Minister wants to collect the tax.

I cannot explain why the First Minister wants to hide all the figures. Perhaps it has something to do with the totals. SPICe indicates that the system will cost almost £100 million to set up and £100 million to run—a cost of more than £0.5 billion over the next session. The First Minister has provided us with no figures. This week the SNP announced a new business focus for Scotland week in the US. What is the point of that, if the First Minister's message to America is "Welcome to Scotland, the most highly taxed part of the United Kingdom"?

The First Minister: The message to America will be "Come to Scotland for skills and innovation". We will probably spend some time drawing attention to the dramatic taxation cut for small business in Scotland that will be so widely welcomed.

If the figures are not there, as Wendy Alexander says, why is she able to quote them? Having taxation collected by HM Revenue and Customs—a system that was put in place under the Scotland Act 1998 to collect revenue raised under the 3p tax-varying power—is fundamentally more efficient than a widely discredited council tax system.

I hope that Wendy Alexander will forgive me when I say that, when it comes to trust in politics and politicians, five years ago the Labour Party abandoned hope of ever being trusted again, when it took us to war on an illegal prospectus—a decision that was supported by Wendy Alexander in the Parliament. I know that Simon Pia thinks that everything in Wendy's garden is lovely. Given the approval ratings, I suggest that he has become the comical Ali of Scottish political journalism.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S3F-616)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans to meet the Secretary of State for Scotland in the near future, but I spoke to him briefly the other day.

Annabel Goldie: This week the Robert Foye review laid bare the gaping inadequacies of a system that, appallingly, resulted in the rape of a schoolgirl. Yesterday the Scottish Prison Service admitted that high-risk prisoners such as Mr Foye could still be considered for transfer to an open jail; unbelievably, it could all happen again.

As if that were not bad enough, next week the Scottish Government proposes to allow even more dangerous criminals out of jail even earlier, on home detention curfew. That is just the latest move in the Scottish National Party's unrelenting drive to empty our jails. Why is the SNP so soft on crime and criminals?

The First Minister: As Annabel Goldie knows, the Scottish Prison Service has published its assessment and review of the Robert Foye case. It recognised in its statement, as does every party in the chamber, the unacceptable nature of Robert Foye's vicious attack on a young woman. The seven recommendations in that statement will be implemented either immediately or within the next few weeks. In addition, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice has asked for a presumption against returning to the open estate anybody who has absconded from it. The underlying matters about the control of our open estate system will be put to the McLeish commission for further study. That is a comprehensive response to a dreadful occurrence.

Given that the open estate has been part of the Scottish prison system for more than 50 years, there is a case for us, as a Parliament and across the parties, to recognise the important role that it fulfils. Although dreadful mistakes do and can happen, the Scottish Prison Service is working to its utmost and best to protect our communities from harm.

Annabel Goldie: The public want prisoners in prison; the SNP Government wants convicts in the community. Who would have thought that when the SNP cried "Freedom!" it had in mind the prison population?

The chilling facts are that home detention curfew will mean that more and more prisoners will get out earlier and earlier, and, disturbingly, the system that will run home detention curfew is precisely the same one that failed so appallingly in the Foye case.

Instead of being soft on the prison population, will the Scottish Government be strong for victims, stand up for the public of Scotland and abandon the impending disaster of home detention curfew?

The First Minister: Home detention curfew can play a valuable role in the Scottish Prison Service. The Scottish Government—like, I hope, every political party—has the protection of the public uppermost in its mind.

I have said to Annabel Goldie that it is best not to make partisan points out of such issues—or that it is best to be careful about them. I was extremely disturbed to note that Bill Aitken has been giving the impression in a number of statements that the Prison Service's open estate in Scotland is not working as it should as regards availability, escapes and absconds.

We have discussed previously the fact that the 66 prisoners who absconded this year are 66 too many. The figure is lower than it was last year and the percentage of prisoners absconding in relation to the open estate population is at its lowest for many years. However, to see how much

consensus there was about the open estate policy, I asked for figures that go back quite a few years. I found that in the last year of the Conservative Government, when Michael Forsyth was the Secretary of State for Scotland and James Douglas-Hamilton was the prisons minister, 98 prisoners absconded from the open estate in Scotland and the open estate prison population was 290. That is more than twice as many absconds as happen at present.

I do not think that Michael Forsyth or James Douglas-Hamilton were trying to put the public in danger or at risk. I just hope that when Annabel Goldie and her colleagues talk about such matters, they recognise that no party in the chamber has anything other than the safety of the public uppermost in its mind.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S3F-617)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The next meeting of the Cabinet will discuss issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

Nicol Stephen: Five years ago today, British armed forces started the invasion of Iraq. That was opposed by the Liberal Democrats, by many others in the chamber and by tens of millions of people in protests on an unprecedented scale throughout the world.

Five years on, thousands of allied soldiers and tens of thousands of civilians have been killed, yet the deaths continue and the Government's justifications for taking us to war look ever weaker. Yesterday, I lodged a motion in the Parliament that calls for a full public inquiry into the war and, this morning, my colleague Lord McNally tabled a bill in the House of Lords that would require such an inquiry. Will the First Minister allow his party's members, including his ministers, to sign my motion, and will his Government support a full public inquiry?

The First Minister: The Scottish National Party gives comprehensive support to an independent and complete public inquiry into the causes of the war in Iraq. To be fair, the Liberal Democrats in the House of Commons supported just such a resolution and debate when I introduced that two years ago. I am certain that the proposal has cross-party support, including from Labour members of the United Kingdom Parliament and the Scottish Parliament, who believe that an inquiry is necessary and would be timeous.

We can do nothing about the minimum of 151,000 people from the population of Iraq who are now dead, the 175 British soldiers, many of

them Scots, who are dead, or the thousands of Americans who are dead; and we can do nothing about the catastrophic effect around the world of what has happened in Iraq, with international instability.

The purpose of such an inquiry, which we support fully, would be to try to ensure that never again can the country be misled into an illegal war, because people who might do such a thing will understand that there will be a day of reckoning and that such a decision will have ramifications.

Nicol Stephen: There is one area in which the First Minister can make a direct difference and an issue on which he needs to take urgent action now: he can change the law to allow Scottish fatal accident inquiries to report on the deaths in action of Scottish soldiers. He can get rid of the current system of inquests in Oxfordshire, with all the trauma and upheaval that it causes relatives and families.

The Ministry of Defence has signalled its willingness to co-operate. Does the First Minister understand the distress that the delay is causing? Families were told by his spokesman in the House of Commons last June that it was all being sorted. Last week—nine months on—all that was announced was a review. What is the timetable for changing the legislation?

Five years on from the start of the war, it is tragically clear that young Scottish soldiers will continue to be exposed to danger and death in Iraq. Is it too much to ask their Government to give them and their relatives the consideration and the dignity that their service and their sacrifice deserve?

The First Minister: No, it is not. The Government supports measures to ensure that FAs or other procedures can be a Scottish answer to the huge delays that have caused many service families distress. As Nicol Stephen knows, Lord Cullen is reviewing FAs. We recently wrote again to the UK Government, asking to accelerate matters. I was disturbed to read this week about suggestions from the MOD that commentary on why individual soldiers met their deaths—which I think no coroner south of the border and certainly no sheriff north of the border would make unless it was absolutely necessary—might be censored in some way. That would be totally undesirable, because just as it is important that service families hear about such matters quickly, it is also important that they have confidence that the person on the bench, whoever they are, can speak the entire truth without fear or favour.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): I am sure that, given the issue's importance, the First Minister will have read the report into the absconding from Castle Huntly of

Robert Foye. Was the victim's family contacted before the publication of the report? Is allowing out on licence prisoners who have tested positively for drugs protecting communities? Who has taken responsibility for the absolutely disgraceful and unacceptable management of the affair?

The First Minister: I hope that contact was made with the victim's family, but I shall inquire about that to make sure that it was done and then write to the member.

The systems that we have in place in respect of the open estate have been in place for a number of years. It is absolutely right that the Scottish Prison Service should seek to review its procedures, as it has laid out in the report. I hope that the seven recommendations carry the support of the whole Parliament but, as I said to Annabel Goldie, it would be best if we proceeded on the assumption that every one of us wants the open estate to work to its best and our communities to be kept safe from harm.

Local Government Elections

4. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government has any plans to alter the date of the local government elections in Scotland. (S3F-619)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Government is taking steps to implement the decoupling of Scottish Parliament and local government elections. Yesterday the Scottish Government published a consultation paper on decoupling, which stated that our preferred method would be to move the local government elections to a position midway through the parliamentary session. That would be facilitated by extending the present council term and the next council term by one year. Thus, elections would be held in 2012 and 2017. Although that is our preferred option, we are open to alternative views and we encourage everyone who has an opinion on the matter to voice it through the consultation process.

Alex Neil: As the First Minister knows, the Gould report recommended, and—on 10 January—the Parliament approved, the decoupling of the elections. The Parliament agreed with the Gould report's recommendation that executive and legislative powers over electoral law, including that relating to local government, should be transferred from Westminster to the Parliament. What progress has been made on electoral law in respect of local government elections?

The First Minister: The Gould report made such a recommendation. Its first recommendation was that it was sensible that one authority—this Parliament—should have full executive and

legislative responsibility for Scottish Parliament and local government elections. Labour members apparently no longer agree with that position, but we cannot rewrite the Gould report at this stage. The Gould report most certainly contains that recommendation. The Labour Party tends to regard with suspicion any move to enhance significantly the Parliament's powers, but I am not sure how that squares with the working party that Wendy Alexander wants to be developed.

Is it not an entirely sensible idea that any self-respecting Parliament should have control of its own elections? Is that not particularly sensible, given that the people who have control of them at the moment did not make much of a fist of it last year?

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I wonder whether it is in order for the First Minister to misrepresent the Parliament's decision, which was that responsibility for the administration of the elections should indeed be a matter for this Parliament but that legislative responsibility is an entirely different matter, which should be considered by the proposed Scottish constitutional commission? Does the First Minister recall that that was the majority view of the Parliament when we debated the issue?

The First Minister: I know that Jackie Baillie will have prepared her question, but I point out to her that I was talking about what was in the Gould report. I know that Labour members wish that the recommendation in question was not in the Gould report, but it is.

I was present for the parliamentary debate that Jackie Baillie mentioned. I detected that there was enthusiasm for a significant change and for following the recommendations in the Gould report. I detect from the question that the Labour Party is starting to backtrack from that position. That is a great pity, because if this Parliament were to speak with a united voice on such an obviously sensible suggestion, we might even be able to persuade the Scotland Office to do the right thing for a change.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): The First Minister will be aware that the turnout at recent council by-elections has hovered at around 25 to 30 per cent—

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Cambuslang!

Robert Brown:—and that, before 1999, when council elections were held separately, the turnout was consistently much lower than in joint elections.

Does the First Minister acknowledge that such low turnouts damage the democratic mandate even of councils that are elected using the fairer

single transferable vote system? Does he agree that the issue is a considerable downside to decoupling council and Scottish Parliament elections? Does the Government have a strategy for overcoming that challenge if it goes ahead with changes?

The First Minister: I think that Liberal Democrats are alone in the Parliament in not supporting decoupling. The argument is that if the election campaign takes place on local government issues, under a fair voting system, there is a chance of generating the interest that will produce a satisfactory turnout. There is a substantial complaint from local councillors across the parties that having council and parliamentary elections on the same day—regardless of the additional administrative problems that such a system causes—shields and prevents local government issues from being properly examined during the election campaign. Robert Brown should have more faith that we can generate the interest that is required to increase turnout in local government elections.

I heard Lord George Foulkes shout “Cambuslang!” from a sedentary position. The most recent election did indeed take place in Cambuslang, and the Labour vote declined by 22 per cent—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: If we applied that swing to the Parliament, only five Labour constituency members would be left. Lord George is not worried about that, because he is a list member.

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): I gently point out to the First Minister that the Parliament resolved that:

“the proposed Scottish Constitutional Commission should consider the full legislative framework for Scottish Parliament elections.”

Indeed, he voted in favour of that resolution.

Will the First Minister guarantee to decouple the next elections, regardless of what agreement is reached on other recommendations in the Gould report?

The First Minister: We are going forward on the consultation document. There is an argument that decoupling is sui generis—it stands on its own as an idea that is worth pursuing.

I have given the member a favourable answer, so I hope that he will agree that it would be a good thing if we did not just cherry pick from the Gould report but implemented all the report's recommendations, including the recommendations on legislative and administrative control, so that Scotland can be confident that its own Parliament

has the confidence to run its own elections effectively.

Charities and Voluntary Organisations (New Futures Fund)

5. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Government will take to ensure that charities and voluntary organisations currently funded by the new futures fund will not be adversely affected by the ending of that funding. (S3F-637)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Government strongly supports the work of the third sector. We are making £93 million available over three years—a 37 per cent increase on the previous spending review. That will include the £30 million Scottish investment fund.

Under this Government, from next month the fairer Scotland fund, which is worth £435 million in 2008 to 2011, will be in place across Scotland. The fund will give community planning partnerships greater flexibility to support projects that make the biggest difference to people's lives.

Iain Gray: The First Minister's response provided no answers for bodies such as the Aberlour Child Care Trust and the Salvation Army, which tackle addiction and support vulnerable families, particularly in Glasgow. The replacement funding to which he referred will not be available to such bodies until September, by which time projects will have folded. Will he order emergency transitional funding, to save jobs and preserve vital work?

The First Minister: I gently point out that the new futures fund was programmed to end in March this year by the previous Administration, and that it is worth £3 million per year, whereas the fairer Scotland fund is worth £435 million over three years.

In response to the argument that the Labour Party deploys—that somehow the lack of ring fencing is leaving charities and good organisations throughout Scotland exposed—I can do no better than say:

“It is ironic that we have heard more from some opposition parties about these groups as part of an attack on the government's Budget than we have ever heard over the last eight years.”

Those are not my words; they are the words of Pat Watters, Labour councillor and president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): I have been working closely with the Realise Community Project, which is an employability project in Maryhill in Glasgow that was formerly funded by the new futures fund. I met the Glasgow community planning partnership, which has

moneys under the fairer Scotland fund from the new futures fund. Does the First Minister agree that community planning partnerships must be independent of Government and that working with voluntary sector organisations, as I am doing, is far more constructive than engaging in the cheap scaremongering and politicking that we hear from Opposition members?

The First Minister: I willingly accept that the member is infinitely more effective than Iain Gray is, although I would not dream of describing him in the terms in which he has been described.

Community planning partnerships must have greater flexibility to support the projects that make the biggest difference to people's lives. The fairer Scotland fund will enable them to have exactly that flexibility. I agree that members should work constructively with their community planning partnerships. Co-operation, concordat and agreement across Scottish society are very much the way forward as opposed to the old ways of top-down diktat that took Scotland nowhere.

Class Size Reductions (Placing Requests)

6. Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): To ask the First Minister how class size reductions will impact on pupil placing requests. (S3F-620)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Every member in the chamber supports the statutory right of parents to make placing requests while acknowledging the fact that the great majority of parents are happy with their local school and choose not to do so.

Eighty thousand people petitioned the Scottish Parliament to reduce class sizes—I think that it was the second biggest petition in the history of the Parliament. With the support of teachers and parents, reducing class sizes is one of the SNP Government's most popular policies. It will lead to better education in every school.

Hugh O'Donnell: I thank the First Minister for that piece of propaganda. Does he agree that forcing class size changes on hard-pressed councils will further restrict parental choice? How will he support parents in choosing a school for their children?

The First Minister: I do not agree. I would never accuse Hugh O'Donnell of asking parliamentary questions or making political statements for propaganda purposes. Clearly and obviously, that is the preserve of the people of whom he is asking the questions.

Having lower class sizes is a key part of increasing both the popularity of all parts of the Scottish education system and the confidence of all parents. The consequence of ensuring that all Scottish pupils get a decent start will be a

reduction in placement requests and an increase in the general level of satisfaction with the education system across Scotland.

12:32

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Health and Wellbeing

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Meetings)

1. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when ministers last met the chair of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and what matters were discussed. (S3O-2706)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I have regular meetings with all national health service board chairs to discuss matters of importance to health and the NHS in Scotland. The most recent meeting was on 25 February. Health officials are in regular contact with Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board about a range of matters.

Bill Butler: At the next meeting with board officials, I hope that the cabinet secretary will raise the subject of the future provision of occupational health services in Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board. I have corresponded with Ms Sturgeon about concerns that constituents have raised regarding the proposal to outsource such services. I have grave reservations regarding the possibility of the board adopting such a wholly unacceptable course of action.

Such services should be delivered—indeed, must be delivered—by the public sector. Will the cabinet secretary assure members in the chamber and, more important, the staff who would be affected, that if the board requires additional financial support and resources to continue to provide those occupational health services in-house, her Scottish National Party Government will make such resources readily available?

Nicola Sturgeon: I affirm that the Government believes passionately in the public provision of health services. Unfortunately, that view was not shared by the previous Labour-Liberal Administration. As Bill Butler said, I have corresponded with him and a range of other members on the issue. As he is aware from my reply to him, there are no firm proposals on the table from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, which is considering a range of possible options for the delivery of occupational health services.

If any firm proposals are put forward in the future, full consultation with the staff concerned will be required. As Bill Butler would expect, I will retain a close interest in the matter.

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): Has the cabinet secretary been in recent dialogue with Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board with regard to the retention of services at the Vale of Leven hospital? A number of individuals have been in touch with me in the past week with concerns about the issue.

Nicola Sturgeon: I certainly understand the strength of feeling and opinion in the communities that are served by the Vale of Leven hospital. I offer my thanks to all the staff who work in that hospital for the excellent job that they do.

I have made it clear to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde that, in respect of services at the Vale of Leven hospital, I expect the board to pay heed to the report of the independent scrutiny panel. The panel's original report, and the follow-up report that I commissioned, made it clear that no reasons of safety would justify the NHS board not consulting on a full range of options. The board accepted, at its meeting in January, that it would need to go through due process. As I indicated with regard to the previous issue, although the matters are for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde I will retain a close interest in developments.

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): When the cabinet secretary next meets the board, will she raise my on-going concern about the implementation of car parking charges? Radio Clyde reported last week on a supermarket attendant who said that the health board parking attendants were asking him to report staff who used the supermarket car park.

This week, I was contacted by a senior staff nurse at Stobhill, who said that some staff are transferring to other greater Glasgow hospitals where there are no car parking charges. A constituent of mine who tried to park at the Beatson last week, having finally found a space and followed the instructions on the ticket machine that was adjacent to her parking bay, came back to find that she, along with two other ladies who were visiting at the same time, had been slapped with a £40 ticket. They had parked in what turned out to be poorly signposted reserved bays. They got very little change from the parking attendant: "Sorry hen, that's too bad" was the response. Can something be done about that?

Nicola Sturgeon: The issues to which Jackson Carlaw refers, which were featured on Radio Clyde last Friday, relate to the Southern general hospital, which is in my constituency, so I am well aware of them. I asked the board about the suggestion that staff have been asked not to park in the car park and was assured that that is not the case. I will continue to respond quickly and positively to any suggestions that I hear in that regard.

As I have said before in the chamber, the presumption is that car parking should be provided free at Scottish hospitals. Car parking charges should be a last resort—for example, where there are issues of congestion. Jackson Carlaw said that the person who spoke to him had struggled to find a space at the Beatson. That indicates that there are serious congestion issues at some of our hospitals, especially in our cities, and boards have to respond to those problems.

