

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 27 November 2008

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 27 November 2008

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

A Framework for Science

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Good morning. The first item of business is a statement by Fiona Hyslop on a framework for science in Scotland. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

09:15

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): Change happens progressively over time, but a clear vision and a well-understood sense of direction are crucial.

Just over a year ago, the Government set out our vision for Scotland. We published our economic strategy, defined our economic purpose and said that there would be a new framework for science, which would outline how Scotland's success as a nation will be underpinned through developing knowledge exchange, increasing overseas investment in research and development in Scotland and developing the science base. The clear focus of those science goals emerged from an extensive consultation in 2006.

The new framework, "Science for Scotland", also reflects more recent dialogue with key stakeholders, including the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Universities Scotland, the Association of Scotland's Colleges, the Scottish Science Advisory Committee, the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Confederation of British Industry Scotland, the Scottish Council for Development and Industry, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and many others. I attended a meeting to hear the views of 12 key sector advisory boards and I commend everyone who contributed to the development of the framework.

Of course, science and policy development do not exist in a vacuum. We have continued to launch initiatives that will have a positive impact on science and economic growth. Those initiatives include the £10 million Scottish institute for cell signalling in Dundee, the £10 million saltire prize, the new science baccalaureate and the report of the joint future thinking task force on universities, "New Horizons: responding to the challenges of the 21st century", which aligned the university science base with the Government's economic

purpose of delivering sustainable economic growth for the benefit of all.

This morning, copies of the new framework and associated background papers have been placed in the Scottish Parliament information centre and published on the Scottish Government's website. The new framework is deliberately more focused and accessible than was the 2001 science strategy that it replaces. It is, however, supported by background papers, which provide greater detail.

Much has changed since 2001. Indeed, much has changed in the past few months. Across the world and here in Scotland, individuals and institutions and homes and high streets are feeling the impact of the economic downturn. As we know, other Governments are taking steps to minimise the impact of the downturn and recover quickly. Ambitious nations know that science, engineering and technology have shaped the modern world, so they are continuing to invest in building their scientific capacity, promoting that capacity's economic and commercial relevance and advancing their competitive advantage in global markets. Governments around the world want to be better able to shape and respond to future science-based market opportunities. They want to develop and attract scientific talent, investment and high-value jobs, and they want to attract, encourage and grow innovative businesses that use science and research to prosper.

Scotland is well placed to use science to underpin sustainable economic growth. This week, the unveiling in George Street of a statue that honours James Clerk Maxwell provided a timely reminder that Scotland has a proud heritage of scientific excellence. To this day, our science base stands comparison with the world's best. Many of our key economic sectors are science based, and later today I will visit Optos, a medical devices company in Fife, which is a great example of a high-tech, Scotland-headquartered business that uses science to compete internationally.

"Science for Scotland" is focused on fostering science as a comparative advantage. It describes key ways in which Government, in partnership, will sustain, enhance and more effectively exploit Scottish science to support the economic purpose, enhance our international reputation for science and support individuals, organisations and businesses. It sets out how we will develop four key areas: individuals; scientific research and economic and business demand; international standing and inward investment; and connections in Scotland and in Government.

I will not list each element of the framework. Three elements are key, the first of which is science education and careers. Scotland's people

are our greatest asset. A key challenge is to encourage more Scots to study and build careers in science and engineering, so that we can develop the technicians, world-class researchers and science entrepreneurs who are needed by businesses and the economy now and will be needed in the future. We will therefore launch a new marketing campaign—do something creative, do science—to promote a more positive and realistic understanding of the diversity of science-based careers, particularly among young people who are leaving school.

Skills Development Scotland will develop a new national science careers programme: the path is science, engineering and technology—the path is SET—which will support improved and informed choice and help school pupils and college students and their parents and teachers. Both programmes will start in 2009.

We will make science in schools and colleges more challenging, relevant, interesting and exciting, through the on-going development and implementation of curriculum for excellence and the science baccalaureate. Indeed, only yesterday I set out more detail on how the baccalaureate will operate. The baccalaureate will encourage more of our young people to take science courses in the later stages of secondary school, raise the status of secondary 6 and assist young people in making the transition from school to higher and further education and employment. The interdisciplinary project, which is a key feature of the baccalaureate, should encourage students to draw on many areas of learning, recognise the interdependence of subjects and make connections between the study of science and the world of work.