Members are aware that the Government has asked all NHS boards to review their car parking policies and report to us by June, at which time we will take final decisions on car parking policy. In the meantime, I have acted to cap charges at £3 a day. Although nobody wants to pay such a charge, that compares favourably with the £7 a day that would have been the car parking charge had the previous Labour-Liberal Administration stayed in office.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): In responding to an earlier question, the minister referred to strength of feeling. She is well aware of the strength of feeling in Clydebank and the surrounding areas about Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board's proposals to remove continuing care provision from the St Margaret of Scotland hospice. Why will she intervene in other areas of Scotland where there is strength of feeling, given that she appears to be reluctant—as does the chief executive of the health board—to listen to the views of people in my constituency on that important matter?

Nicola Sturgeon: As Des McNulty is aware, I visited the St Margaret of Scotland hospice a few weeks ago. He was present at that visit. I pay tribute to those who work at the hospice and provide that service. As is demonstrated by the support that the hospice receives, it provides a very valuable service. Des McNulty has also made that clear in the chamber.

In essence, it is a matter for negotiation between NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and those who run St Margaret's hospice. As Des McNulty and other members of the Labour Party know—it is a view that they expressed passionately in government—there is a need to shift the balance of care more into the community. Needs around continuing care are changing, and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde—like every other NHS board—is duty bound to respond to that. Nevertheless, I have made it clear to the board that I expect it to continue to engage positively with St Margaret's hospice, and I hope that the hospice will engage constructively with the board. I am confident that, if both sides do that, we can reach a satisfactory conclusion.

Housing (City of Edinburgh Council)

2. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what housing resources will be allocated to the City of Edinburgh Council for 2008-09. (S3O-2707)

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): I will make an announcement in due course about the detailed allocation of resources for the next financial year under the affordable housing investment programme. In the meantime, I will meet elected members and officials from the City of Edinburgh Council later today to discuss a range of housing-related issues.

Malcolm Chisholm: Does the minister realise that the Edinburgh housing market area has 75 per cent of Scotland's overall shortage of affordable homes and only 15 per cent of Scotland's overall housing spend, in spite of a doubling of Edinburgh's housing resources over a three-year period by the previous Administration? Does he also realise that the previous Scottish Executive planned to proceed to a new distribution formula that would give greater weighting to affordable housing shortages? When will the minister make that shift and give proper recognition to Edinburgh's unique housing problems?

Stewart Maxwell: It is always fascinating to hear what ex-ministers would have done had they won the election. The experience is interesting, if not very illuminating.

The allocation to which Malcolm Chisholm refers—75 per cent of the need versus 15 per cent of the spend—was his party's allocation. The previous Government is responsible for that statistic. I will make an announcement as soon as possible on the affordable housing investment programme. I will be interested to hear what colleagues from the City of Edinburgh Council say this afternoon and I will listen to any practical proposals that they make for tackling the clear difficulties that Edinburgh faces.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): What has been the result of Scottish Government correspondence with Her Majesty's Treasury on securing housing debt write-off, even in cases in which tenants vote no to stock transfer?

Stewart Maxwell: The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth wrote to the Treasury on that matter at the tail-end of last year. Unfortunately, I must report to the chamber that, according to the Treasury, there are no circumstances other than through stock transfer in which housing debt will be written off. That result is very disappointing. Perhaps if all parties in the chamber had been more unified in their support of the cabinet secretary taking the matter to the

Treasury, we might have got further. If the public, in a democratic ballot, vote no to stock transfer, I believe that it is extremely unfair for them to be penalised by a Labour Government in London.

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP):

Does the minister agree that the fact that, last year, more than 1,000 people applied for council houses in Edinburgh demonstrates the city's chronic housing shortage, which was exacerbated by the inaction of the Labour and Liberal Democrat Executive and the Labour council administration that ran Edinburgh for some time? In light of his response to Robin Harper's question on debt relief, which would, in fact, free up £280 million for direct investment, will the minister assure members that he will make further representations to the Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer—who is an Edinburgh MP—to ensure that that decision is reversed as soon as possible?

Stewart Maxwell: I agree with the member's view of the situation in which Edinburgh finds itself and her comment that the previous Administration allowed it to happen. There is no doubt that Edinburgh, with its extremely high levels of debt, is in serious difficulty. However, as the member quite rightly pointed out, the Edinburgh MP who is in charge of the Treasury has turned his back on the people of the city.

As I said, the Treasury has confirmed that there are no circumstances other than housing stock transfer in which debt funding could be made available. I—and, I am sure, most members in the chamber—disagree with that position. We believe that there are other possibilities that would allow debt to be written off, and we will continue to pursue those matters with the Treasury or whatever other body we need to pursue them with.

I look forward to this afternoon's meeting with council officers and elected members to find out how we can jointly address the situation and resolve some of Edinburgh's problems, particularly the high level of housing debt—which, I must say, the current administration in Edinburgh was left with by the previous Labour administration.

NHS Dumfries and Galloway (Budget)

3. Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing's decision to accept the recommendations of the NHS Scotland resource allocation committee will affect the budget of NHS Dumfries and Galloway. (S3O-2733)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): NHS Dumfries and Galloway has received in 2008-09 an initial revenue allocation of £228.1 million, which is an increase of £7 million over the equivalent 2007-08 allocation.

As with previous allocation formulae, changes flowing from the NRAC recommendations will be phased in over a number of years. I have made it very clear that, to avoid turbulence, no board will receive less funding than it does at present.

Elaine Murray: Obviously it is a matter of concern that, in the long run, NHS Dumfries and Galloway might lose up to £12 million from its budget as a result of the decision. Is it the case that the cabinet secretary's decision to reverse the closure of various accident and emergency departments and to invest in other health service provision in the central belt will be funded through cuts to the health service that is offered to my constituents and others in rural regions?

Nicola Sturgeon: I do not know which part of the English language Elaine Murray struggled with in my response. It is absolutely outrageous for a local member to come to the Parliament and deliberately scaremonger about the loss of funding to NHS boards, particularly when I made it crystal clear in my first response that no board would lose any funding as a result of the NRAC recommendations.

Let me make it clear again for the hard of understanding: as with the previous Arbuthnott and Scottish health authorities revenue equalisation formulae, the NRAC recommendations will be phased in over a number of years to avoid any loss of funding to NHS boards. Elaine Murray would do more of a service to the public whom she supposedly represents if she went back and gave them some accurate facts.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):

Does the cabinet secretary share my disappointment—although perhaps not my surprise—that, on the very day when a record doubled allocation of about £900,000 has been announced for NHS Dumfries and Galloway to tackle alcohol misuse, all that the Labour Party can do is carp about what was actually a real-terms increase in the budget?

Nicola Sturgeon: I again confirm that NHS Dumfries and Galloway received, as did all health boards in Scotland, a real-terms increase in its revenue allocation for the next financial year. I also reconfirm that no board will lose any funding as a result of the NRAC recommendations.

I agree with Alasdair Morgan that, today of all days, we should congratulate the Government—and the Minister for Public Health, Shona Robison, in particular—on the announcement of substantial additional funding across Scotland for the fight against alcohol misuse. As the member rightly points out, in Dumfries and Galloway alone, for the next year alone, there will be almost £900,000 of additional funding. Across Scotland, there will be

£85 million of additional funding over the next three years. If Labour members could stop scaremongering for long enough, they might be able to find it within themselves to welcome that very good news.

Social Care

4. Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions ministers have had regarding alternative approaches to social care. (S3O-2681) *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I ask members to ensure that their mobile phones are turned off.

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): I have regular meetings with representatives of local authorities, the NHS and other partners to discuss how together we can further develop innovative, personalised support for individuals. Most recently, my officials met in control Scotland to discuss how that organisation can contribute to this important agenda.

Nigel Don: As the minister knows, Aberdeen City Council aims to adopt the in control approach and hopes to have a team in place by June. What support can the Scottish Government provide the council for that programme? Please will the minister meet me to discuss the social care situation in Aberdeen?

Shona Robison: I am aware of developments in Aberdeen. I can inform the member that, between 2006 and the present, in control Scotland has received funding from the Scottish Government to support the personalisation of services. Together with other self-directed support stakeholders, in control will participate in a round-table event in May, which will develop the strategy with the aim of increasing radically the uptake of self-directed support.

I am happy to keep the member informed of those developments. It would perhaps be best to have a meeting after the event in May.

Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): How many local authorities, and which ones, will address the provision of social care to patients with mental health needs? Will the work of local authorities be reflected in the single outcome agreement?

Shona Robison: As Margaret Curran well knows, mental health remains a key priority for the Government and for health boards in partnership with local authorities. That is why we now have four health, efficiency, access and treatment—HEAT—targets on mental health, which will give a sense of priority to local partners who are delivering a very good service in mental health.

We are developing the plan for the next three years, which will be very much about localised services for mental health. I would have thought that the member would want to welcome that.

Healthy Living and Sports (Aberdeen)

5. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is encouraging healthy living and participation in sports in Aberdeen. (S3O-2702)

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): It is for each local authority to determine levels of investment and sporting programmes to meet the needs of the communities that it serves.

The Scottish Government continues to work in partnership on the delivery of the national sports strategy, reaching higher, which defines increasing participation as a key outcome. Over the next three years, we will invest £56.5 million, of which £40 million is new money, in initiatives that are dedicated to promoting healthy living, including the promotion of healthy eating, physical activity and achieving a healthy weight.

We are working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and individual local authorities on the implementation of a new concordat. The process is on-going, but I believe that it will secure improved outcomes for the people of Scotland.

Richard Baker: The Scottish Government has said that it wants to increase participation in sport, but some swimming pools and sports facilities in Aberdeen are being closed, while the opening hours of others are being severely restricted. How are such decisions consistent with national policy? Has the minister had any discussions with Aberdeen City Council on that issue ahead of any single outcome agreement? What will the Scottish Government do to ensure that people in Aberdeen have more opportunities, not fewer, to take part in sport and lead healthy lives?

Stewart Maxwell: It is the responsibility of local authorities to ensure that there is adequate provision of sporting facilities for their residents, and to determine that provision in light of their local needs and priorities. I understand that Aberdeen City Council faces difficulties relating to the age of the plant in the ice arena and to Bon Accord baths, which are about 70 years old. The baths have closed a number of times in recent years because of the problems there. The council has inherited some difficulties with its facilities, but we will work with the council, sportscotland and officials to ensure that the people of Aberdeen get the kind of facilities that they deserve.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): The minister recognises the difficulties that are faced by Aberdeen City Council. What encouragement

has he given to the local authority in connection with the replacement of the Bon Accord pool with a 50m pool? Does the Government acknowledge that a number of the city's facilities serve not only the people of Aberdeen but the people of the north-east? Will the minister encourage Aberdeenshire Council to accept its responsibility to its residents by supporting some of the facilities in the city?

Stewart Maxwell: A meeting was held on 13 February between Aberdeen City Council and sportscotland to discuss a series of initiatives to take forward the proposal for a 50m pool. That is a matter for the local authority to take forward. I hope that Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council will work together for the benefit of all the residents in the north-east of Scotland, because a 50m pool would benefit not only those in the city but those in the whole of the north-east.

On the general point about working with the council, I am more than happy for the city council—and Aberdeenshire Council—to contact my office in order that we can discuss such projects and consider what help and assistance the Government can give.

National Health Service (Rural Dentists)

6. John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what consideration it has given to the future of rural national health service dentists and their patients, should the recommendations in the Glennie report be implemented. (S3O-2748)

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): The particular needs of those dentists and their patients will be taken into account when the chief dental officer for Scotland convenes a group to set realistic and achievable timescales for compliance with the recommendations in the Glennie report.

John Farquhar Munro: I am sure that the minister will acknowledge that implementing the recommendations of the Glennie report will have a great impact on dentists and patients, whether NHS or private, rural or urban. Will she assure me that the Government will do all that it can to prepare dentists for the implementation of the Glennie report and that, in the process, we will not lose any more rural NHS dental practices?

Shona Robison: I gently remind John Farquhar Munro that it was the previous Administration that established the review group that led to the recommendations in the Glennie report. The Government will take a pragmatic approach to achieve best practice in infection control, while recognising the challenges for rural dental practices that the member referred to.

In October last year, I announced £5 million of funding to help dental practitioners to address decontamination issues. I have also asked the chief dental officer to lead on the delivery of a dental premises strategy for Scotland. Further funding will be considered in light of the outcome of that strategy.

In a letter dated 29 February, the chief dental officer explained that the December 2009 target date for all practices to comply with the requirements of upgrading on decontamination is under review. She also advised that she is to reconvene the dental sub-group of the Glennie group to develop an updated action plan to provide realistic and achievable timescales, which will take account of a premises strategy.

I would have thought that members on the Labour benches would take the issue more seriously than appears to be the case. It is important to reassure patients about infection control and to acknowledge the challenges faced by rural dentists. It is a pity that Labour members do not seem to appreciate that.

Renal Dialysis (Children)

7. Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to further assist families with children on renal dialysis. (S3O-2690)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish paediatric renal urology network is developing guidelines and protocols that would allow as many children as possible with renal disease to be treated nearer home and, in many cases, at home. We warmly welcome that work and encourage adoption of the guidelines across NHS Scotland as a matter of priority.

Michael Matheson: I am sure that the cabinet secretary will want to join me in welcoming members of the Kidney Kids Scotland organisation that is based in my constituency, which provides valuable support to children who are on renal dialysis.

The minister mentioned the paediatric renal urology network, but is she aware of the difficulties that it is having in ensuring that health boards throughout the country engage effectively with it at local level? Will she consider contacting the chair of each health board to ensure that boards engage effectively with the network and that it is integrated into their regional planning processes?

Nicola Sturgeon: I welcome to Parliament the Kidney Kids charity, which I understand had a reception earlier today. I thank the organisation very much for the excellent work that it does in supplying equipment, funding clinical posts and providing much-needed financial help to parents.

Its work is an excellent example of the contribution that the voluntary sector in Scotland makes to the provision of health care. I know that the whole Parliament will want to put on record its thanks. [Applause.]

As Michael Matheson will be aware, Kidney Kids is an extremely important contributor to the Scottish paediatric renal urology network. The network has developed guidelines and protocols, part of the purpose of which is to enable more children with renal disease to be treated in the chronic category. That means that more of them will be able to be treated at home because, in many cases, children who have chronic as opposed to acute renal disease can have their dialysis in their own homes, rather than in Yorkhill hospital.

I appreciate that there has been some frustration at the slow progress in implementing the guidelines and protocols. I am determined that the implementation process will gather pace and I give Michael Matheson an assurance that I will raise the issue at my next meeting with all NHS board chairs.

Excellence in Sport (Higher Education)

8. Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps the Minister for Communities and Sport is taking to enhance excellence in sport by working collaboratively with the higher education sector. (S3O-2678)

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): Officials recently met representatives of Scottish Universities Sport and the universities' sports-related academic group. They also attended a sports and physical exercise forum that was convened by the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council and hosted at the University of Stirling. A number of initiatives in this area are being considered and progressed by officials in the education and lifelong learning and sports divisions.

Keith Brown: When the minister takes future decisions on such collaborative working, will he take into account the excellent record and facilities of the University of Stirling and, in particular, its co-location with the body that was formerly named the Scottish Institute of Sport, its hugely successful involvement in preparing the swimming training for the most recent Commonwealth games, its contribution to the success of people such as Andrew Murray, Gordon Sherry and Richie Ramsay, and its pathfinder record in offering sports-related degree courses and scholarships over the past two decades?

Stewart Maxwell: I am well aware of the history of the University of Stirling's interest in sport. I have visited the campus on two occasions. The

co-location that the member mentioned is extremely interesting. The hub of activity around the university and the Institute of Sport is one reason why we chose to put one of sportscotland's hubs in Stirling. It is clear that we recognise the importance of that area.

I have had initial discussions with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning on how we can more closely co-ordinate the efforts of the higher education sector and those of the sports sector to ensure that not only students, but the wider community benefit.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): What is the current status of the Government's exercise on prescription scheme, which was mentioned in the SNP's manifesto as something that would be available to children across Scotland?

Stewart Maxwell: I am happy to tell the member that that scheme is under review. We hope to bring forward the results of that review as soon as possible.

Sport (Communities)

9. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what it is doing to provide support to sport in communities. (S3O-2722)

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): The provision of sport to local communities is the responsibility of individual local authorities. We continue to support their work, for example through our annual investment of £12 million in active schools and £500,000 in clubgolf. Additionally, through sportscotland, £4.8 million will have been invested in local facility development in the current year and in January we announced investment of more than £2 million through the cashback for communities programme, to support the development of football opportunities in local communities. Work is going on with local authorities on how sport will be delivered through single outcome agreements.

Johann Lamont: The minister knows of the important work that is done by football clubs in their communities and he will be aware of the role of fans in ensuring that clubs take such work seriously. Given the parlous state of some of our football clubs, will he commend the important work of Supporters Direct in Scotland in helping to create and sustain supporters trusts? Will he match the funding that the previous Executive gave to Supporters Direct—and if not, why not?

Stewart Maxwell: I am on record as saying in the Parliament that I acknowledge the important work of Supporters Direct and the important role that fans play in the development of their clubs. As I think that I said during the recent debate on

Supporters Direct, discussions are going on between officials and Supporters Direct to ascertain how we can develop and financially support the organisation's important work.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): Does the minister accept that if we are to promote sport and physical activity in communities it is often desirable to provide child care for families who want to get involved in sport? Is he concerned that the administration in the City of Edinburgh Council, of which his party is a member, has withdrawn crèches from many leisure centres in the city, including the Leith Victoria swim centre in my constituency? Will he give his support to the demonstration that will take place at 3.30 pm this afternoon, at which people will call for that decision to be reversed?

Johann Lamont: If that is not your responsibility—

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Stewart Maxwell: It is clear that it is for the local authority to take the matter forward and to decide how best to use its resources. We are investing record-breaking resources in local government over the next three years. It is for the City of Edinburgh Council to manage a difficult situation, given the mess that the previous Labour administration left.

NHS 24 (Doctors)

10. Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how many doctors are employed by NHS 24. (S3O-2749)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): NHS 24 directly employs four doctors, who provide management support to the organisation. Doctors and other clinicians who support local out-of-hours services are employed by NHS boards.

Hugh O'Donnell: According to its website, NHS 24 was designed primarily to help patients to get

"the right care from the right people at the right time."

Therefore, does the cabinet secretary agree that NHS 24 is no substitute for access to clinical services?

Nicola Sturgeon: I confirm that NHS 24 is not—and is not intended to be—a substitute for access to clinical services. During the out-of-hours period it is meant to be a gateway for patients that ensures that they access the correct services, so that they receive

"the right care from the right people at the right time."

It is no secret that NHS 24 has had difficulties since its introduction, but when I carried out the

organisation's annual review last year I saw clear signs of progress and improvement in performance. NHS 24's progress is a tribute to its staff and I have no doubt that the organisation will continue to improve in the months and years to come.

National Health Service (Waiting Times)

11. Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what intermediate targets it has set for waiting times in the NHS on the way to the 2011 target of 18 weeks from referral to treatment. (S3O-2738)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I announced that national maximum waiting times will reduce to 15 weeks for a first out-patient consultation, six weeks for diagnostic tests and 15 weeks for hospital in-patient and day-case treatment by the end of March 2009. Those are key milestones towards delivery of the 18-week whole-journey waiting time target. Following the abolition of hidden waiting lists on 1 January, waiting time targets apply to the thousands of patients who were excluded under the previous Administration.