The second key area is research. Scotland's scientific research base is ranked first in the world in terms of the rate of research citations relative to gross domestic product. A major challenge is to maintain that position. Our investment in research infrastructure sustains and enhances the excellence of Scotland's science research base, which attracts significant project funding from the United Kingdom research councils, charities and business, provides international profile and attracts a significant proportion of inward investment. Scotland provides a major element of the UK's research capacity. Indeed, we punch above our weight. I have discussed science with UK ministers twice in the past few months and I will continue to support and enhance productive links at every level with research councils and the European Union.

A clear consensus emerged from the consultation. On-going support for Scottish investment in infrastructure to secure UK project funding is the best way to improve research

outcomes and enhance our international profile. Therefore, we will continue to support science infrastructure, as is confirmed in "New Horizons". Such support underpins existing and emerging world-class research, which in turn supports our science capacity, sustains and enhances our international standing and helps to improve Scottish business competitiveness and prospects for inward investment.

The third challenge is knowledge exchange. Our economic goals have not been and will not be realised solely by continued investment in our academic science base. Scotland's expenditure on R and D in higher education compares favourably with spending in most competitor economies. However, our business expenditure on R and D is less than half the UK rate, which in turn is well below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average. That is crucial, because OECD studies confirm that business R and D is the optimum driver of economic growth.

Perhaps one of the most important issues for Scotland is how we increase business R and D. Also, how do we improve how scientific expertise in colleges, universities and research institutes supports businesses, key sectors and the economy? Improved university commercialisation is extremely important but is not the complete answer. We need to generate demand from industry for science. That is a well-established challenge in Scotland and internationally, for which there is no quick fix. Culture change in academia and in business will be involved.

To promote such an approach, "Science for Scotland" confirms plans for a progressive shift in emphasis and resource allocation. Currently, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council allocates only a tenth of its research resource to knowledge exchange. In the future, we will take a new and distinctive approach. We will prioritise research excellence and strategic knowledge exchange as key priorities, given their different impacts on sustainable economic growth.

We will increase investment in scientific knowledge exchange faster over time, to support industry-led projects that help key sectors to use science to prosper. That commitment to increase the proportion of funding for targeted knowledge exchange provides a signal of intent and will influence culture change. Support will be directed to key businesses and sectors, allowing them, rather than Government, to articulate and address their needs by taking forward strategic projects, with support from all Government agencies and with sustainable economic growth as an outcome. The approach will foster longer-term growth in business demand for knowledge exchange and business R and D. It will also adjust the balance of

current incentives in academia, promoting growth in participation in knowledge exchange.

Knowledge exchange works best when the partners work together closely and establish a lasting relationship that is based on trust, respect and an understanding of how their different talents produce mutual benefits. There are already several exciting examples of industry-led collaborative projects in Scotland, which are building R and D capacity. For example, the funding council recently invested in 30 PhD placements in small businesses in the chemical industry. We need more of that sort of industry-led initiative.

We want the business community to bring forward ideas. The funding council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise will respond positively to jointly facilitate project development, particularly in key sectors. Government and all its agencies will work with businesses and with colleges and universities to promote faster economic growth. Together we can increase business R and D, grow companies of scale and support the economic purpose of increased sustainable growth.

At the start of the statement, I said that vision is crucial. Our vision is of a nation of world-class scientific achievement, a magnet for talent and investment, and a powerhouse of technology innovation and enterprise, increasing sustainable economic growth. "Science for Scotland" will begin to make that real.

The Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will take questions on the issues raised in her statement. We have exactly 20 minutes available for those questions, after which we must move to the next item of business.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): I welcome the statement and the science strategy, which has been a long time in coming. Much of it takes forward the important work that Labour and the Liberal Democrats did when we were in office. We all recognise that science—in schools, universities or business—is core to our lives, health and wellbeing.

At a time of economic downturn, why is the strategy not one for science and innovation? Will there be a separate innovation strategy? Has the science strategy been costed? Will it mean extra funding for science or business R and D, or is it just a reshuffling of existing funding?

The cabinet secretary made a big play of her manifesto commitment to the Scottish baccalaureate. At a time of swingeing cuts to secondary school staffing and when major curriculum change is under way, why is the curriculum to be made more crowded by introducing that award? Will the cabinet secretary

publish the evidence that parents, teachers and universities are demanding the change?

Finally, given the slashing of budgets for continuing professional development in schools, how long will it, take on the present funding, for every science teacher in Scotland to access the excellent Scottish Schools Equipment Research Centre courses?

Fiona Hyslop: Rhona Brankin has a positive way of promoting her case.

The science strategy sits alongside the innovation strategy. As I said in my statement, the science strategy draws on work by the previous Administration, particularly the consultation in 2006. I point out that the 2001 science strategy that was produced by the previous Administration was not accompanied by any increased resources for science.

In the rebalancing that the Scottish funding council will take forward in developing the knowledge exchange agenda, growing business demand for science will be a key focus. Recognising and stimulating that demand is a key task for us all and our enterprise agencies in particular.

There has been an increase in advanced highers since last year, despite the scaremongering of some of Rhona Brankin's colleagues, particularly Wendy Alexander. It is recognised that, even in Renfrewshire, there is the same access to advanced highers as there was last year. The baccalaureate is based on existing highers and advanced highers, so it will not crowd the curriculum. It will stretch our ablest pupils in S6, some of whom perhaps coast through their sixth year, and it will include an interpretative and integrated project.

We have a wealth of supportive quotations from organisations, universities and businesses to welcome the baccalaureate. Indeed, universities and colleges are offering to provide support for the integrated projects. For schools that cannot provide the integrated project, the fact that they can draw on employers' support and that the work can take place in universities and colleges will provide the bridge to universities that we so want.

Local government resources education, which, together with social services, accounts for almost half the local government spend. The fact that local government received record funding, despite a tight spending settlement, is testament to our support. John Swinney made a serious point yesterday: if the Parliament and Government face a £500 million cut in public resources in 2010-11, that will be a big challenge for us all. I hope that we can come together to resist that. Investing in education, universities and colleges and in local government will help us to come through the

economic downturn and ensure that we are well placed for the future.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for prior sight of the statement, and I assure her that the Scottish Conservatives will support the overall objective of boosting the number of specialist science and technology graduates in Scotland. That objective builds on the previous Executive's plans, and it is in line with ensuring that educational research and economic objectives are pursued in parallel. It also overcomes some of the doubts that colleges, universities and employers have had about the future in the area.

I welcome the determination to provide more practical work and related experience for our top school leavers, but I note that the cabinet secretary believes that that can be achieved primarily in the school set-up by the introduction of a new Scottish science baccalaureate. I have three specific questions on that. First, does the cabinet secretary agree with the academic who said this morning that, because of the restrictions in many schools on offering advanced higher, perhaps only 200 pupils in any year group would take the Scottish science baccalaureate? If she does not agree, how many pupils does she estimate will end up with the award?

Secondly, can the cabinet secretary provide details of how the Scottish baccalaureate will be viewed for university entrance? Most specifically, will a pupil with the award gain advantage over pupils who do not have the award but who perhaps have better qualifications across the curriculum? Finally, will she provide a reason why only some subjects are deemed worthy of inclusion in a Scottish baccalaureate system?

Fiona Hyslop: The first question was on the numbers, and that is the challenge. We currently have about 30,000 sixth year pupils, and only about 3,000 would probably be eligible. There is a lot of welcome interest from early adopters of the baccalaureate, but we would not expect all those pupils to take it in the early years. However, that is the point: if we want more pupils to take science at universities, we need more of them to take more science subjects and at higher levels—to higher and advanced higher. The point of the exercise is to grow the numbers and provide an incentive to do that. As Elizabeth Smith identified, the interpretative project will be part of that.

The second question was about university entrance. We published the details of the strategy yesterday, and we have had discussions with the Scottish Qualifications Authority and universities. Universities across Scotland are welcoming the baccalaureate and, following their advice and at their request, we have included advanced higher English in the languages baccalaureate and

advanced higher maths in the science baccalaureate.