Dr Simpson: I welcome the cabinet secretary's commitment to continue Labour's work to reduce waiting times for patients. In doing so, the Scottish National Party's stated aim is not to extend the use of the private sector in the NHS. However, in December the Government gave a contract to PricewaterhouseCoopers to co-ordinate the survey of patient experience in the NHS. That work was previously done in the public sector.

Is the cabinet secretary comfortable that 13 eminent academics from Scottish universities have challenged the contract on the grounds that there might be a conflict of interest, that no guarantee of impartiality can be built in and that the results can be open to commercial manipulation? Is that the same PricewaterhouseCoopers that NHS Lanarkshire employed in 2005 to assess its public consultation process and which concluded that the process was satisfactory, only for Nicola Sturgeon, as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, to condemn it as seriously flawed? Will she undertake to ensure complete transparency in the work that PWC is doing at all stages of the contract?

Nicola Sturgeon: Before I respond to the question on PricewaterhouseCoopers and the contract that is at issue, I say to Richard Simpson that the real credit for reducing waiting times in the NHS belongs neither to the SNP Government nor—certainly—to the previous Labour Government, but to the NHS staff who do such fantastic work day in, day out delivering for our patients.

As I have said in and outwith the chamber on many occasions, the Government rejects the obsession with the privatisation of our health services that was the hallmark of the previous Labour-Liberal Democrat Government. The previous Government had an obsession with private finance initiative hospitals and private sector delivery of front-line health care services. This Government will not follow that approach.

The contract with PricewaterhouseCoopers for the patient experience programme is not a contract to deliver health care services but a research contract. The service that PricewaterhouseCoopers will provide is one of giving guidance to NHS boards on the design of patient surveys and the collection and analysis of data from the surveys. The process will be completely transparent. We were obliged to put the contract out to tender under European Union procurement rules. I have ensured that a fuller version of the contract is made available on the Scottish Government website than would ever have been the case under the previous Government which, in addition to being obsessed with privatisation, was obsessed with secrecy.

My last point is an important one. PricewaterhouseCoopers will be accountable to the steering group that will govern the patient experience programme. The steering group is not only chaired by the Government chief nursing officer but its membership includes representation from the academic community. The process is both transparent and accountable. Instead of nit-picking about contracts and processes, perhaps it would have been better if Richard Simpson had reflected on the fantastic opportunity that the patient experience programme gives the Government to improve services for patients in Scotland.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): What progress has been made on waiting time targets for mental health, drug and alcohol and infertility treatment, and for the 28,000 people who are waiting for physiotherapy?

Nicola Sturgeon: Mary Scanlon knows, as a result of my previous responses to her questions on the subject, that the Government is committed to looking at what further services can be brought into the ambit of waiting time guarantees. We have announced—and this represents very good progress—that audiology services will be included in the new 18-week referral to treatment target.

We will continue to look at how many other services can be brought within the target. We want to ensure that waiting times are reduced for as many patients as possible.

British Medical Association

12. John Scott (Ayr) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what recent discussions it has had with the British Medical Association. (S3O-2662)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Recent discussions with the British Medical Association have included: general practitioner contracts; community nursing; education and training of the medical workforce; non-consultant career grade doctors; and junior doctors.

John Scott: During those discussions, has the cabinet secretary touched on the matter of agenda for change? She knows that many NHS staff continue to express concern about the way in which agenda for change is being implemented. In particular, staff are expressing concern about the widespread anomalies that are being thrown up as a result of inconsistent band outcomes in different board areas and the divergent pay levels that have resulted from differing incremental dates being set for the same job grades. Notwithstanding the formal review mechanism, what further steps does the Government propose to take to ensure that such inconsistencies are addressed in the interest of fairness and morale in the NHS?

Nicola Sturgeon: Clearly, agenda for change is an issue of great importance. I have not discussed it in particular with the BMA because, of course, agenda for change covers the NHS's non-medical workforce. That said, I know of the great frustration among NHS staff at the time that it is taking to implement agenda for change. There is not much point in raking over those coals, except to say that those who are implementing agenda for change may have underestimated the scale of the task and raised false expectations about the speed of implementation that would be possible. I and the health department are focused on ensuring that we get to the end of the process as quickly as possible and we are working closely with NHS boards to achieve that. The vast majority of staff are now assimilated to agenda for change pay rates and the vast majority have had their arrears paid. A robust system is built into the process to ensure that there is consistency checking, but we continue to have discussions to ensure that it is as robust as it needs to be.

I am confident that we will soon reach the end of the process. We will then be able to focus on other aspects of agenda for change, such as the knowledge and skills framework that is important in relation to staff training, staff development, skills in the NHS and the multidisciplinary workforce that we need to build for the future.

The Presiding Officer: Because I gave him the nod, there will be a brief supplementary question from Dr Ian McKee.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. When the cabinet secretary next meets the BMA, will she discuss measures to relate the distribution of general practitioners in Scotland to clinical need and deprivation?

Nicola Sturgeon: I share the BMA's determination to do as much as possible—and certainly more than we have done before—to tackle deprivation and health inequalities in Scotland. It is clear that we need to do a number of things. I am reliably informed by the Minister for Public Health that the report of the health inequalities task force is due within the next few weeks, and that will be an important part of the process.

However, the Government is already investing considerable resources to tackle health inequalities through the enhanced services programme, which is directly related to GPs, and the keep well programme, which I am more than happy to concede is a continuation of a programme that started under the previous Administration. Much work is under way, but I think that all members in the chamber would agree that there is a great deal more to be done to tackle health inequalities.

Marine Environment

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-1602, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on Scotland's marine environment.

14:57

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The sea has defined and shaped Scotland and sustained our communities and nation since time immemorial. Our relationship with the sea has helped to forge our nation's identity, our culture and our economy, and generations of Scots have, down the centuries, played a leading role in maritime history, trade and communications.

Today, however, it is accepted that we need a new relationship with the sea. In the 21st century, we accept that we cannot simply take from the sea or dump things into it without understanding the consequences for our marine environment and the need to safeguard precious resources for future generations. With the increasing and competing demands that are being made on our seas, it is time to modernise and streamline the management of our marine environment.

Scotland has a unique coastal and marine environment, and the seas around us are essential to our wellbeing. The marine ecosystem stabilises temperature, absorbs CO₂ and is essential to life as we know it. The scale and importance of Scotland's marine area cannot be overstated. We have 10 per cent of Europe's coastline. If we measure Scotland's area out to the 12-nautical-mile limit of territorial waters, more than half of Scotland is water. About a fifth of Scotland's population live within 1km of the sea and the vast majority live within 10km.

Scotland's seas are unique. Our seas are oceanic and deep, whereas those of the rest of the United Kingdom are enclosed and shallow. Our seas have a good or excellent environmental status, whereas those of the rest of the UK are compromised or severely degraded. Large areas of the Scottish coast are inaccessible, sparsely populated and underdeveloped, whereas the coasts of the rest of the UK are intensively developed, readily accessible and heavily populated. Our uniqueness can be illustrated by the impact of marine climate change. Warming has been faster in the English Channel than in Scottish waters. However, we still expect marine climate change to impact on some sectors, such as aquaculture, which is a predominantly Scottish industry.

Our seas generally might be unique, but our important marine environment is spectacularly

unique. Our seas are among the most biologically productive in the world, containing over 40,000 species. They are among the richest in Europe for marine mammals. We have about 70 per cent of Europe's population of grey seals and about 35 per cent of the European Union's population of common seals. More than 20 species of whales, dolphins and porpoises can also be seen around the Scottish coastline, and the international importance of our seabird populations is well documented.

It is no wonder that Scots feel an enormous responsibility towards our marine environment, which manifested itself during the recent furore over proposals for ship-to-ship oil transfer in the Forth. We are all aware of the current anxiety that is being caused by the proposal for oil exploration in the Moray Firth and its potential impact on the UK's most northerly dolphin population. Members will be aware that I have written to the UK Minister of State for Energy, requesting him to heed the concerns of Scottish Natural Heritage on that important issue.

The community-driven Lamlash Bay initiative, which is establishing a marine reserve off Arran, further demonstrates the commitment of Scots to preserving their local marine environments. That grass-roots project is the first of its kind and it shows that, with hard work, it is possible to develop a regime for marine protected areas that minimises conflict and achieves a good outcome, not only for our marine environment but for all the communities that use our seas.

The Government and the Parliament have a duty to recognise that, in 21st century Scotland, the sea remains a hugely important natural resource, on which many communities, jobs and industries depend. The breadth of economic activity ranges from the domestic production of oil and gas to the smallest scale of enterprise, such as the dive-boat operators who exploit the wealth of Scotland's historical wrecks in Scapa Flow. Scottish ports handle 110 million tonnes of cargo and 10 million ferry passengers every year.

As members are well aware, our fishing interest is considerable. The Scottish fishing zone is the largest of any EU nation. We catch just over 8 per cent of the total EU fish catch, which was worth more than £370 million last year. Aquaculture represents another vital industry to Scotland, producing around 150,000 tonnes of product annually, which is worth more than £280 million to the Scottish economy.

Scotland's seas are central to the economic and environmental wellbeing of the Scottish nation. The Scottish Government and Parliament are determined to improve the stewardship of our seas to ensure that future generations continue to enjoy the benefits. That is why there is widespread

support for a marine bill for Scotland, the process for which is under way.

As a minimum, the marine bill will need to transpose the EU marine strategy directive into domestic legislation. However, there is widespread support throughout our nation and throughout the Parliament for any new legislation to go much further: to provide for planning at both strategic and local levels; to provide a more focused conservation effort; and to simplify the regulatory system for the marine environment by taking a comprehensive look at all marine legislation. After all, more than 85 acts of Parliament and other laws emanating from Europe, London and here currently apply to our seas. On top of that, we have international obligations such as those that are highlighted in the Greens' amendment, which the Government will be accepting.

The current management regime is not fit for purpose. It is cluttered, it is difficult to navigate and it is unlikely to cope with the increasing demands on our seas in the 21st century. The marine bill will therefore place sustainable development at the centre of Scotland's strategy.

A balance must be achieved between environmental protection and resource utilisation. Where activities are unduly damaging or the marine environment is particularly vulnerable, action and protection are vital. Marine planning that is based on an ecosystem approach is an essential tool to deliver sustainability in Scotland's seas. The planning system will be essential for improving our conservation effort and for protecting some areas of outstanding environmental importance. I will not shirk from what is required to deliver the protection that the world-class environment of our marine waters deserves.

Scotland has already made a significant contribution to protecting its marine and coastal biodiversity. At present, Scotland has 49 special protection areas that have one or more species of seabird that qualify for protection. We also have 31 special areas of conservation for seals and bottle-nose dolphins, as well as important habitats such as reefs and lagoons. Further, our rich marine heritage is now fuelling growth in marine wildlife tourism. Our scientific advisers are developing advice on what additional areas may be needed to complete our contribution to the European network of Natura 2000 sites.

Better management and protection of our ecosystem is essential if we are to ensure that the seas continue to deliver benefits for future generations of Scots. One benefit is fishing. Scotland is a proud and successful fishing nation, and many of our key stocks are being fished sustainably. That was confirmed at my meeting on Tuesday with EU fisheries commissioner Joe

Borg, who said that Scotland's fishermen are now viewed as being at the forefront of fisheries conservation in Europe, thanks to the many innovative measures that are being implemented in our waters.

Our coastal waters and our inshore fishermen face some particular pressures. From the holiday maker to the commercial fisherman, people place many competing and quite often conflicting demands on Scotland's inshore fisheries and coastal environment. That is why we are piloting inshore fisheries groups and placing fishermen at the heart of the management process. Sea fishing remains at the forefront of our mind as we develop our policies on marine planning and marine conservation.

Marine energy is a new benefit and an illustration of a new industry that will increasingly and necessarily make demands on our seas. Another technology with the potential to transform the way in which we generate power is carbon capture technology, which will help us to tackle climate change.

Westminster's proposals for a UK marine bill have already been presented in the form of a white paper setting out plans for legislative reform. Given that I have just outlined the unique qualities of our own marine environment, it will come as no surprise that I have misgivings about the proposed UK approach. We have our own unique challenges and opportunities. Scottish waters are different. We are pressing the UK to respect subsidiarity and ensure that decisions are taken at the right levels and as close to home as possible. Everyone I have spoken to in Scotland believes that most decisions in the seas round Scotland that affect Scottish interests should be taken in Scotland, although our interface with the UK, the EU and the international community remains vital.

That is why we will reiterate our support for Scotland's legislation to apply out to 200 miles from shore, rather than the artificial 12-mile boundary. Accordingly, we will accept the Liberal Democrat amendment. We will support our coastal communities, our industries, including our fishermen, environmental organisations and others by continuing to put that case to the UK Government. Parliament has the opportunity today to speak with one voice and to back Scotland's case.

I will continue to work constructively with the UK Government to find a mutually beneficial way forward. However, I must say that I look forward to the day when then Opposition parties lodge amendments calling on the UK Government to work constructively with the Scottish Government.

As members know, in January I launched the sustainable seas task force to examine how

smarter licensing, planning, protection and marine management can be achieved, and to prepare the way for our consultation paper on the bill. To date, the task force has shown that there is a remarkable degree of consensus on a range of issues. In particular, it has highlighted the lack of a consistent knowledge base in relation to what is on the sea bed and in our waters.

I believe that now is the time for Scotland to manage our seas in a manner fit for the 21st century. In January, I announced that I want 2008 to be a year-long celebration of Scotland's seas. A number of trail-blazing initiatives are already under way in Scotland's seas to protect our marine environment, and they will all ensure that our precious resources can be enjoyed today and by future generations.

The jewel in the crown will be Scotland's first marine bill. I look forward to working with Scotland and all parties in this chamber to make it a reality.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to consult on proposals for the sustainable management of Scotland's seas and coast, including coherent framework measures for marine planning, conservation and sea fisheries, and believes that this will enhance Scotland's stewardship of the seas, support sustainable development and provide protection for the marine environment, so ensuring that future generations of Scots will be able to enjoy the many social, cultural and economic benefits that the seas deliver.

15:09

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): The bottom line, which came across strongly in the cabinet secretary's speech, is that we have had a lot of discussions to date. There has been a huge amount of stakeholder involvement over the years, before last year's election and since, about how we can better protect and manage our marine environment. I strongly agree with the cabinet secretary that, with the UK marine bill being imminent, we need to ensure that Scotland does not fall behind the overall UK debate.

We assumed that today's debate would coincide with an announcement on moving forward with the Scottish marine bill. However, instead it deals with a consultation on a possible consultation. Therefore, we will give our views on how we should move forward collectively.

"Seas the Opportunity: A Strategy for the Long Term Sustainability of Scotland's Coasts and Seas" was published in 2005. It established a good starting point for the discussion on where we might go with a marine bill. The report by the advisory group on marine and coastal strategy, which was published two years later, focused on the need for better policy leadership and good governance for Scotland's seas. I am sure that we

can all agree that that has to be the starting point for Parliament.

AGMACS was an inclusive group. It included the national industry bodies, national stakeholder organisations across a range of interests, environmental non-governmental organisations, fishing groups, regulatory agencies and experts on key aspects of marine science. The Environment and Rural Development Committee's marine inquiry also took place before the election. I was involved at the start of one and the end of the other. I was struck by how much consensus there was on the overarching principles that we could all sign up to. That is a powerful inheritance for the new ministers.

I therefore push for speedy progress on the bill, because I think that the principles of the bill will not be the difficult issue. The difficulties relate to how the legislation will work in practice. We must think through how marine spatial planning works in practice and how we get on board all the stakeholders who were happy to sign up to the AGMACS report when we move to either a national planning framework approach or a more localised planning approach.

I am keen that we get to that stage. When we were in office, the Labour Party signed up to AGMACS's recommendations and our enthusiasm for them has not dimmed in opposition. We want to get to the stage of debating how the recommendations are delivered in the bill and how they can be implemented. That is why we lodged our amendment which, on this occasion, is not critical of the Government; it is more of an encouragement to the Government to keep the process driving forward and not to lose the momentum that the AGMACS report established. There is a huge appetite for progress.

We want to give parliamentary support to the minister to accelerate the process but, crucially, we also believe that the Scottish Government should work constructively with the UK Government and other Administrations in the UK. As well as working with the UK Government directly, it has to work with the Northern Ireland Executive and possibly the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure that a system is produced that is driven from the top but is also bottom-up and deals with the bit in the middle effectively.

It is not only about the drafting of the legislation. If there is to be coherence in marine legislation, implementation, too, is important. I remember that, before the election, we all used to say that there were 85 marine acts. We need more coherence and we need a more joined-up approach. There will be three marine bills, but that will not be the end of legislation on marine matters. There will still be issues to do with oil and gas and maritime transport. We must get the marine bills that are

before us moving together and we must ensure that they link in with all the other legislation.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Does the member agree that, in such a complicated scenario, which raises both devolved and reserved issues, it would be much better, simpler and more effective for everybody if one organisation dealt with the planning system for marine spatial planning? There should be one organisation and one system.

Sarah Boyack: The marine management organisation is where we should sort that out. That is why I would like to get on to debating the bill, because the MMO will need to have a UK level but it should also have a Scottish level. There are different models that we could use; the AGMACS recommendations accepted that there is more than one way to make the system work. I hope that the MMO will be accountable to us in the Parliament, so that there will be a Scottish MMO as well as a UK MMO. That is entirely possible and it is what we should look to achieve.

We have taken our marine environment for granted. The marine bill gives us an opportunity to examine how we manage the potential conflicts and the potential opportunities that come from better and more intelligent strategic planning. We need to find better ways of protecting and managing our marine life, because we must protect species and the habitats that maintain them. That is why the recommendation from AGMACS that we should base our marine nature conservation on scientific advice, with specific measures for species conservation, policy and site protection is crucial. We need to meet our biodiversity commitments, both at the Scottish level and at UK level. It is crucial that we also take into account socioeconomic considerations, so that we get sustainability in our seas.

We must draw together a Scottish set of marine ecosystem objectives. I would like the minister, when he sums up, to talk about the progress that has been made. AGMACS hoped for progress to be made in 2007—it will be interesting to see how that has gone. That needs to work in both the regional seas round Scotland and the wider UK waters.

We need to ensure that we have the right vehicle for marine spatial planning. We support the AGMACS suggestion that the Scottish marine management organisation should have responsibility for marine nature conservation and fisheries to 200 nautical miles and that it should be nested in a UK system or framework. We think that that would ensure the benefits of both worlds under devolution. We would be part of the wider UK system but could also play to our strengths. In our most recent debate on fisheries, it was clear that when we link sustainable development to

fisheries and marine conservation, we achieve sensible outcomes. That is the way we should go.

There is more than one way to deliver that outcome, which is why we are not specific in our amendment—I hope that Mike Rumbles will not be overly specific at this stage either. We need to give the minister breathing space to negotiate the best way to make it all happen in practice. We should be looking to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to work in partnership with the Scottish Government and to devolve the responsibilities to us without a big constitutional stand-off. That would make sense.

We need to consider the statutory basis of marine spatial planning as recommended by AGMACS. It suggested a three-tier approach involving a top level led by the UK MMO, with a connection to Scotland so that we are involved in the discussions. The pilot involving the UK Government, Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Ireland is the right model to examine—we need co-operation among the devolved and other Administrations. We also need a bottom tier that is genuinely local. I hope that we can build on the partnerships that already exist in Scotland and ensure that local stakeholders' expertise is brought to the fore in the priority areas.

We need a joined-up approach because, whatever we put in our marine bill and whatever is in the UK and Northern Ireland bills, that is unlikely to be the end of the story. We should ensure at least that those three bills join up. The work done on the proposed climate change legislation gives us a model for making progress. The UK bill is ahead of ours. A climate change consultation paper is out in Scotland, but the two bills are not progressing in sync through the Parliaments. However, it is possible to ensure that they link together. That is the model that we are looking for with the marine bill as well.

We are dealing with a complex situation, but the bill needs to signpost how the process will work. It does not need to be overly detailed because some of the detail will come in secondary legislation after the main bill is passed. We need to reach the point of testing it among stakeholders and through the parliamentary process.

We are keen to get on with the work because, until we get the bill, we will not get our national network of marine protected sites or the delivery of the governance structures to ensure that our marine environment is properly protected and able to enjoy the sustainable development that we all want. We will not get a marine and coastal national park until we get the marine bill—that was one condition that ministers put on developing a marine national park. It was evident last week that ministers are now thinking about where we go next

on national parks. I hope that the marine element is not missed out.

We need to have a bit more urgency and to reach the point at which we can debate the powers in the bill. We support ministers in doing that work and will engage constructively in the process. We think that AGMACS provided a good framework, and we look forward to seeing the consultation on the bill. However, we stress that we need an intelligent, joined-up and mature discussion throughout the UK. Although our waters are special, they are part of wider waters as well. There are unique aspects of the Scottish environment that we need to protect, but we must also join up with our colleagues throughout the rest of the UK and Europe, because the seas are a wider resource for Europe's environment as a whole.

I move amendment S3M-1602.2, to insert at end:

“calls on the Scottish Government to accelerate the timetable for the Marine Bill, and further calls on Scottish Ministers to work constructively with the UK Government and other administrations to ensure that an integrated and joined-up approach to new legislation and its implementation are achieved.”

15:19

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): It is crucial that coastal and marine-based activity is managed in a sustainable way that integrates socioeconomic and environmental factors for the long-term benefit of our people and our natural heritage.

We support the introduction of a Scottish marine bill to provide a coherent framework for managing our seas. As we have heard, powers over the marine environment are a mixture of devolved and reserved. It is essential that, in introducing a Scottish marine bill, our Government seeks the agreement of Westminster—and I would ask Westminster to seek agreement with the Scottish Government—and that the Scottish Parliament has exclusive jurisdiction out to the 200-nautical-mile limit over marine conservation and marine spatial planning, building on its current powers over sea fisheries and offshore renewable energy.

A system of marine spatial planning must be established as part of an effective and co-operative framework that covers Scottish, UK and European interests. Of course we must co-operate. I will, in a moment, deal with why Labour's Sarah Boyack in particular has missed the most important point, which is that we need such jurisdiction to ensure that there is a simple solution in a complicated area.

The Liberal Democrats accept that producing a marine bill is a complex process; indeed, that is

undeniable. However, I have a little bit of criticism to make. For some reason, the Scottish Government seems to have been incredibly slow in bringing forward its proposals. Back in June last year, Richard Lochhead said:

"I hope to announce plans for a new single piece of streamlined legislation to protect marine and coastal environments soon."

That was some nine months ago. We are still waiting to see the consultation, never mind a draft bill.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats are committed to ensuring that the wide range of those with interests in the marine environment, including our fishing and tourism industries, those with energy interests—especially in the North Sea—environmental non-governmental organisations and local communities, work effectively together towards shared objectives. We have been disappointed that there is apparently no commitment at the UK level to move towards what we consider is essential for effective marine management. My Liberal Democrat colleague in the House of Commons Chris Huhne has described Gordon Brown's reluctance to devolve to the Scottish Parliament power over the seas from 12 to 200 miles as the "main obstacle" to the marine bill and

"another example of Mr Brown failing to let go of power."

It is vital that the Westminster legislation dovetails with the forthcoming Holyrood legislation so that there is harmony all round in planning our use of the sea.

I disagree with Sarah Boyack. We do not need two MMOs—we do not need a Scottish MMO dovetailing into a UK MMO. That is not done with fishing, over which we have our own jurisdiction.

Sarah Boyack: There is quite a range of UK bodies that have clear accountability to the Scottish Parliament. There are different models that we can use. Is Mike Rumbles suggesting that oil and gas responsibilities should be devolved to Scotland?

Mike Rumbles: No, I am not, despite SNP members tempting me to say that I am. I am suggesting that we should have devolved responsibility for planning in the marine spatial environment. Further complications in an already complicated scenario are not needed.

I will now speak specifically to our amendment. Currently, the Scottish Parliament has partial control over the enforcement of nature conservation through the work of the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency, but it has no role at all in the designation of sites beyond the 12-mile limit. Bringing full jurisdiction over marine conservation to the Scottish Parliament would

result in significant advantages in respect of stakeholder engagement, management and parliamentary scrutiny. That is what the Liberal Democrats advocate. However, to be effective, powers to designate and manage new forms of marine protected areas, including—I hope—a new marine national park, must be included in the Holyrood bill with the clear purpose of being used to meet Scotland's global obligations, to which Robin Harper's amendment refers. I am happy to confirm to Robin Harper that we will support his amendment to our amendment. The Scottish Liberal Democrats believe that Scotland should have responsibility out to the 200-mile limit as part of the Scottish zone for marine spatial planning, fisheries and marine nature conservation, including the network of marine protected areas. However, the Scottish Government working closely and constructively with the UK Government is crucial to the success of the whole process.

Although I find nothing in the Labour amendment that is not also in the Liberal Democrat amendment, it is not true the other way round. The Liberal Democrat amendment is far superior in its content because we explicitly call for competence out to the 200-mile limit. The Labour amendment does not replicate that. We also disagree with the stance taken by Sarah Boyack in her speech. I therefore urge Parliament not to support the Labour amendment. I do not believe that Sarah Boyack has gone far enough to defend the environment.

Sarah Boyack: I was absolutely clear that we fully support all the AGMACS recommendations. We did not have to put that into the amendment because there are a lot of recommendations. I was absolutely clear about that point.

Mike Rumbles: Sarah Boyack does not want to go down the same route as the Liberal Democrats. In this case, she is not as environmentally friendly as we are, and it is important to make that distinction. I urge Parliament not to support the Labour amendment at decision time but to support the far clearer Liberal Democrat amendment.

I move amendment S3M-1602.1, to insert at end:

"believes that Scotland should have responsibility out to 200 nautical miles as part of the Scottish zone for marine spatial planning, fisheries and marine nature conservation including the network of marine protected areas, and calls on the Scottish Government to work constructively with the UK Government to reach agreement on this."

15:26

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I am delighted that the marine environment is being discussed in the chamber. I will support Sarah

Boyack's and Mike Rumbles's amendments, which are not mutually exclusive.

Scotland's seas have been abused and neglected for far too long, and there can be no doubt that a marine bill is overdue. However, we need to see what we and the marine environment are going to get out of it. Surely the idea is to provide a degree of protection that is consonant with the survival of our marine environment while allowing controlled use of that environment, and reducing use where appropriate.

In the face of environmental change and global warming, it is ever more urgent to get on with it. We must have a robust marine environment that can withstand the changes that it has already been identified will encroach on our waters because of climate change. There is no doubt that this is a critical time for Scotland to ensure that sustainable development is placed at the heart of how we approach our seas, and to ensure that protection of our marine environment is central. The Green party's amendment asks the Parliament to acknowledge our international obligations under the 1992 Oslo-Paris Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-east Atlantic and the 2002 world summit on sustainable development.

The Scottish and UK Governments have international commitments to halt the loss of biodiversity and protected rare wildlife sites within the next five years—the next five years. The OSPAR convention aims to establish an ecologically coherent network—not just one or two areas—of well-managed marine protected areas by 2010. The WSSD commitment is to the establishment of marine protected areas, including representative networks, by 2012.

The Liberal Democrat amendment is quite right to raise the network of marine protected areas as an issue, but we should also acknowledge that establishing such areas is not just an additional good thing to do when we are progressing the proposed marine bill; it is part of our international obligations. The commitments represent our global obligation to the seas. The previous First Minister attended the world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg to underline Scotland's commitment to those goals. I was there, and I tell members that he did that.

I attended the summit on behalf of the Scottish Green Party. It was clear that progress had been slow, and that the exploitation and abuse of our marine environment, whether in Scotland or other parts of the world, simply could not continue. The summit did not do as much as it could have done. In fact, after the summit, many people evinced a great deal of disquiet about the fact that the summit did not go as far as it should have done, particularly with the seas. Although some progress

has been made during the past decade or so, now is the time to up the ante.

Organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds have emphasised that the 2010 and 2012 deadlines are fast approaching. Given that progress in establishing European marine sites in UK waters has been desperately slow, I would like to hear from the minister exactly how he intends to meet those deadlines. He must reassure us of his commitment to the OSPAR convention and to the WSSD. In that context, however, I congratulate the minister on having at least written to Westminster about the plight of the dolphins in the Moray Firth.

In addition to the constructive work that should be done with the UK Government, Scotland has an opportunity to develop its own robust and progressive marine legislation. The convening of the sustainable seas task force will be significant in putting a framework in place. We often hear of sustainable this and sustainable that, but sustainability—dangerously—can be open to interpretation. I remind the cabinet secretary that the Parliament voted for the wording “the precautionary principle” to be included in a previous motion on the exploitation of our seas. I would like to hear a clear commitment from him that he recognises the principles of sustainable development as outlined in “Seas the Opportunity: A Strategy for the Long Term Sustainability of Scotland's Coasts and Seas”. I want to hear that the Government believes that those principles still apply in the marine context. They are an important basis for the work of the sustainable seas task force.

To sum up, the Greens have long advocated the introduction of marine legislation to protect Scotland's marine environment. Our success in halting ship-to-ship oil transfers in the Firth of Forth was a significant part of that picture; a single coherent marine bill will be another step—the step—in the right direction. Scotland's seas are extraordinary, as the cabinet secretary said. We have some of the most precious marine wildlife. The Scottish National Party Government might face some tests of its environmental credibility—for example in protecting dolphins from oil and gas exploration in the Moray Firth—but it is safe to say that the Greens will continue to campaign for genuine protection for our marine environment. We look forward to the forthcoming legislation.

I move amendment S3M-1602.1.1, to insert after “marine protected areas”:

“sufficient to meet Scotland's international obligations under the Oslo Paris Convention and World Summit on Sustainable Development”.

15:32

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Today's debate on Scotland's marine environment is welcome and has been surprisingly consensual thus far, notwithstanding the best efforts of Mike Rumbles to make it otherwise. Like Sarah Boyack, I had assumed that today's debate would launch the consultation on the marine bill. This proactive engagement tells us that the bill is long overdue. Although the bill will be a complex piece of legislation, it is certainly time that we made a start on it.

The need for a Scottish marine bill is well documented. We welcome the Scottish Government's intention to tidy up the legislation soon, on the basis that the present legislation is too fragmented. Given the forthcoming UK legislation, Scotland must also try to bring together the various disparate pieces of legislation into a single coherent framework for the management and protection of our seas and coastal waters. An important point is that the legislation must dovetail with the proposed UK marine bill, which must in turn take account of existing European and UK legislation.

Apparently, Scotland's seas are currently regulated by more than 80 pieces of legislation, as the minister said. The list of issues covered is huge, and ranges from shipping and navigation to defence, oil and gas extraction, nature conservation, renewable energy, fishing, pollution control, ports and planning. Relevant EU legislation includes the common fisheries policy, the birds directive and the water framework directive. International law includes the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, as well as several other international agreements. Pulling together all those pieces of legislation will be a Herculean task, so it is easy to see why addressing the issue was previously put into the tray marked "Too difficult".

A start must be made by examining which actions are most needed. First, we need to protect the interests of those who make their living from the seas, especially our commercial fishermen and seamen. The legislation must be balanced and proportionate. We must also protect and enhance our marine environment to sustain marine biodiversity, tourism and—importantly—sea angling. With 40,000 species to be found in our seas and coastal waters, it is vital that we strike the right balance.

AGMACS, which was set up by the previous Executive, reported in March 2007 that we need new powers to extend Scotland's responsibilities in the seas. It noted that we need a statutory marine spatial planning system and an integrated system of coastal zone management, and it advocated the creation of a new Scottish marine

management organisation with responsibilities out to the 200-nautical-mile limit.

Our own former Environment and Rural Development Committee stated that the governance of the marine environment should be simplified, and that a single integrated regulatory system for all marine activities in Scotland is essential. It is self-evident that that has to be properly integrated with the regulation at UK Government level to avoid overlaps and division between jurisdictions. Gaps in legislation must be filled, for example the recently exposed inadequacies in Scotland's ability to protect its marine environment from ship-to-ship oil transfer in the Firth of Forth. In addition, all parties appear to agree that we need to consider the creation of an integrated network of marine protected areas. Scottish Environment LINK and the RSPB have pressed strongly for that for some time.

Today's debate paves the way for the consultation on our own Scottish marine bill, and that must begin with a close look at developing the concept of marine spatial planning. For example, the Pentland Firth should be noted as the future area of choice for tidal power, which is the most reliable source of renewable energy if a cost effective way can be found to harness it. The Solway Firth should be designated as our first marine national park for the simple reason that there appears to be a desire for it in the area, to protect that unique part of Scottish inshore waters. I know that the Presiding Officer—indeed, perhaps even the Deputy Presiding Officer—campaigns vigorously for that in the previous session of Parliament. I might be taking the Deputy Presiding Officer's name in vain, so forgive me.

A strategic overview of what goes where should be established as soon as possible, as that will simplify the future planning process. The complexity of jurisdiction within and without the 12-nautical-mile limit, and out to 200 miles, needs to be simplified and rationalised. At the very least, Scotland must not give up control of areas that it already controls. AGMACS has suggested that a three-tier structure would facilitate effective spatial planning, which seems to be eminently sensible.

Developing the concept of ecosystem resilience and enhancement within marine national parks should be a key priority—it already works well in Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. Marine ecosystem objectives, or MEOs, should be considered as part of the legislation, assuming that community buy-in can be achieved. Commercial and recreational fishing interests must be reasonably respected. The Government will need to be proactive and positive about that if a whole-ecosystem approach is to be established.

In order to facilitate that, the concept of a Scottish marine management organisation—an

SMMO—could, and should, be considered. Such an organisation could have wide-ranging co-ordinating powers, and could be responsible for planning and the enforcement of devolved activities in Scottish waters. It could be answerable to the Scottish ministers and be responsible for licensing, co-ordinating with a UK MMO and providing a central point of marine expertise.

Much good work has been done by various organisations over the past 16 years, which has brought us to this point today. The sustainable seas task force will meet for the first time in April and report thereafter, and it will, I hope, support existing proposals and further develop the concepts that are being explored in today's debate. I note the minister's remarks in that regard. Thereafter, we can start getting this long-overdue legislation onto the statute books, and consider which legislation within the current plethora we can repeal. Scottish Conservatives look forward to that work, and we will play an active and constructive part in the process.

15:39

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The marine bill debate raises a number of issues, including the need for enhanced environmental protection that respects the rich diversity of our marine life; the need to protect local workers and economies from heavy-handed and intrusive legislation that threatens their livelihoods; and the need for us to respect the communities that a marine bill will affect. I remain optimistic that we can craft legislation that respects those diverse interests. The example of our two national parks is helpful in that regard.

I was sceptical at first. I worried that the national parks would stifle development and be detrimental to our local communities. The national park boards are not perfect, and questions over planning issues still need to be resolved, but, in general, planning controls have been applied in such a way as not to threaten the diverse interests in and around the national parks. That should give us all confidence that a marine bill can achieve the same balance between economic use of the seas and protection of our marine environment. The success of the national parks is in no small measure due to the locally elected elements on the boards—there is a strong case for having wholly elected boards. In that respect, I cannot emphasise enough the importance of taking local communities with us in developing the marine bill.

The potential benefits of a consolidated marine bill are clear, but at the top of the list must be simpler rules and regulations for the benefit of all, and a stronger, more sustainable marine environment to hand on to future generations. I am

confident that, with appropriate protections, the industries that share the waters—fishing, shipping, tourism, leisure, renewable energy, oil and gas—can remain rich and robust. I am hopeful that we will be able to get even more out of our seas than we do at present without detriment to them. It is essential that the bill does not place one interest above another. It would be remiss of us to save the fish while killing the local economy or to support the economy at the expense of our marine life.

Should the marine bill make provision for marine parks, it must not impose them on communities that do not want them. For instance, there is strong opposition to the imposition of a marine park on the west coast. Community interest must be the paramount consideration, because marine parks will work only where they are wanted. I was, therefore, interested to hear John Scott suggest that there is local support for such a park in the Solway Firth.

Local communities have a great deal at stake. More than 70 per cent of Scots live within 10km of the coast, and an estimated £4.5 billion in revenue is provided by marine activities on or immediately near our shores. We must, therefore, secure the support of our coastal communities for the proposed bill and show them that responsible legislation can provide a net benefit to them by supplementing instead of subtracting, protecting instead of pillaging, and building instead of breaking. In addressing our objectives for a marine bill, we must include safeguards for fishermen and others who rely on their trade to feed their families, as well as safeguards to protect our marine environment. There is no doubt that many people will be worried about the effects of a marine bill. We must reassure them not only that they will not be harmed, but that more work can and will be created.

Let us take the Highlands and Islands as an example. Highlands and Islands Enterprise estimates that 2,800 jobs are directly supported by sea fishing and that another 2,200 are indirectly linked. Many more people are employed in fish farming, tourism, sea angling and so on. Those are all important jobs that sustain our local communities, and we must build on them in a marine bill.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I appreciate the importance of caged fish farms. However, does the member agree that escapes, such as recently occurred in Loch Etive, can be detrimental to the biodiversity of local fish species?

Dave Thompson: I agree that escapes from fish farms can be a serious problem. We must ensure that they are kept to a minimum.

Marine parks could, however, bring many benefits for local communities, which would have all the diversity and beauty of Scotland's marine environment at their disposal. Imagine what a marketing tool it would be and the tourism boom that would follow—the new hotels that would be built and the new restaurants that would be filled. Imagine the livelihood of the local communities being enriched, not impoverished. Imagine a park that built on and highlighted the rich environment for the benefit of all, while ensuring the solvency of our fishing industry and the protection of our waters—all under the control of locally elected residents.

Such a vision does not require too much imagination, but securing the commitments that I have mentioned for our environment, our fishermen and our local communities would be a real achievement for a marine bill and would protect and enhance one of Scotland's most treasured assets.

Although, as I said at the beginning of my speech, I was sceptical at first, and although improvements still need to be made, the introduction of national parks has shown that we can balance the needs of the economy and the environment. If the marine bill can consolidate the current plethora of legislation and allow for the establishment of community-led marine parks where they are wanted, it will be well worth supporting.

15:45

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

Like other members, I welcome this debate and hope that it allows ministers to accelerate the progress of what, in its attempt to rationalise all the institutional arrangements, will inevitably be a fiendishly complex bill. I also hope that, given that the UK Government is slightly ahead of us in developing its own marine bill, we will be able to dovetail our legislation with its framework. Indeed, briefings that we received today from various non-governmental organisations, such as the RSPB, stressed the importance of working with the UK and Irish Governments and other bodies.

I have spoken before about the importance of, and the challenges involved in, providing better care for and protection of the marine environment, and I do not intend to repeat myself this afternoon. However, the proposed marine bill will unquestionably provide us with an opportunity to make progress on a range of fronts.