Over the next few months, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service and universities will consider the tariff values of the baccalaureate for university entrance. The first baccalaureate graduates will take the award in summer 2010. The intention is for university website prospectuses to mention the baccalaureate immediately, while printed prospectuses will do so to cover applications for university next year. In the next few months, universities and UCAS will therefore take forward the tariff requirements.

The third question was on why only some subjects are in the baccalaureate. We need to improve our science position in Scotland. I make no apologies for trying to do that; it is why we are advancing the science baccalaureate in particular. Such is the interest that has been generated that we are considering arts and social sciences for the future, but science must be our main focus at this stage.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I, too, thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of her statement, which came with a helpful quotation at the top that the cabinet secretary did not read out. The quotation was from Joel Barker:

"Vision without action is merely a dream."

I suspect that that is a new summary of the Scottish National Party's record in the past year.

Liberal Democrats welcome the framework. We will study it closely, and we will support the Government's practical steps to implement it. The cabinet secretary's statement mentioned the most announced prize in Scottish history—the saltire prize. When will that prize actually be awarded rather than announced again? Mention was also made of the baccalaureate. Stapling qualifications together does not send out strong signals to universities or schools, and a likely 7 per cent uptake of eligible students is worrying.

I know from my constituency, with the research in the school of textiles and design and the economic development of ProStrakan, the need for economic development and research to work together. Will the cabinet secretary address concerns about the real-terms cut in higher education and research funding? That was a catastrophic decision in advance of an economic downturn. Will she also address the concerns that exist about Scottish Enterprise's operating plan? It does not support businesses that primarily serve local markets, which include many science and research businesses. Will she review Scottish Enterprise's funding and operation as we go into recession?

Fiona Hyslop: We should be honoured that one of the prestigious professors of the Chinese Academy of Sciences has agreed to join the judging board for the saltire prize. I understand that further details of the prize will be announced next week. It is attracting great international attention and focuses on Scotland's capabilities for renewable energy. We should all pull together to support that.

The member asked about funding. In this comprehensive spending review period, the Government is investing a greater proportion of its overall budget in our universities and colleges than the previous Administration did. Universities asked us to ensure that the profiling of the resources was extended so that there were increases in the later years of the spending review rather than the early years, and we took a responsive attitude towards that request.

I agree with Jeremy Purvis that the connections between enterprise and the local economy are vital. Knowledge exchange must not only reach for high-profile proposals—particularly proposals in life sciences, such as those that we see at Little France—but penetrate deeply into our economy, particularly our small and medium-sized enterprises. The biggest challenge is stimulating the demand for science at SME level. That can happen not only with universities but with colleges. Part of the knowledge exchange agenda is to progress that with colleges and universities.

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary reassure me that, with all the emphasis that is being placed on science, the background that engineers require in later life will not be overlooked at school?

Fiona Hyslop: The answer is yes. Indeed, as was reflected in my answer to Elizabeth Smith's question, the baccalaureate focuses on science, engineering, technology and mathematics precisely for that reason. We have a big demand for engineers in Scotland and we must stretch the most able in our schools to ensure that we fulfil it.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary share my view that it is crucial to bring together our scientific communities in universities and industry to create high-value collaborative research and development projects, such as the Centre for Health Science in Inverness, which has an emphasis on knowledge transfer and provides a bridge between town and gown?

Fiona Hyslop: I agree absolutely. Maureen Watt visited Lifescan Scotland only recently. We have a comparative and competitive advantage in Scotland because of the collaborative pooling that has been established, which is the envy of many other areas in Europe. The UHI Millennium

Institute, in which David Stewart takes a keen interest, makes a particular contribution to collaboration between institutions, but we are working with different universities throughout Scotland. The connection between companies and universities is critical, which is why the science framework places a strong emphasis on what we can do to improve it.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): The cabinet secretary has highlighted the need to increase the research and development that take place in Scotland. What role does she envisage the enterprise agencies playing in achieving that?