As other members have pointed out, AGMACS created a framework for the bill, and its approach received broad agreement from a committee in the previous parliamentary session. Of course, any bill that comes before Parliament provides an

opportunity to adjust Scotland's institutional landscape, and the bill will be no different. I have no doubt that in the bill, ministers will seek to create a Scottish marine management organisation, which will lead to better co-ordination, better coherence in policy, better prioritisation and a better approach to investing in the future.

Bills also allow new concepts to pass into law, and I hope that the proposed bill will provide for marine spatial planning, marine protected areas and nationally important marine areas. However, the bill will also allow us to be more ambitious than simply seeking to adjust institutional arrangements or to introduce new planning concepts, important and vital though such matters are.

As we move further into this century, human damage to the sea becomes ever more apparent. We are losing biodiversity and inflicting physical damage on the sea bed in many stretches of our coast. Moreover, as our population grows, the pressures on the sea and the potential for damage increase.

As we are constantly reminded, despite our own puny efforts we will never conquer the sea's powerful forces. However, we have learned to navigate the seas and to use them to travel relatively safely around the globe. We have also learned how to exploit them for oil, wind power, tidal power, leisure opportunities and—most important—food. Such exploitation has to be managed and controlled if we are to secure the long-term future of our seas and our planet.

Not so long ago, man's ability to destroy the marine environment was kept in balance; in other words, our activities did not outstrip the sea's ability to cope. However, as technology has improved over the past 50 or so years, so exploitation has increased. At some point in the past century, the balance flipped and mankind has now started to cause real damage to the marine environment. The damage is most noticeable in fish stocks, but it is also happening in a less visible way to the sea bed.

When the balance flipped, the interests of those who were benefiting economically from managing the seas began to dominate the debate, which is perfectly understandable. As Dave Thompson says, people's jobs and communities depend on the marine environment. It is therefore natural that human interests have long dominated the debate. However, if we are honest, we will admit that some of our activities in the marine environment are unsustainable. We will have to address that.

The coming bill is an opportunity to rebalance the forces that impact on our seas and to protect the marine environment much more successfully than in the past. That will require more than simply

laws on institutional and planning arrangements. It will require ministers, the Government and all its institutions to have specific duties to care for the seas—binding duties on ministers to secure the protection of the marine environment; duties to act sustainably, which Robin Harper spoke about; duties to take a precautionary approach; duties to pursue ecosystem health objectives; and duties to secure scientific evidence that will help to guide decisions, and to have regard to it. Unless a bill contains those obligations, in the long title and its provisions, it will fall short.

We have to embrace new thinking. That will mean more no-take zones and more marine ecosystem objectives. It will mean marine protected areas and possibly marine national parks, which Dave Thompson mentioned. It may mean designating nationally important marine areas. It will mean that more fishermen have to adopt the best conservation practices of our inshore fleet. It may mean that we have to put our dolphins ahead of our short-term oil needs. It will mean ending some of the dredging of our sea lochs.

It will also mean new economic opportunities. If we get it right, there will be more opportunities for sea angling, leisure and tourism around our coastline, and more people will be involved in shellfish production and in sustainable inshore fisheries. However, in addition to the practical arrangements, the bill will have to contain points of principle and a visionary approach. I hope that the Government will ensure that that is the case. If it is not, we will seek to amend the bill accordingly.

15:52

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):

I have a constituency that has extensive coastline and sizeable island and coastal communities, so I welcome this important debate on Scotland's marine environment. Current legislation on marine issues is a complex and untidy mix of reserved and devolved powers. Peter Peacock described it as "fiendishly complex".

The power to legislate on marine issues is partially devolved. The Scottish Government has devolved powers over issues such as nature conservation to 12 nautical miles, licensing of deposits in the sea, except oil and gas, and coastal protection works to 12 nautical miles. It has powers over renewable energy—wave, wind and tidal—in the Scottish renewables zone, which is similar in extent to the Scottish fisheries zone, over fisheries within the Scottish fisheries zone, and over pollution control from land. It has powers over cultural heritage within 12 nautical miles, tourism, ports and planning for coastlines and for aquaculture up to 12 nautical miles out.

The mix of competences is arbitrary and unnecessarily complex and ignores the distinctive nature of Scotland's marine environment. That is why the Scottish Government seeks to have marine powers fully devolved.

In early January 2008, a new task force was set up to consider proposals for legislation to protect Scotland's marine and coastal environment. That body will represent the main users of coastal seas.

On Arran in my constituency, the cabinet secretary announced an important and significant initiative on 21 January. He launched the 12-week consultation on the Lamlash Bay community conservation area—which is otherwise known as the no-take zone in Lamlash Bay. It is intended to protect maerl beds—the coral-like seaweed that forms a nursery for young fish—and to promote the regeneration of marine life, including scallops. When an initiative on a similar scale took place in New Zealand, it was found that the number of scallops that were produced increased by up to 50 times. The initiative will be extremely significant for Scotland: it could be a template for zones in other parts of Scotland, allowing us to regenerate depleted marine stocks.

The great thing about what happened in Arran was that it originated in the community: the Community of Arran Seabed Trust pursued the issue for more than a decade. It is significant that, as Dave Thompson mentioned, a marine bill would provide communities with the opportunity to take greater control of their lives.

Scotland's fisheries zone, which is within 200 miles of the coast, covers 127,000 square miles of sea and nearly a quarter of EU waters. When the Parliament was established in 1999, it was 133,000 square miles—I recall that certain parties in Parliament voted to surrender some 6,000 square miles of Scottish seas.

As the cabinet secretary said, Scotland's seas have an exceptionally varied character with wonderfully diverse geological features, such as steep cliffs, deep-sea lochs, islands, rocky reefs, sea caves, sandy beaches, machair, lagoons, salt marshes, estuaries and firths. Scotland's waters are home to at least 8,000 species of plants, invertebrates, fish, birds and mammals. That includes many species of cetacean—whales, dolphins and porpoises—and globally significant populations of some birds and animals. The cabinet secretary talked about the seal population in particular. Scottish waters are among the most rich and diverse in the world. Species such as the basking shark and the leatherback turtle are of global significance, as are Scotland's sea bird populations.

In 2000, the Scottish coastal forum estimated that the annual income from marine activities in

the area between 1km offshore and 1km inland was £4.5 billion a year—not including oil, of course. Marine fish farming in the UK is confined entirely to Scottish waters and provides additional income for many fragile rural communities. The Scottish Federation of Sea Anglers estimates that recreational sea angling is worth more than £150 million a year to the Scottish economy through associated retail trades and tourism. Sea angling's future is reliant on the quality of fish stocks. Even whale watching, which people may think is not of great significance, supports some 2,500 jobs and £57 million of revenue annually.

It is therefore vital that we protect our marine species, habitats and ecosystems, whether they are of Scottish or international importance, and that we have a comprehensive network of marine protected areas. It is also important that we have a statutory system of marine spatial planning in Scotland and a lead decision-making body. Through the use of marine spatial planning, we must stop the free-for-all and ensure that aquaculture, oil, gas, renewable energy, fishing, shipping and nature conservation are no longer regulated and planned separately. Issues such as energy, and particularly oil and gas, should be incorporated into any devolved settlement.

On the timing of the marine bill, Mike Rumbles said he was disappointed that it was taking the SNP Government about nine months to progress the matter. The previous Labour and Liberal Administration was in power for 96 months and did not produce the consultation programme that we are moving forward with. I thank the cabinet secretary for his hard work, and wish him all the best in moving the issue through Parliament.

15:58

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I support all that was said by my colleague Sarah Boyack and I support the amendment in her name.

The first thing that hit me when I started to explore the issues that we are debating is the sheer wealth of information and knowledge that has been accumulated at various levels of Government—Europe, Westminster, the Scottish Parliament, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, local authorities and many other agencies. The work of the Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs and Environment Committee and the Scottish Government's advisory group on marine and coastal strategy has been invaluable in informing the debate on what future direction we should take. The membership of the advisory group is most impressive, and I congratulate the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee and the group on presenting politicians with such invaluable information and policy suggestions. In addition, MSPs have received a variety of

communications from external organisations such as the Scottish Wildlife Trust, urging us to support the view that a Scottish marine bill should be developed.

I represent Dunfermline East, which has a coastal area stretching from slightly west of the two—soon to be three—Forth bridges to just short of Burntisland. My constituency includes the island of Inchcolm, which is one of my favourite constituency visiting points, where I meet the island keeper and his wife.

In principle, I am highly supportive of the idea of a common European marine policy and a bill, and I recognise the need for the adoption of a holistic, multisectoral and multilevel approach to management of the marine environment and maritime affairs. I believe that, by drawing on its experience in fields such as fisheries, education, enterprise, transport and the environment, Scotland can be a leader in developing such a policy.

As someone who has Rosyth port on her doorstep and who fought so hard for such a long time for the establishment of the Superfast ferry route from Rosyth, I understand how vital the highway of the seas is to the development of policy for the marine environment. With others, I campaigned against the proposal to allow ship-to-ship oil transfer in the Forth and organised a petition to the European Parliament's Committee on Petitions on the issue. I shared in the joy at the outcome of that particular application.

The priority is to get the right balance between environmental issues and opportunities for economic development. The planning system will need to be the subject of part of the strategy, but it should certainly not form the entire focus of the strategy. Many other aspects of our marine coastal strategy need to be developed. Financial tools are equally vital.

We should not simply look at the demarcation between Scotland and England—that would be a narrow and partisan approach. Above all, a bill will offer us a genuine opportunity to make a difference. We share the waters of the North Sea with other European countries, so we should have strong interaction not just with Westminster, but with all the member states around the North Sea.

The North Sea Commission is an international organisation that represents 68 coastal regions from eight countries around the North Sea: Scotland, England, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. It was founded in 1989 to facilitate and enhance partnerships between regions that manage the challenges and opportunities that are presented by the North Sea. Furthermore, the NSC aims to promote the North Sea basin as a major economic

entity within Europe by encouraging joint development initiatives and political lobbying at European level. I believe that the Scottish Government should undertake to engage much more intensively with the NSC and its partners in the context of shared waters. At one stage, I was vice-president of the organisation, so I have detailed knowledge of how it has worked.

I read with interest the variety of views that emerge when attempts are made to define the areas that make up Europe's shared waters. It is important to recognise the interaction between oceans, seas, coastlines and inland waterways. I was particularly interested to read the view that Graham U'ren expressed to the previous session's Environment and Rural Development Committee. He said:

"The practicalities of getting a properly integrated approach to a spatial plan for a regional sea involve an accommodation with the UK Government the like of which we have not seen so far. That is of no surprise to me, as our profession has been debating how we can deal with UK-wide spatial issues. We cannot get away from them—they are there anyway."—[*Official Report, Environment and Rural Development Committee*, 17 January 2007; c 3893.]

Before I close, I will focus on an issue on which I would like the minister to respond in his summing up. In our deliberations on the marine environment, we will be confronted by many issues. I have raised one that is key to my constituency with the Minister for Environment many times—perhaps ad nauseam. He will recall that we had a meeting that we had to abort because he had brought the wrong officials and the wrong papers. I hope that we can rearrange it soon. That key issue is what must be done to reduce the vulnerability of coastal regions to the risks of coastal erosion and flooding.

Although efforts must be made to reduce the speed of climate change, the Scottish Government must acknowledge that changes are already happening and must take action to mitigate the effects of such change. Coastal areas are particularly vulnerable to the rising sea levels and flooding that result from climate change, so resources must be made available for flood prevention and coastal barriers, which will be put under ever-increasing pressure in the coming years. Public expenditure on coastline protection against the risk of erosion and flooding is inadequate and, in many cases, non-existent. Long-term public investment is required, which must be well targeted. That means that it must rely on sound and up-to-date scientific knowledge of our maritime environment and its economic benefits. Scientific studies should be commissioned to undertake a comprehensive risk assessment of Scotland's coastal areas and to identify possible solutions.

I hope that the minister will listen to my plea that there be no housing or other developments on flood plains.

16:05

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):

At this stage of a debate, most of the arguments have usually been made. In this debate there has been consensus among members on the broad principles. Therefore, we should dig deeper into the issues and acknowledge the complexity of some of the work that we intend to take on.

In the light of the inquiry into the marine environment that was undertaken by the Environment and Rural Development Committee in the previous session, the report by AGMACS considered the restoration of biodiversity in our seas. I represent the Highlands and Islands—a huge amount of Scotland's seas lies to the west, north and east of the region. The committee discussed what should be done in the long term to restore the eco-balance in the Minch. The prawn stock in the Minch is huge, precisely because biodiversity in the area has been destroyed. There used to be other species, such as cod and haddock, in profusion, but mismanagement of fisheries led to a situation in which one stock is the remaining source of income. The situation in the Minch illustrates the depth of the problems that we face when we consider Scotland's maritime environment's long-term sustainability. We cannot solve the problems in one or two sessions of Parliament; it will take a generation.

However, this Government aspires to tackling the issues. If we are to do so, we must find a mechanism that will work. I am delighted that the Community of Arran Seabed Trust project is approaching statutory underpinning as a result of the current consultation, as Kenny Gibson said. People on Arran want to protect the sea bed. However, in other countries the application to the sea of planning structures that are designed for the land causes problems. People live on land; they do not live on the sea. In the Armorique regional natural park in Brittany in France there are signs in the harbours that say, "No to a marine park". Such problems arise because we need a different approach to management of the sea.

In some countries, such an approach might be pursued by a ministry that deals with the sea. We are talking about having an overarching organisation in Scotland, but we must be careful to consider the powers that we have. Mike Rumbles said that it has taken too long to get to this stage, but we should consider how many civil servants we have and how many more people would have to be recruited to run a marine organisation.

Mike Rumbles: My point was about expectations. The cabinet secretary said nine months ago that he would announce plans for a bill soon, and I wanted to urge him forward.

Rob Gibson: I thank the member for his friendly intervention. My point is that the number of people that the Government can deploy on such issues is limited, so we should welcome progress after nine months—as opposed to what previously happened in 96 months—as Kenny Gibson said.

Two or three small examples show the need for collaboration—I will not mention COAST again, which is an obvious example in that regard. In Scapa Flow, ship-to-ship oil transfer takes place safely in enclosed waters, where people also dive to explore wrecks, as a member said. The pristine environment is looked after by the local planning agency—primarily Orkney Islands Council. Marine management can be done in a way that fits our overall picture of what should be happening.

The Stavanger 2008 North Sea project, which is associated with Stavanger's year as European capital of culture, demonstrates that we should celebrate our marine heritage, which stretches back through trade—and Viking raids before that. It is clear from the huge interest in boat festivals, for example, that we can use people's interest in the sea to encourage them to think about the sustainable use of the sea in the future.

In the short time that is available to us in the debate, I hope that we can put into some kind of perspective the issues that relate to marine parks, as I said earlier. If we are to have co-existence between the dolphin and the forms of marine energy that we have to explore in the Moray Firth close to where I live, we must do that while ensuring the sustainability not only of the dolphin but the human population. An essential part of human life is having safe and secure sources of power. That is the case not only in terms of tidal power in the Pentland Firth but also in respect of the undersea cables that carry the tremendous source of power that is tidal energy to other places that need it. If we do not explore marine energy options, we risk losing the communities on our coastline that enjoy the marine environment. The dolphins have to be looked after, but only in the context of a balanced structure that allows the human population that lives around these shores also to be nurtured.

Robin Harper: Does Rob Gibson acknowledge the real difference between the amount of disruption that is caused by, for instance, an offshore wind farm close to or in the Moray Firth and that which is caused by oil exploration?

Rob Gibson: We have to sort out such issues. In order to achieve balance, we will have to put in place an organisation such as we are discussing.

In the meantime, we will have to ensure that exploration for, and production of, energy through offshore wind farms goes ahead. We have to recognise that all forms of marine energy exploration will have an effect on the marine environment; we have to balance effect and gain.

It is essential that Scotland co-ordinates control over our seas. The map of the UK territorial waters looks like a leaky sieve—so many jurisdictions are involved. It is high time the Scottish Government was given the major role in ensuring that control of Scotland's seas is co-ordinated in Scotland. Other parts of the UK should deal directly with our Government in respect of our seas.

16:12

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I disagree slightly with Kenneth Gibson's allegation that the previous Executive did absolutely nothing about our marine environment for about 96 months. I appreciate that he was absent from Parliament for 48 months during the second session, but over the past eight years, we seized the opportunity, set up the advisory group on marine and coastal strategy and held a consultation on the marine national park. It is not the case that the previous Executive took absolutely no action. It is not my intention to argue that ministers in the SNP Government are not travelling in the correct direction: they are, but they could go further and faster in protecting and promoting Scotland's marine environment.

Members of all persuasions have expounded eloquently the case for the marine bill. I apologise for being totally parochial in my speech, but I will concentrate on my constituency interests in the Solway Firth, which boasts a diverse and important marine environment, as it does an important terrestrial environment. The warm waters of the gulf stream bring into the Solway Firth species that are rarely seen in Scottish waters, such as the sun fish. Basking sharks are also fairly frequent visitors to the area.

The extensive mudflats and sandflats are home to famous cockle beds, as they are to a wide variety of wading birds. They act as a refuge for overwintering species such as barnacle geese and hooper swans and are the stopping-off point for other migratory species. The sand dunes support many species that are of botanical interest. The Solway is the only part of Scotland to be home to all native amphibians and reptiles. The waters of the Solway Firth also are home to a wide range of micro algae. I understand that there are 800 species in UK waters, of which the Solway supports 300. It also supports many rarer seaweeds, which may be of less attraction to human visitors, but are important in attracting bird life and other wildlife to the Solway Firth, and therefore to the biodiversity of the area.

Those are some of the reasons for the previous Executive selecting the Solway Firth as a potential candidate for a marine national park. I am disappointed that the present Government appears to have ruled out further consideration of the results of the consultation on the marine park. However, I raised the matter in last month's members' business debate on recreational sea angling and was encouraged to hear the Minister for Environment say in his response to the debate that the matter might be revisited once "robust marine legislation" had been put in place.

Mr Rumbles and others suggested that the marine legislation might have to have an aspect of the national park legislation within it, but that is not my understanding. My understanding is that the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 would cover a marine national park, although there would have to be secondary legislation. I do not think that a marine national park would have to be part of a marine bill.

We need to know the Government's timetable for producing robust marine legislation. Thereafter, when will we return to consideration of the previous Executive's consultation on establishing a marine national park? As I said in the debate on sea angling, there is considerable support in Dumfries and Galloway for pursuing consideration of making the Solway Firth a marine national park. Some 12 per cent of organisations that responded to the previous Scottish Executive's consultation favoured the Solway Firth as the preferred location. That is a higher percentage than supported any other proposed designation.

Solway Heritage stated in its response to the consultation that a national park could provide a vehicle for bringing together the many different interests in the marine and coastal environment. It could represent the sustainable interests of the Solway as a whole and seek resolution of any conflict between those interests. In the reopening of the cockle fishery in the Solway, we have seen that such conflicts can and do arise.

Dumfries and Galloway markets itself as a natural place, and becoming Scotland's first marine national park would help to reinforce the brand. It would be another strand to the region's tourism offer. The Solway Firth is accessible to visitors—be they human, animal or fish—and although many of us would argue fervently for improvements to the region's transport links, the Solway Firth is near enough to the central belt, Northern Ireland and northern England to attract visitors on short breaks and day trips. The national park would raise the region's profile as a tourist destination.

There is opposition to the creation of a marine national park in some areas that might in the past have been perceived as the front runners.

However, that should not prevent fair consideration of areas where there is more agreement about the potential of marine national park designation, such as the Solway Firth. Neither I nor the Labour Party wishes to foist a marine national park on an unwilling coastal region. I am not even saying that the Solway Firth must become Scotland's first such park. What I ask is that ministers continue to keep the door open for the establishment of a marine national park on the Solway.

Many organisations in Dumfries and Galloway that are concerned with the marine environment believe that the Solway Firth is a serious contender and that the case for its designation should be considered further. My plea to ministers is, first of all, to let us have sight of the promised robust marine legislation. There is an interest in and an appetite for seeing that legislation and progressing it. Thereafter, let us return to consideration of the merits of having a marine national park in Scotland.

16:18

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP):

Members will need to forgive me if my voice crackles a little today. It comes from urging Partick Thistle on to its well-deserved draw at Ibrox last night. That is nothing to do with the debate, but it is well worth mentioning. I am sure that Karen Gillon, especially, will agree.

The Central Scotland region, which I represent, is not known for its rugged coastline or the views of the ocean that are afforded by its islands and peninsulas, although I heartily recommend to all members a visit to Broadwood loch in Cumbernauld. I leave the more poetic descriptions of our maritime heritage and coastal environments to my colleagues who have the privilege of representing such areas in the Parliament. However, being a member for a land-locked region does not mean that I have no interest in Scotland's marine environment, nor is it the case that the careful management of our maritime resources does not concern my constituents. The motion talks of our "stewardship of the seas", and that responsibility is shared by us all, no matter where in the country we are from.

In last week's debate about national parks, I spoke of the importance of preserving our natural environments for the benefit of future generations. That is clearly as true of our marine environment as it is of our environments on land, and our decisions in the Parliament today will leave a legacy for all those who depend on the seas in years to come. I was interested to hear members touch on the idea of a marine national park. I agree that the concept needs continued and careful consideration.

A well-managed marine environment benefits not only coastal communities and those who work at sea, but others as well. The ripples of successful maritime policy can be felt well inland and around the world—from the manufacturing company that supplies renewable energy technology to the seafood restaurant in a city centre; and from tourists building a coastal stop into their itinerary to parents on a school run filling up the car with petrol from the North Sea. The Scottish coastal forum estimated that, in 2000, the annual income from marine activities in the area between 1km offshore and 1km inland was £4.5 billion. Scotland's oil provides at least £23 billion annually to the UK economy.

It is worth dwelling for a moment on the significance of the North Sea oil resource. Scotland's oil was described in 1975 as being the "future of Britain" by the then Secretary of State for Energy, one Anthony Wedgwood Benn, who was being fêted by some MSPs yesterday. Scotland's oil now regularly comes in at more than \$100 a barrel, despite predictions in 1999 by the late Donald Dewar that the price would remain at \$10 to \$12 for the foreseeable future.

We now know that Professor Gavin McCrone, in his secret report to the UK Government in 1974, argued that an independent Scotland with control of its own oil resource would produce a

"chronic surplus to a quite embarrassing degree".

Of course, the Government of the day, including Tony Benn, suppressed that report and argued the contrary—that the oil revenue was insignificant for Scotland's future.

However, over the past 30 years, some \$200 billion-worth of oil has been extracted from the North Sea, yet Scotland—and indeed the whole of the UK—is yet to match the prosperity and quality of life of our Scandinavian neighbours, who have managed their maritime and natural resources so effectively. The debate on Scotland's oil will continue, no doubt, as part of the national conversation on Scotland's constitutional future, so I will leave my contribution on the subject at that—for now.

That leads me to the wider substantive issue of the debate: the appropriate place for decisions about and implementation of maritime policy in Scotland. I welcome the Government's commitment to engagement with the communities and interests that depend on the seas, and its determination to ensure that the policy framework for managing the marine environment is fit for purpose in the 21st century.

The Scotland Act 1998 bequeathed to the Scottish Government and its predecessors a complex and conflicting range of jurisdictions and responsibilities over the marine environment. As

was mentioned earlier, Scotland is defined in the 1998 act as the land and territorial waters to a distance of 12 nautical miles, but Scottish ministers have responsibility for regulating fisheries and renewable energy beyond those limits to 200 miles. Even within the 12-mile limit, activities including shipping and navigation and issues such as safety at sea are reserved to the UK Government. I fully support the Scottish Government's call for powers over maritime policy to be fully devolved—along, of course, with all the matters that are reserved in schedule 5 to the 1998 act. Until that day comes, however, I am happy to continue to support the Government's initiatives to make the most of the powers that it has to ensure the best possible approach to marine policy.

The impact of climate change brings a particular urgency to the debate. The coastal environment will change, and sea levels are predicted to rise. As a member of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, which is undertaking an inquiry into flooding, I have heard that Scotland could be better placed to avoid some of the effects of that phenomenon, but we must still consider the impact that flooding will have on our coastal communities. I am sure that that will form part of the Government's thinking on the flooding bill that it will introduce in due course.

Our seas have the potential to contribute so much to life, even in the land-locked parts of Central Scotland, and in a way that meets the Government's ambitious aims for our country. For example, the seas can help us to become greener—Scotland has been left too far behind in marine renewable energy. We can become healthier—careful use of our fish stocks should contribute to improving Scotland's diet. Our country can become richer, smarter and fairer as we invest in new technologies for and new understandings of our marine environment.

Today's debate has allowed us to reflect on those matters, and I know that the Scottish Government will consider them as it prepares its forthcoming legislation. I commend the Government motion.

16:24

Robin Harper: This has been an interesting and important debate. As I reflect on what has been said in relation to the UK position, I note that our SNP colleagues—quite rightly in many ways, and certainly as a source of continuous enjoyment for themselves—enjoy tweaking the noses of Westminster politicians whenever they deem that appropriate. As the marine bill is developed, it will be terribly important to enter into discussions with the UK Government in a constructive and careful way, so that the bill is balanced.

The picture that is beginning to develop, particularly if control is extended out to 200 miles, means that it is extremely important that we recognise the international side of the issue—which is why I included in our amendment the references to the WSSD and the OSPAR convention—as well as the European and UK side, and, of course, the part that we should play in controlling the waters that are contiguous to Scotland.

There are a lot of reasons for that. One of them is that, just as fish do not know boundaries, neither do the minute organisms in our seas. There are parts of our marine environment about which we know very little. An enormous amount of research is being done in deep-sea marine environments and it is recognised that we are hauling fish out of the deep north Atlantic without knowing very much about the ecology that supports them.

Even in the marine environment that we know a lot about, one of the effects of global warming at the moment is the disturbance of quantities of the copepods that exist in the southern North Sea, with the result that southern varieties of those minute organisms are drifting into other parts of the North Sea. The fish that would normally eat the variety of copepod that is being replaced are moving northwards with the new copepods, and other species of fish are moving in. We need a regulatory process and framework for our seas that will be able to cope with such changes in the environment.

That is one of the reasons why the precautionary principle—and, perhaps, the Sandford principle—should be applied to our marine environment as well as to our terrestrial environment. If the marine environment is not protected in a way that ensures that it is at least robust and can survive a certain amount of change, it is going to be ever more susceptible to the damage that is beginning to be inflicted by climate change and which will, without doubt, be inflicted over the next 30 or 40 years.

I was glad to hear that the cabinet secretary has written to the UK Minister of State for Energy about dolphins. I would like to explore the issue of the combined threat to the marine environment of oil exploration and offshore wind power. There is no doubt in anyone's mind that offshore wind power has tremendous possibilities. In many people's minds, it represents a preferable alternative to the large number of wind projects that are presently queuing up to be built in Scotland's beautiful environment, from north of here to Cape Wrath. We will be able to learn from the research that is being done in the experimental stations in Orkney what we can and cannot do in our marine environment.

There is no doubt that any marine development comes at a cost. We need legislation that minimises the effects of developments in our marine environment but at the same time allows developments that will be of value in preserving our environment—I refer, in particular, to offshore wind—to go ahead where their impact will be minimal. I congratulate the minister on bringing the debate to the chamber and look forward to many future debates on the subject as the preparation of the bill continues.

16:30

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): The debate has highlighted our marine and coastal environment, which contains many special and some unique landscapes of national and international renown. As has been said, we have distinctive habitats, such as sea lochs and maerl beds. We have heard that Scottish waters are among the most diverse in the world: they support 44,000 forms of life or, as the cabinet secretary said, “life as we know it”—an interesting quotation from, I think, “Star Trek”. It is perhaps no coincidence that we know less about the seas than we know about our solar system, hence the importance of conserving them.

The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell): Beam me up.

Jim Hume: I wish they would beam me up, Mr Russell.

Liberal Democrats welcome any proposal for a marine national park, which was mentioned by Sarah Boyack and John Scott. Elaine Murray mentioned that the Solway Firth in the west of my region is one of the five contenders to be the location of a marine national park. I hope that a marine national park will happen when the marine legislation has been worked up, and I seek an assurance from the cabinet secretary that those plans have not been put on the back burner.

Biodiversity in our seas is important, and the coastline is important economically because it supports communities, be it through fishing, aquaculture or tourism. The cabinet secretary mentioned that there are 16,000 jobs in fishing and aquaculture and that Scotland produces about 90 per cent of UK farmed fish and shellfish.

Recreational diving opportunities also attract many thousands of divers every year. In the east side of my region, the area around St Abbs and Eyemouth has flora, corals and shipwrecks—including, I believe, a sunken U-boat—to visit. As other members have said, the oil and gas industry supports 164,000 jobs.

As Robin Harper and John Scott said, there is cross-party agreement that Scotland's seas should

be managed coherently and in a way that addresses social, economic and environmental factors. The difficult part, of course, is working out how that can be achieved in practice.

As a Liberal Democrat, I welcome the prospect of a Scottish marine bill that will complement UK legislation, complex though that process is, as all members have said. I hope that such a bill will be introduced soon, and I share Mike Rumbles's disappointment that proposals have still not been introduced, despite the cabinet secretary's upbeat words in June last year.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): Why will the Liberal Democrats vote against an amendment that seeks to speed up the process? That is exactly what the member is calling for.

Jim Hume: We are happy to speed up the whole process and look forward to prompt delivery.

As Mike Rumbles stated, several key issues should be addressed in bringing forward a Scottish marine bill. The Scottish Government must seek Westminster's agreement to the Scottish Parliament having exclusive jurisdiction over marine conservation out to the 200 nautical mile limit, and, as many members have said, there needs to be an integrated system of marine spatial planning. Those will build on our current powers over sea fisheries and offshore renewable energy. A bill that included a limit of only 12 nautical miles would not be a marine bill; it would be more of a beach bill. I am glad that the SNP supports our amendment.

It is vital that the Westminster and Holyrood bills complement each other. The Scottish Government needs to work constructively with the UK Government. The cabinet secretary was a little quick to name and blame Westminster, and I assure him that the people of Scotland are fed up with the SNP line of blaming Westminster for all that is wrong. I look to him to give us details of and assurances about discussions. Perhaps the Minister for Environment will refer to the issue when he winds up, but is the cabinet secretary making progress on obtaining the essential control over our seas out to 200 nautical miles?

I would like licensing arrangements to be aligned with proposals to protect the marine environment under the proposed bills. There are concerns that gas and oil have already been removed from the remit of the marine management organisation that will be set up under the UK marine bill, and there is no guarantee that its remit will include carbon capture and storage.

We want MMOs—as they may be called—to be fully involved stakeholders. Ensuring that that will happen will involve many different Administrations. Sarah Boyack mentioned Wales, and Rob Gibson

mentioned others: Northern Ireland, southern Ireland and the Isle of Man, which has not always played ball in the past.

Licensing for offshore storage of natural gas and carbon dioxide needs to take full account of the environmental risks and should integrate with future provisions for managing and protecting the marine environment.

Liberal Democrats welcome a better, more streamlined approach to marine conservation and management. We welcome the introduction of a Scottish marine bill, and we look to the cabinet secretary for assurances that that will happen sooner rather than later. The Scottish Government should not delay the delivery of better marine management, and I sincerely hope that, in co-operation with Westminster, the cabinet secretary will make every effort to secure more devolved power for the Scottish Parliament. I look for support from throughout the chamber for the Liberal Democrat amendment.

16:36

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): We welcome this afternoon's debate, which has been consensual, by and large. Like others, we agree that no more time should be lost in finding the best means possible of simplifying the management of our seas and coastline in order to secure a sustainable future for the many social, cultural and economic benefits that are derived from them. That will allow future generations of Scots to be able to benefit from what has been, and still is, taken for granted by so many of us.

Although I am not and never have been a water baby, I have a huge respect and admiration for that grey North Sea, which has sustained the development of my home city from a small fishing port to the thriving energy capital of Europe that it is today. I am sure that, unless their livelihoods depend directly on it, most of the time many Aberdonians give little thought to our coastal waters except to admire their beauty on calm days, to wonder at their power in the teeth of a south-easterly gale or simply to bemoan the fact that so many warm summer days in Aberdeen come to an abrupt end in the late afternoon as the notorious coastal haar descends upon us.

We take for granted much about our maritime situation. The sea has always been there, it is vast, and it appears to be constant. We pay little heed to what goes on in or around it or to the damage that we have done to it by exploiting its many resources or by polluting its depths with the by-products of our modern daily lives. It is only in recent years that we have realised that, if we are to protect our marine environment and allow it to thrive far into the future, we will have to give

looking after it as much thought and planning as we have given to developing our landmass.

I am ashamed to say that, until this week, I did not know that Scotland had 11,000km of coastline or that its seas are among the most biologically productive in the world, with, as we have heard, more than 40,000 species of life within and depending on them. It is clearly important that we protect that world-class marine environment for the future.

Having come to the Parliament more recently than some members, I had no idea until fairly recently of the extreme complexity of the legislative framework that regulates Scottish waters. That complexity is now recognised as being so great that it no longer allows coherent governance of the marine environment. Therefore, we are delighted that the cabinet secretary has put maritime law reform high on his agenda and that he intends to continue engaging with the draft UK marine bill in a way that I hope will be ultimately productive. We also welcome the fact that he intends to consult soon on the Scottish marine bill, which he plans to introduce in the near future.

If the Scottish and UK Governments and the other devolved Administrations, which Sarah Boyack mentioned, all work together effectively, there are excellent opportunities to deliver to our mutual benefit the sustainable development of our seas, which we all desire. We have been promised a Scottish marine bill that will deliver a simpler regulatory system for the marine environment, more action on marine nature conservation, a strategic national approach to marine management and greater local control over marine and coastal areas. I have no doubt that the Government will consider with interest the ideas of bodies such as Scottish Environment LINK about how those aims can be achieved.

I am no expert on the marine environment, but I recognise its importance to the many and varied interest groups that rely on it. I was therefore pleased that when Richard Lochhead set up a sustainable seas task force, he included representation of many bodies that have a legitimate interest in the seas. I am talking about organisations such as the RSPB and the WWF; commercial fisheries interests, given that the livelihoods of stakeholders in those interests depend on sustainable fish stocks; sea angling and other leisure interests; aquaculture and energy interests, including oil, gas and shipping businesses, which are massively important; many statutory agencies, such as Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency; and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. All those interest groups were tasked with considering what the Scottish Government needs to do to deliver the sustainable

management of our seas and coasts, with the goal of developing a set of viable proposals for Scottish marine legislation.

The previous Executive's AGMACS, which several members have mentioned, also included many stakeholders. It, too, made valuable recommendations—in particular that there should be an overarching strategic spatial plan for the marine environment, with a devolved marine management organisation for Scottish waters. Much work has therefore already been done to try to overcome the complexities of marine regulation and management, but it is clear that much more work needs to be done.

It is crucial that any new Scottish legislation is made to dovetail with emerging UK legislation in order to ensure the coherent management and protection of our seas and to avoid adding to the existing complexities of maritime law. All sectoral interests must be considered, but, given the stresses on our fishermen in recent years, it is particularly important that all plans for greater marine protection are progressed in close co-operation with our commercial fishermen to ensure that they are among the first to benefit from improved conservation measures. John Scott has said many times recently that the interests of recreational sea anglers must also be high on the agenda, given the invaluable support that they provide to many fragile coastal communities.

This has been a welcome debate. We look forward to the introduction, in due course, of Scottish and UK legislation that will allow us to manage and protect our marine interests long into the future, and which will take due account of the legitimate interests of our commercial and recreational fishermen and all the communities whose prosperity depends on the health of our coastal waters.

16:42

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): On the whole, the debate has been constructive and consensual. Key themes have certainly begun to emerge. The UK marine bill is due within the month, and it is imperative that Scotland does not fall behind in such a crucial area of environmental policy. I welcome the debate that we have had.

Many members have mentioned the AGMACS report. We should not underestimate the importance of the blueprint that that report left us. That blueprint was developed through consensus and its production involved the widest possible range of stakeholders. As Sarah Boyack said, Labour is signed up to the AGMACS recommendations, and we are as enthusiastic as ever to see them delivered as soon as possible.

I hope that the Government views our amendment as constructive, as it simply seeks to inject some sense of urgency into the process and encourage constructive working with the UK Government and other Administrations to deliver a coherent and joined-up system. I am not talking only about the drafting of the legislation; I am also talking about its implementation, which is perhaps the most important dimension of any legislation. The legislation should be more than a series of worthy statements; it should be a workable document that enables the effective management and protection of our marine environment.

I am happy to support the Greens' amendment and, despite Mike Rumbles's best efforts, I will probably also support the Liberal Democrat amendment. It was good to hear Jim Hume make a great case for the Labour amendment. I look forward to his voting for it at decision time. I am reassured to find myself on the opposite side of the argument to Mike Rumbles. I was beginning to wonder whether I am going a bit soft in my old age. It is good to see normal hostilities resume between Mike Rumbles and the Labour Party.

I read the Labour and Liberal Democrat amendments again, very closely, to ascertain the logic of Mike Rumbles's argument against the Labour amendment. He argued that progress has been too slow, but he wants members to vote against an amendment that wants progress to be accelerated.

Mike Rumbles: Sarah Boyack made it clear that Labour does not want what we want; Labour does not want to let go of power up to the 200-nautical-mile limit.

Karen Gillon: I will leave Mike Rumbles to read the *Official Report* tomorrow and reflect on his attempt to mislead members about what Sarah Boyack said.

I will go back to what is happening in the two amendments, because Mike Rumbles seems to be very keen that we should not do that. The Liberal Democrat amendment focuses exclusively on the 200-nautical-mile issue. It urges constructive engagement exclusively on that issue. In their speeches, both Liberal Democrat members argued that the issue is about more powers for Scotland, but their amendment does not mention powers; it talks about responsibility, which is distinct from powers. They do not always mean the same thing. The Liberal Democrats should be clear about what they mean. Is the issue one of powers or one of responsibilities? We cannot have the responsibility without having the power. The Liberal Democrat amendment should have been clearer about what the Liberal Democrats are looking for. It does not ask for the powers to be devolved to Scotland.

The Labour amendment goes much further, and is additional to the Liberal Democrat amendment. It does not seek to remove it, and we will vote for it at decision time. I do not know how we could be clearer about our position on the 200-nautical-mile issue.

We recognise that the debate is about far more than a line on a map and that we cannot operate in isolation. Mike Rumbles agreed that powers over oil and gas should continue to be retained by the UK Government. We want to have a constructive dialogue about how those powers are exercised in Scottish waters; the Liberal Democrat amendment seeks to have that dialogue—and that power—removed. That is a bizarre proposition from someone who believes that they are arguing from a constructive position. Ship-to-ship oil transfer was a classic example of an issue on which dialogue must take place—but the Liberal Democrats appear to be suggesting that they do not want dialogue at all.

John Scott: If Labour members are so uncertain about the Liberal Democrat amendment, why are they going to support it?

Karen Gillon: The amendment clearly asks for responsibility up to 200 nautical miles, but Mr Rumbles appears to be confused about what that actually means.

Even at this stage, the Liberal Democrats should reconsider their futile argument. However, if they want to stand carping on the sidelines, so be it. It will not stop them; it never has in the past.

There are other good examples of dialogue between our two Governments and other Administrations being fruitful. I think particularly of the climate change bill: a UK bill and a Scottish bill are being drafted and worked on together. Consultation on our proposed climate change bill is giving a clear idea of the Scottish ministers' direction of travel. It would seem that there has been constructive engagement between ministers at UK and Scotland level on that issue. It is a good model. The Minister for Environment and I have always managed to engage in constructive dialogue and I urge him and his cabinet secretary colleague to adopt that model for future discussions with the UK Government and other Administrations.

Today's debate is an excellent opportunity for ministers to drive the agenda forward and set us on a clear course to implement a bill that meets and lives up to the goals and recommendations in the AGMACS report. As others have said, it is true that, in the past, we have not paid due attention to our marine environment, taken it for granted and assumed that it will always be there and that our actions on land and at sea will have little impact on it. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Examples from across the world and here at home show that our actions can destroy habitats, endanger ecosystems and rob future generations of the beauty that we enjoy.

Developing the governance of a marine environment fit for the 21st century will be challenging. Dave Thompson made a good speech about how the national parks debate has shown that a dialogue can take place and be constructive, even when different interests and desires are involved.

I agree with the cabinet secretary that the EU fishing negotiations show that environmental concerns can live side by side with industrial interests when both sides listen to each other and work constructively together. If we can carry that forward in this process, we will be on the right road.

We are not opposed to the Scottish Parliament having responsibility for fishing and nature conservation up to the 200-nautical-mile limit. The issue is one of pragmatic policy development rather than of a constitutional argument about where we draw lines on maps. As Robin Harper rightly said, fish and birds do not worry about lines on maps but move between different jurisdictions freely and easily—as does pollution. It is therefore essential that we have constructive dialogue.

No matter who ultimately has responsibility up to a particular line on the map, there must be co-ordination and consensus. Conflict is in no one's interests. We therefore urge the Government to engage in constructive dialogue with DEFRA to bring about the most appropriate solution for Scotland in the interest of all stakeholders. Whatever we do must be done in a joined-up way because the Scottish marine bill will inevitably need to fit in with the UK bill as well as, probably, with a Northern Ireland bill and, certainly, with legislation that is introduced by our colleagues in Wales.

Today's debate has been worth while and constructive. I hope that all the amendments will be agreed to and that the consultation paper will enable us all to work together. I also hope that the bill will be introduced as soon as is practically possible so that our marine environment can receive the right protection and enhancement for the years ahead. We on these benches will work with the cabinet secretary and the minister to achieve just that.

16:52

The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell): I had intended to start by saying that the debate has been tremendously useful and consensual, but then I witnessed the previous exchanges. I think that the Government is just

giving up and voting for everything. We will support everybody and just hope that, at the end of the day, everyone will agree. I might commend the two Liberal Democrat speakers on the strongest attempt that I have ever seen to stop others voting for their amendment. Even so, despite their speeches, we will persevere and vote for their amendment.

I will vote for the Labour amendment, but I might point out that, in the lexicon of Opposition terms, the last weapon is time. When an Opposition starts arguing that the Government is going too slowly, essentially it agrees with everything the Government is doing. The reality is that we are going fast and we intend to go faster if we can. It is not as if Richard Lochhead is sitting idly looking at the sea and wondering what to do. His record speaks for itself. Over the past 10 months, he has been involved in a range of trail-blazing measures within and outwith Scotland: the conservation credits scheme, which was a first; the Lamlash Bay scheme, which was a first; the work on ship-to-ship oil transfers; and the strong representations—which I am glad Robin Harper, having failed to mention them in his opening speech, acknowledged in his summing up—he is making on the issue of bottle-nosed dolphins in the Moray Firth. Those are in addition to all the other actions in which Richard Lochhead has been involved at home and abroad. A great deal of work is going on.

I am pleased to say that the sustainable seas task force has already held a series of workshops to investigate the detail—the frightening detail, as Mr Peacock rightly said—of the planning, conservation and streamlined licensing issues, which include the creation of a Scottish marine management organisation and the co-ordination of science, research and data storage. The task force is taking forward the recommendations of the report on the marine environment that was published by the Environment and Rural Development Committee in the previous parliamentary session as well as the work of the advisory group on the marine and coastal strategy—AGMACS—which we have heard so much about. Those matters are being, and will be, driven forward. At the end of the process, we will have the most robust consultation paper and we will then move into the most robust piece of legislation.

We will keep the process moving and—this is why we support the Labour amendment—we will accelerate it as much as we can in so far as doing so is consistent with having legislation that will last and do the job. That is the balance that must be struck. We do not want rushed legislation—or bad legislation; we want legislation that will stand the test of time. Therefore, we will accept the Labour

amendment and, of course, the Liberal Democrat amendment and the Green amendment.

I was struck by the number of times members mentioned the need to balance the environmental and the economic opportunities. Peter Peacock talked about new opportunities emerging in that way. It is important to realise that the environmental improvements that we need, and that are taking place, lead to economic improvements. For example, cleaner waters are already leading to our shellfish industry being poised for enormous growth, which it can achieve because the circumstances are right. Scottish fishermen working in the most sustainable way possible means that the long-term economic future of fishing communities is being guaranteed by the Government.

I will strike only one critical note, regarding Helen Eadie's speech. I apologise to her for the confused meeting that we had in my office—although it is not always possible to be entirely clear in meetings with Mrs Eadie—but this debate is not about coastal flooding. I may have brought the wrong papers to a meeting; Mrs Eadie brought the wrong speech. The coastal flooding debate takes place in relation to the flood prevention bill, and I am happy to have that discussion with her.

I am positive about the Solway Firth. I met the Solway Firth partnership—a group that is well known to the member from Dumfries—on Monday—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Order. There are far too many conversations going on.

Michael Russell: I am familiar with the desire for a marine national park within the Solway. We need to discuss the way in which the community can express its support—or at least have the chance to do so—as the community in Harris is now beginning to express its support. When we are in a position to take a marine national park forward—after the marine bill has been introduced—I will encourage, as should the member for Dumfries, the community on the Solway to push that issue forward.

I come now to the nub of the matter. There are three strong reasons for supporting a new marine bill, the motion and all the amendments. The first is that the Scottish marine resource is priceless: it is one of the greatest and most important marine resources in the world and we need robust legislation to protect and enhance it in the 21st century.

The second reason is that the legislation that we currently possess is vastly overcomplex—the cabinet secretary mentioned the 85 acts and laws that apply. The chart that I am holding up is meant to explain the links between international

agreements, EU commitments and UK legislation on marine protected areas. There are nine boxes in it, and nine different organisations and pieces of legislation with responsibility for that alone. Special areas of conservation and special protection areas in Scottish waters require four boxes to explain the organisations that are involved. The marine legislation is essential to make sense of all that, and to provide efficient government and efficient intervention.

The third reason is the 200-nautical-mile limit. It has been helpful to hear the strong pleas not just for the Scottish Government to co-operate with the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Government, but for those Governments to co-operate with the Scottish Government. That point needs to be borne in mind and reported outwith the chamber. It takes two to tango and we are ready to tango. We are—if I may mix metaphors rather outrageously—in our wetsuits, ready to take part in this dance. That might not be an attractive proposition for a Thursday afternoon, but I am trying to be as accurate as possible.

It is essential that the other Governments come to the issue with serious intent and a willingness to debate, discuss and compromise. If they do not, all the good will in this chamber and from this Government—we guarantee good will—will count for nothing. I hope that members in the chamber will, with one voice, say that we wish the bill to be effective and to solve the problems that we have laid out. This Government will take serious cognisance of that. We are willing to co-operate in every way possible with the other Administrations to make it work. I hope that they will pay heed to the unanimous view of the chamber and come to the table willing to co-operate.

I commend the motion and all the amendments to the chamber. We may take an historic step this afternoon towards achieving the marine legislation that we need, if members respond to the demands of the people of Scotland.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

There are a possible 12 questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members, in relation to the debate on housing, that if the amendment in the name of Stewart Maxwell is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Jim Tolson will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S3M-1603.3, in the name of Stewart Maxwell, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1603, in the name of Johann Lamont, on housing, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 46, Against 77, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1603.1, in the name of Jamie McGrigor, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1603, in the name of Johann Lamont, on housing, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)

Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 61, Against 64, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1603.2, in the name of Jim Tolson, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1603, in the name of Johann Lamont, on housing, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)

Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)

McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 79, Against 46, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-1603, in the name of Johann Lamont, on housing, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)

Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)

McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 78, Against 46, Abstentions 1.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament regrets the SNP government's lack of a coherent housing strategy; notes that the Housing Supply Task Force has no timetable or remit to produce recommendations for action; notes in particular the absence of robust evidence on funding and efficiencies in delivering its housing targets; believes that the Scottish Government's provision of a real terms increase of 9% in affordable housing over the period of the comprehensive spending review falls far short of what is needed to address the affordable housing shortage; further notes concerns about the impact of a single regional developer model, as outlined in the Firm Foundations consultation, on community-controlled housing associations and housing co-operatives; agrees that the Scottish Government should make a statement to the Parliament as soon as possible, clarifying its plans for the clear SNP manifesto commitment on a £2,000 first-time buyers' grant, and urges the Scottish Government to act to secure long-term improvements in housing rather than the short-term appearance of change.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1601.2, in the name of Maureen Watt, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1601, in the name of Rhona Brankin, on schools of ambition, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)

FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)

Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 49, Against 76, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1601.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1601, in the name of Rhona Brankin, on schools of ambition, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 77, Against 46, Abstentions 2.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1601.3, in the name of Jeremy Purvis, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1601, in the name of Rhona Brankin, on schools of ambition, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 77, Against 46, Abstentions 2.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-1601, in the name of Rhona Brankin, as amended, on schools of ambition, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 77, Against 48, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament recognises the important contribution that the Schools of Ambition programme has made in giving schools greater freedom to develop creative and innovative approaches to school improvement; notes HM Inspectorate of Education's positive comments on the programme's effect on pupil motivation; deplores the

Scottish Government's decision to axe the Schools of Ambition programme in the face of such success, calls on the Scottish Government to continue the funding of existing schools of ambition and to identify further individual schools that would benefit from becoming schools of ambition and to continue to provide Schools of Ambition funding directly to schools and to support decisions being taken on the expenditure of such funds at school level; and considers that head teachers play a crucial role in leading excellent schools and turning around schools that face challenges, and therefore calls on the Scottish Government to provide additional support and incentives for head teachers to improve their schools, including enhanced contract terms with more flexibility and increased rewards for outstanding leadership.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1602.2, in the name of Sarah Boyack, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1602, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on Scotland's marine environment, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)

McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 110, Against 15, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1602.1.1, in the name of Robin Harper, which seeks to amend amendment S3M-1602.1, in the name of Mike Rumbles, on Scotland's marine environment, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whittton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 109, Against 16, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1602.1, in the name of Mike Rumbles, as amended, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1602, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on Scotland's marine environment, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 108, Against 1, Abstentions 16.

Amendment, as amended, agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-1602, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on Scotland's marine environment, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)

Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 111, Against 0, Abstentions 14.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to consult on proposals for the sustainable management of Scotland's seas and coast, including coherent framework measures for marine planning, conservation and sea fisheries, and believes that this will enhance Scotland's stewardship of the seas, support sustainable development and provide protection for the marine environment, so ensuring that future generations of Scots will be able to enjoy the many social, cultural and economic benefits that the seas deliver; calls on the Scottish Government to accelerate the timetable for the Marine Bill, and further calls on Scottish Ministers to work constructively with the UK Government and other administrations to ensure that an integrated and joined-up approach to new legislation and its implementation are achieved; believes that Scotland should have responsibility out to 200 nautical miles as part of the Scottish zone for marine spatial planning, fisheries and marine nature conservation including the network of marine protected areas, sufficient to meet Scotland's international obligations under the Oslo Paris Convention and World Summit on Sustainable Development, and calls on the Scottish Government to work constructively with the UK Government to reach agreement on this.

Human Trafficking

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-1444, in the name of Gil Paterson, on the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises that 23 March 2008 marks the first anniversary of the United Kingdom's signing of the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings; notes that this convention is yet to be ratified in order to enshrine the rights of victims of trafficking in domestic law; further notes that there are substantial responsibilities for the Scottish Government under this convention, including the identification of trafficking victims in line with services to victims of trafficking, the investigation and prosecution of trafficking and the non-prosecution of crimes that trafficking victims have been coerced into; believes that a lead should be taken in the UK on the implementation of the parts of the convention for which it has responsibility, and considers that all measures should be taken to stop this modern-day form of slavery.

17:14

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): The debate gives us the opportunity to recognise the anniversary of the signing by the United Kingdom of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings—ECAT. I would have been delighted to be able to say that it is a celebration of the ratification of the convention but, sadly, that has not yet happened. When it is ratified, the convention will ensure that the rights of victims of trafficking are upheld in domestic law. Although the issue is not in the Scottish Government's jurisdiction, I want the Parliament and the Scottish Government to be as one and to use any influence that we have to put the strongest case to the UK Government that action is needed to bring the effects of the convention into play and to say that we would support the measures that are needed to ensure that the convention is ratified.

I pay tribute to Amnesty International for its consistent and diligent work in raising awareness of human trafficking. Amnesty has concerns about the identification of victims of trafficking in Scotland. That is currently police led and there is no formal procedure for consulting non-governmental organisations and other agencies as per international best practice. For a number of reasons, victims of trafficking are unlikely to disclose what has happened to police officers or immigration officials. Those reasons include threats from traffickers; shame and guilt about having been involved in commercial sexual exploitation; concern about insecure immigration

status; fear of corruption among home state officials; and the fact that victims may be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

When a brothel is raided, in many cases the people who are arrested are people who have been trafficked. Some have entered the country with legal documents on the promise of legitimate work. Unfortunately, they have been tricked and forced into the sex trade by violence and confinement, and their documents have been substituted by false ones. These are people who are unable to speak English and who, although they have been brutalised and scared out of their wits, are illegal immigrants due to fake planted documents and are likely to be deported. When they reach their home country, the threats of the traffickers become a reality and they may find themselves in trouble with their home authorities.

We need support services that are trusted by those who are trafficked. The victims need time to come to terms with their situation if they are to become good witnesses or to have their needs assessed. NGOs that are working in the field pick up information from the street and can play a significant role in many ways. They can pick up information to identify traffickers and assist with the recovery of victims by providing the varied and expert support that is essential if we are going to make a difference.

Article 10 of ECAT requires trained officials to identify and help victims, including referring them to support organisations and issuing them with residence permits where eligible. Article 10 also requires that if a person is reasonably suspected of being trafficked, they should not be removed until the identification process is complete, and in the meantime they should receive appropriate support and accommodation.

Article 12 of ECAT requires member states to provide such measures

"as may be necessary to assist victims in their physical, psychological and social recovery."

As a minimum, those measures should include a standard of living necessary for subsistence, including

"appropriate and secure accommodation, psychological and material assistance; access to emergency medical treatment;

information on rights; access to an interpreter and legal advice; and

"access to education for children."

I would like the Scottish Government to support the call for the reflection period for the victims of trafficking to be extended from 30 days to at least 90 days to allow victims to access adequate care services. Although this is a reserved matter, I want the Scottish Government to engage with the Home

Office, as the previous Administration did in the first place, and urge the UK Government to sign the convention. We can then move forward positively.

Human trafficking—or, should I say, slavery—comes in many different forms: women for the sex trade; manual workers; farm workers; child pickpockets; and children who are to be sexually abused. According to evidence that was given to the House of Commons, someone was even trafficked into the fishing industry in Scotland.

The United Nations estimates that between 700,000 and 4 million women and children are victims of trafficking. There is a well-connected worldwide criminal network behind it, and it is often associated with other criminal activities. It is a professional and formidable force that has a business worth of \$10 billion.

Trafficking is on the rise in Scotland and the UK. We need to get organised in Scotland, the UK and Europe and at UN level. As trafficking has no borders, international action is necessary.

Friends, we can do our bit. This evening's debate is the next step in bringing the issue to public attention and in seeking the Parliament's support for encouraging the Scottish Government to engage with the UK Government to bring about the ratification of the convention. I believe that we are pushing at an open door—let us all walk through that door together.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. As a large number of members wish to speak, I ask for speeches of no more than four minutes.

17:21

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): Gil Paterson is to be thanked for bringing the motion to the Parliament.

The trafficking of human beings from some of the most impoverished countries in the world is sickening. Thousands of defenceless women, young girls and young men have been trafficked into the United Kingdom on the promise of jobs and a better life, but the reality is that they find themselves experiencing the most horrendous emotional, physical and mental abuse. They are frightened, beaten, intimidated and sexually exploited. In other words, they are raped—there is no other way of describing what happens to them. Other people are trafficked to be used as domestic servants or as forced labour, and we have heard examples of marriage being used as a mechanism for trafficking.

As Gil Paterson said, the international trafficking of human beings is big business. It is the third-largest money earner in the criminal world after

drugs and weapon smuggling. Women were trafficked for the men who attended the football games at the world cup in Germany, and we should be aware of that vis-à-vis the coming Commonwealth games.

The motion calls for the rights of victims of trafficking to be enshrined in domestic law. That is the least that we can do. If victims manage to escape, they should not be immediately deported. If they give evidence in court, they should be treated as vulnerable witnesses. Help must be given to those voluntary organisations that are charged with encouraging trafficked human beings to speak up, because fear of deportation prevents some victims from accessing services and support. As Gil Paterson said, victims of trafficking need time, during which support and health and legal services can be provided.

Amnesty International tells us that it has significant concerns that, without the provision of adequate systems of support, victims will be regarded as illegal immigrants and will be deported, in which case they run a significant risk of being re trafficked.

The exploitation of human beings, in a culture that is alien to them and in a language that they barely understand, whereby they are used as sex objects should cause everyone in the Parliament to demand the ratification of the Council of Europe convention, at the very least.

We should challenge the Scottish Executive to lead the way by providing the necessary support networks for victims, thereby demonstrating our abhorrence of this evil trade. Those networks should be formally linked to identification and referral procedures. The Executive should support the training of front-line workers and the sharing of best practice, such as the trafficking awareness-raising alliance—or TARA—project in Glasgow.

The motion is correct to ask that the convention be ratified. What representations on ratification has the minister made to the responsible minister in the UK Government? If he has made no such representations, why has he not done so?

As MSPs, we must demonstrate to victims of trafficking that their contemptible clients are not representative of the Scottish people, and that the overwhelming majority of Scots offer genuine support and the hand of friendship to those who have been brought to our country on a false premise. They deserve nothing less.

17:24

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): I thank Gil Paterson for securing a debate on a matter of considerable importance.

I think that all members rejoice in internationalism but, as with everything else in life, with the gain sometimes comes the pain. With internationalism has come people trafficking, and there is no doubt that some of the people who suffer that pain are among society's most vulnerable.

As Gil Paterson said, trafficking comes in many shapes and forms. Sometimes it is to do with basic good intentions, for example when a child is trafficked for adoption by a childless couple who want to give a child a home—that is technically trafficking. Sometimes people are trafficked for the sordid sex trade, as Trish Godman pointed out. At other times, people are trafficked to be used in labour gangs.

When we consider the effects of trafficking on its victims, it is clear that trafficking is one of the more contemptible examples of human criminal behaviour. Children are trafficked purely as tools for the obtaining of child benefit, which is unacceptable. Young women are trafficked for sexual purposes. Sometimes women are deprived of their passports and beaten and starved, to provide gratification for some of society's more primordial human beings.

What can we do for victims of trafficking? We must do everything possible to ensure that the people who are responsible are brought to justice. The operation of the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency is becoming more and more sophisticated, so we can probably find out many of the people who are responsible for trafficking in Scotland and the UK. However, trafficking is international and many or most of the people who are involved in the trade operate in the country of origin of the victims. Given that many people are trafficked from third-world countries, it can be difficult to get to the bottom of the problem. We should demand a wider and more enthusiastic international response and greater co-operation, which has been sadly lacking in some instances.

People have been rescued in significant cases in the UK. How do we support victims of trafficking when we discover them? We must support such people. In some instances it might be best if they go home immediately. We must listen to what they want. If they are needed to help with a prosecution, we must ensure that they are kept in circumstances that offer the security and protection that they need. If they want to go home, we must let them do so. Above all, we must demonstrate to victims the humanity that was sadly lacking in the people who brought them to the state in which we found them, and we must ensure that there is a level of international co-operation that can put an end to this vile trade.

17:28

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):

I congratulate Gil Paterson on securing the debate, in which I am pleased to speak. I was, in September 2000, the first member of the Scottish Parliament to lodge a motion on human trafficking, and I moved the motion on Scottish National Party policy on trafficking at our annual conference. Since 2000, 23 members from five political parties have lodged motions in the Scottish Parliament on human trafficking, which demonstrates the strength of feeling on the issue. Trish Godman secured a members' business debate on the matter two years ago.

Trafficking is a vile worldwide phenomenon that affects men and boys as well as women and girls, although women are most likely to be exploited through trafficking. Victims can be trafficked for a range of exploitative purposes and children are particularly vulnerable.

The Scottish Government has substantial responsibilities under ECAT, given Scotland's distinctive care and justice systems.

The internationally recognised definition of child trafficking is children being transported for purposes of exploitation within or across national boundaries. The definition includes situations in which children have consented voluntarily to travel, but were exploited on arrival. That happens frequently with adults, too.

Trafficking in human beings is not only a crime but a fundamental violation of the most basic human rights. Exploitation varies according to age, gender or race. Examples include domestic servitude, restaurant and catering labour, benefit fraud, as well as sexual exploitation and underage forced marriage.

Trafficked children are at risk of losing even their identity because traffickers often destroy their papers and change their names. During the journey, unsafe transportation places children at risk of death or injury. On arrival, they are likely to experience violence, abuse and dangerous working conditions that are harmful to their health and wellbeing.

Correct identification and referral of victims to appropriate services lies at the heart of any system to protect trafficked persons. Under ECAT—when it is ratified—identification by competent authorities will act as a passport to a range of rights that are intended to help a trafficked person to escape from the influence of traffickers and to begin a process of recovery through access to health care, support, accommodation and legal advice. Conversely, failure to be identified will lead to a denial of basic support. In the case of people with irregular immigration status, it could also lead to

immigration detention, criminalisation and the removal to the country of origin without any assessment of the risk of harm or re-trafficking on return.

When trafficked persons who are reasonably suspected of having been subjected to sexual violence or sexual exploitation are interviewed to establish identification, they should be entitled to the same best-practice procedures from the police to which other victims of rape and sexual violence are entitled. For example, female victims should be interviewed only by female officers.

The physical and psychological health needs and safety requirements of trafficked victims are extensive. A study was carried out at a London university into the physical and psychological health of women who had been trafficked into forced prostitution or sexual exploitation in the context of forced domestic work. It found that the women suffered numerous physical and mental health problems and that their psychological reactions were severe and prevalent, and compared to or surpassed the symptoms that have been recorded for torture victims. The symptoms included feelings of suicide, depression, hopelessness and extreme anxiety.

Today's debate gives Parliament an opportunity to make a statement to Scotland, the rest of the United Kingdom, Europe and the wider world that the people of Scotland will not tolerate the trafficking of women, children and young men in our society. We must stamp out trafficking. Working together, we can do that.

17:33

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): It is a pleasure to contribute to the debate. I congratulate Gil Paterson on his success in securing it.

There is no doubt that international trafficking impacts on us directly, or indirectly, whether we live in Scotland or anywhere else in Europe. Even in the most peripheral of ways, we can find ourselves involved in trafficking. One example is the chocolate that we eat. According to a churches council, cocoa pickers are often victims of trafficking. They are the victims—albeit indirectly—of our obsession and hunger for chocolate. Trafficking can impact on us in a number of ways.

I turn to the impact of trafficking on children. I look forward to hearing the Minister for Community Safety's response to the debate and hope that he will support the removal of the UK reservation to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. That would go some way towards protecting trafficked children.

The Government should seek to develop a national reporting facility for children whose arrival into or departure from Scotland is unusual or suspicious. Such a facility would allow us to monitor those movements, which we cannot do at present. Like other members, I would like to see the Government do as much as it can to work with the UK Government to ensure ratification of ECAT by the end of 2008.

Most of us, fortunately, will not come into direct contact with trafficking. I have the dubious honour—if that is the word—of being one who has come into direct contact with it. I will recount the experience. Seven years ago, I was working in Kosovo as part of the United Nations group that supervised the elections. We sat at a border within Kosovo waiting to be checked through by national security guards, who were dealing with a vehicle in front of us. It was a fairly ordinary battered vehicle—there was nothing special about it. It was the sort of van that one would see every day. As we sat somewhat nervously waiting to go through, they opened the back of the vehicle and there were 40 women in the back of it. They were not quite stacked horizontally, but they were pretty close to it. It transpired that they had been persuaded to go with the traffickers by the promise of employment in western Europe.

The women were malnourished. Having come from an area of poverty in eastern Europe, they were desperate for the opportunity to work legitimately. On that promise, they had given up their rights as human beings, and in many cases had paid substantial amounts of money for the privilege of travelling who knows how many miles in the back of a closed van with no food, water or hygiene facilities.

We need to do as much as we can as a country—whether it happens within our own borders or internationally—to bring this horrendous trade to an end. The more we speak about it, the more our voices will be heard. In closing, I congratulate Gil Paterson once again on bringing the matter to Parliament for debate.

17:37

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I do not want to repeat what other members have said, but I, too, congratulate Gil Paterson, who has a long track record of taking up the issue, along with Trish Godman, Sandra White and others in the chamber and outwith it. The issue, indeed, crosses all party politics.

As has been said, we tend to focus on women and sexual exploitation. By all means let us do that—it is appalling and a living nightmare—but we should remember that trafficking also involves young boys and men. What concerns me is the

lack of data. We know that the reason for that is the inability to identify the people who are affected. Kenny Gibson said that it is mainly women who are affected—that might be the case but, to be frank, we do not know. I could not say at this moment how many children have been trafficked into Scotland, what they are being used for, how many men have been trafficked, how many boys or how many women. This is a first stage and this must cross boundaries.

I agree with Bill Aitken about international co-operation, but I was concerned to read in the papers that were provided to us by Amnesty International that there are some countries on a white list to which, for example, women who have been trafficked and sexually exploited are sent back without question—places such as Moldova and Albania. They are immediately in a worse position with the gangs because they have spoken out and broken ranks. They are brought back and their penalty is even greater. That situation is appalling and we must deal with it.

Questions have been asked about how the police system deals with women who have been trafficked and sexually exploited. I believe that they require even more compassion and help—if it is possible to say that—than other female victims. The situation is compounded, perhaps, with language difficulties, fear of further prosecution and a lack of a sense of security. These people cannot feel secure at all.

Kenny Gibson is right that access to health care, support and accommodation is a major issue. Again, I have concerns about the number of children who may be in need of support systems but about whom we simply do not know.

I am quite persuaded by the recommendations from Amnesty International. I suggest that we first set about collecting data to identify who the various people are—young and old. Thereafter, we can start to expose the size of the problem, reach out to the people concerned and provide them with security and compassion. We should change our relationship with other nations so that people are not sent back to where they were trafficked from, which can sometimes be the case. We should give them additional health care, and we should show that Scotland is a compassionate country that will have none of this evil trade.

17:40

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): I welcome this debate and, like Trish Godman and other members, I recognise the work that Gil Paterson has done on the subject, and on the issue of male violence against women generally.

The anniversary of the UK Government signing the Council of Europe Convention on Action

against Trafficking in Human Beings is to be welcomed. I am sure that we are all pleased that the UK Government has confirmed that it will ratify the convention by the end of the year.

Trafficking in people is a vile crime. Sex trafficking—the forced and organised rape of women—is unfortunately a worldwide phenomenon, and it should therefore have a high political priority for the UK Government and the Scottish Government. Human trafficking is a crime involving the exploitation of people, and high numbers of women and children are involved. Essentially, it is organised crime. The people who are responsible for organising people trafficking are the same people who are making money through other criminal networks, including drug trafficking, money laundering and other serious crimes. It is about greed and profit.

Sex trafficking is the aspect that I have studied the most, although I understand that trafficking is much wider than that. According to research in Russia, 20 per cent of labour migrants in that country could be defined as victims of trafficking, which is a shocking figure. Sex trafficking is characterised by extreme forms of abuse, violence and cruelty, and the women are bonded, because their families could get hurt if they report the crime to the authorities. The crime is highly organised, so it is difficult to secure prosecutions. It is also difficult to identify the numbers of people involved, given the complexity of prosecuting the crime.

The police initiative operation pentameter has demonstrated that trafficking is a real crime. It revealed the trafficking of 84 women, 12 of whom were minors. The operation threw up the requirement for a complex support network, which Gil Paterson discussed, including a need to provide language support for women who have been trafficked from other countries. We need them to make clear statements about what happened to them, but because of their fear of reprisal that is the most difficult aspect of the problem. I support Gil Paterson's call for an extension of the period in which we can establish those important facts.

I declare my membership of Routes Out of Prostitution. Much work needs to be done to recognise the harm that is done to women by forced prostitution through bonding and coercion. As far as I am concerned, on the same spectrum are women who are forced into prostitution through drug addiction or through their life circumstances, because they, too, face significant mental and physical harm.

If we are to tackle forced prostitution and human trafficking seriously, we need to examine the root of the problem. The demands of many men for young women and girls to have sex with cannot be ignored. Glasgow City Council has done quite a bit

of work with the Swedish authorities, which have shown that their model of legislation, which involves a complete ban on the sale of sex, has virtually eradicated human trafficking. We cannot ignore that model. We should look to it with interest.

We should be proud of the trafficking project in my constituency, which has a 35-bed unit and has helped at least 17 trafficked women. It is an example of best practice in the UK. It is the only dedicated project outwith London, and we should be proud of it. However, it needs to be resourced, and its work needs to be rolled out more widely.

This has been a useful debate, and I thank Gil Paterson once again for bringing the subject to the chamber.

17:44

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): Trafficking is inhuman, abhorrent, vile and knows no boundaries, and we must do what we can to eradicate it. I well remember the events in Germany that Trish Godman mentioned. However, not only were women trafficked in, but tents were erected to house them, which was absolutely ridiculous. Along with other people, I wrote to the German Government to express our concerns about and abhorrence of the practice.

Trish Godman mentioned Glasgow 2014. I do not think that the problem that she discussed will happen in relation to the Commonwealth games, but we must be vigilant to ensure that it does not.

I join others in congratulating Gil Paterson on securing this debate and commend him for his continued fight against sexual exploitation and violence against women, of which trafficking is one of the most horrendous examples.

Gil Paterson highlighted the failure of the Westminster Government to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, and pointed out what that means for the victims of trafficking. Pauline McNeill said that she looks forward to the Government ratifying the convention at the end of the year. However, I hope that Pauline McNeill and others from all parties will join Gil Paterson and me in asking the minister to ensure that UK Government ministers bring ratification forward. The convention has been unsigned for years, and I would prefer it to be signed tomorrow or next week, rather than at the end of the year. The victims of trafficking are suffering because the convention has not been ratified. We must give those victims representation at the highest level to ensure that they are safe and secure and come under the jurisdiction of the law of the country that they have been trafficked into.

Like Pauline McNeill, I support operation pentameter, which brings together police forces in the battle against trafficking. I thought it was an absolutely fantastic idea when I heard about it. However, as members have said, there are on-going concerns about the identification of trafficking victims and the workings of the national referral mechanism. I ask the minister to examine those issues, which have been well explained by other members.

I congratulate the TARA project in Glasgow, which is the only dedicated trafficking project in Scotland. I also congratulate the Scottish Government on its on-going support for that project, which has been acknowledged by Amnesty International. However, I would like the minister, in conjunction with the workers and volunteers of the TARA project, to examine the criteria under which the project operates, as they mean that support can be given only to women who are over 18 and have been sexually exploited in the UK, which leaves out children, men and those who have been sexually exploited outside the UK.

Human trafficking can involve sexual exploitation, sexual torture, and a variety of other aspects, such as people picking cockles. We thought that we had ended slavery, and we were proud of that. However, now we have another form of slavery, and we must do our best to eradicate it.

17:48

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I thank Gil Paterson for bringing this matter to the attention of the chamber.

I share the abhorrence of human trafficking that members have referred to. However, I think that, although getting the UK Government to sign the convention on action against trafficking will do no harm, it will not do all that much good, either. As Christine Grahame said in her excellent speech, we do not know the size of the problem that we are dealing with, which means that we do not know how to deal with it or what resources must be committed to it.

I suggest that the first step must involve prevention, if at all possible. Therefore, any resources that are to be devoted to the fight against trafficking should be spent in the countries from which people are trafficked. I would like there to be an imaginative information and warning programme in Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, the Baltic states and throughout the countries of eastern Europe from which people have come—some legitimately and others because they have been trafficked.

I mention legitimate means because—some people will not want to hear this—not all those

involved are the victims that Trish Godman and Gil Paterson mentioned. Sex workers, who are already employed in selling sexual services, are also migrating here from eastern Europe. How are they to be treated and evaluated if they are picked up in a brothel? Are they to be treated in exactly the same way as underage girls who have been trafficked against their will and told that they would get a job as a nanny? As a result of our abhorrence of trafficking, we overlook some of the harsh realities that anyone making a policy must deal with. I go back to prevention being better than cure, certainly in the first instance until we have a much better idea of the size and definition of the problem that we are dealing with.

Members have mentioned the TARA project. I am delighted to know that there is such a project, but we require better information about outcomes from that project than we have received from, for example, Routes Out of Prostitution. I pay tribute to Pauline McNeill's work in that organisation, but we do not have the information that we should have after the years for which it has operated. I hope that we have learned the lesson and will apply it to the TARA project.

It is all very well to talk about the support that people deserve if they find themselves in the position of being a trafficked prostitute, but are we willing to commit resources to the issue? We have not been willing to commit the resources to prostitutes who were not trafficked but have ended up on the streets in this country because of drugs, family breakdown and the litany of disasters of which members are well aware. Let us not put the cart before the horse. We should first try to identify what the problem is and we can then start to look for a solution.

17:52

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): I join other members in congratulating Gil Paterson on giving us the opportunity to debate human trafficking. As members from all round the chamber have said, he has a long record in campaigning against violence against women.

I endorse the comments made by many members who have thought equally hard and long on these matters. Trish Godman secured a debate on human trafficking in May 2006, and Kenneth Gibson was first to the crease, as it were, back in 2000. Many members have campaigned vigorously on the issue over a long period.

"Victims of trafficking, who are among the most marginalised groups in society, experience the most horrendous emotional, physical, mental and sexual abuse. I am glad to have an opportunity to reaffirm our view"—

in the Government—

"that trafficking is intolerable and that those who perpetrate it should be dealt with severely.—[*Official Report*, 25 May 2006; c 26123.]

The former Minister for Communities, Malcolm Chisholm, uttered those words back in May 2006. It would be difficult to better them. We all share the sentiments that he expressed.

The motion is right to equate trafficking with modern-day slavery. It is a vile and abhorrent practice that is difficult for many of us to conceive of and which has no place in a civilised society. I am therefore pleased to acknowledge the Home Secretary's announcement in January that the UK will ratify the Council of Europe's convention this year. That is a step forward and we are working to ensure that all the necessary arrangements in Scotland are put in place to support ratification.

It might be helpful if I say a word about that process, because some members, including Gil Paterson and Pauline McNeill, have urged ratification of the convention. As I understand it, the practice in the UK is that there is a two-part process. The convention is first supported in principle and then ratified. Other countries go straight to ratification, but I am advised that the reason for the two-step process in the UK is that ratification is a process that follows compliance of the law and compliance of practice. Therefore, if the law needs to be changed—as I understand it does in relation to immigration—we must recognise that that process has to be undertaken. It is a sensible process that, like all others, must be thought out carefully and will take time.

Far be it from me to defend the UK Government—I am not sure that it would assign that role to me—but we can all recognise that there is a reason why ratification has not been carried out. I think that it was Margo MacDonald who said that ratification would not in itself significantly advance matters. The question is what action should be taken in Scotland, particularly with regard to those matters for which we as a Government are responsible.

We are working closely with the UK Government to ensure that action is co-ordinated at a UK level. That work is underpinned by the Scottish Government's representation on the UK interdepartmental ministerial group on human trafficking and by the joint Scottish-Home Office action plan that was published last year on the day on which the UK signed the convention. The action plan sets out 60 measures that will be delivered in the four key areas of enforcement, prevention, victim support and child trafficking.

The action plan was reinforced by the launch in October 2007 of the police operation pentameter 2, which will run to the end of this month and which was mentioned by various members, including Sandra White. Intelligence from

pentameter 2 is already further developing understanding of the nature and scale of trafficking in Scotland and its links to trafficking elsewhere in the UK and abroad. The evaluation of the operation at a Scottish and UK level will help us to respond more accurately to the threat posed by trafficking.

Many members—notably Christine Grahame and Margo MacDonald, who spoke at the end of the debate—referred to the lack of data. By its nature, human trafficking is a trade, a crime and an activity that is carried out in a clandestine way, so it is difficult to obtain reliable data. However, the lack of evidence that trafficking is taking place does not mean that it is not taking place, and we must proceed on the basis that it is.

The Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency, in collaboration with other law enforcement partners, has been tasked with producing a comprehensive intelligence picture of the extent and impact of human trafficking in Scotland. I have had the pleasure of working with Gordon Meldrum, the new chief of the SCDEA, and I know that he is bringing immense vigour and focus to his duties.

I want to address two of Hugh O'Donnell's comments, the first of which was on the removal of the UK reservation to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. I understand that the Home Secretary has announced that the UK will reconsider the reservation. Secondly, on a national reporting system, the current proposal is for a UK rapporteur. I would be happy to consider those matters further with Mr O'Donnell.

We have recently provided increased funding to the trafficking awareness-raising alliance in Glasgow, to which many members have referred. The project provides specialist support to adult females who have been trafficked for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. Members have mentioned the extension of the reflection period from 30 to 90 days. I undertake to convey the *Official Report* of this debate to the Home Secretary so that we can give further and careful consideration to that matter.

A key commitment in the “UK Action Plan on Tackling Human Trafficking” is to provide targeted guidance to meet the needs of children. The Scottish Government has circulated a model protocol, which will be issued for consultation shortly.

I thank all members for their contributions, which have been sincere, heartfelt and passionate. I hope that we can work together towards the eradication of such a vile and abominable trade.

Meeting closed at 17:59.

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