Fiona Hyslop: The integration of enterprise work is critical. Joe FitzPatrick welcomed the announcement that the Scottish institute for cell signalling was to be established at the college of life sciences in the University of Dundee. The institute is a good example of how to ensure that businesses are plugged into the fantastic, world-class research that takes place in Scotland in a way that helps to commercialise that research, which is critical. Its development was a result of co-operation between the Scottish funding council, our enterprise agencies and the University of Dundee.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The cabinet secretary mentioned the joint future thinking task force. The other week, it faced concerns that there is no new money and that the horizon fund is being created merely by top slicing other budgets. She stated her intention to provide a higher proportion of funding for knowledge exchange. Will that increased proportion be additional money or further top slicing from universities' already tight budgets? What will be the timescale for the increase? The funds that are proposed for the horizon fund are, in many cases, already committed, and I am concerned that, without more money, there is a danger that other important projects may lose out.

Fiona Hyslop: We are all operating within the budgets of the current spending review—everybody is aware of that—but we have given a clear indication of the direction in which we want to take investment in knowledge exchange in the future. It would be far more helpful if members would recognise that, although we would like to have additional resources to distribute across the sectors—in particular, science—it will be particularly challenging to find those resources in 2010-11 if we face £500 million cuts in the Government's budget.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): Half a million women in the UK are qualified in science, engineering or technology but less than a third work in those sectors, all of which already suffer severe skills shortages that are set to worsen. That situation is bad for our productivity

and competitiveness and undermines our aspirations for fairness and opportunity. Why is the Government's strategy silent on that gender imbalance and what specific actions does the Government propose to take to improve women's participation and position in those sectors?

Fiona Hyslop: That is an appropriate question. We need role models in science for young women. We have no better such role model than Professor Anne Glover, who is the Government's chief scientific adviser.

Alison McInnes is right to identify the gap that we must bridge. There is a real issue, particularly at primary level. Primary school teachers are predominantly women and 90 per cent of them feel more comfortable teaching biology than physical science or chemistry. That is why we introduced £250,000 for the science centres—Glasgow Science Centre in particular—to bridge the gap by helping to support education for, and the understanding of, primary school teachers.

There is much that we can do on that matter. If we think that we could do more, we will do it, and if Alison McInnes wants to suggest anything to me, I would be very interested in taking it forward.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): The development of wind and wave power provides Scotland with the single biggest manufacturing, technical and scientific opportunity that it has had in 100 years. Will the cabinet secretary commit to allocating sufficient knowledge transfer and skills transfer funds to allow the burgeoning wave and tidal industry to develop at the pace at which it should be developing?

Fiona Hyslop: The saltire prize will help to showcase the capability in that industry. However, ensuring that we have the necessary technical expertise at all levels—not only in high-level research, but at the technical level—is a real challenge.

Another challenge that we face is the economic downturn. That is why the Government's economic strategy still stands. We should look to the renewable energy sector to help us to come through the economic downturn and become a place of expertise, skills and development in renewable energies. I am discussing with the Scottish funding council and Skills Development Scotland how we can best support that. Particularly in the short term, transferring people with similar engineering skills from other areas of work into renewable energy would be worth while.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): The cabinet secretary described the low proportion of commercial R and D that takes place in Scotland. Does she agree that Scotland's contribution may have been underestimated? Many statistics are collected on a UK basis only, therefore R and D

may be allocated totally to the country in which a company has its headquarters. Does she also agree that industries that conduct much research in Scotland, such as the pharmaceutical industry, should be requested to provide more detailed breakdowns of where they conduct their research?

Fiona Hyslop: Dr Ian McKee raises an interesting point. I would like that to be the case, but we must deal with the statistics that we have. Indeed, various parliamentary committees have taken a keen interest in the matter since the Parliament was established and have identified a shortfall of research and development in Scotland. We should certainly interrogate the statistics more to determine whether there is an issue with companies that are headquartered in England attributing R and D solely to that country and not to Scotland. However, there is still a big gap and, if we want to improve Scotland's productivity and economic growth, we must tackle that gap and bridge it.

Sea Fisheries

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-2966, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on sea fisheries.

09:45

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): I welcome the opportunity to debate this year's fisheries negotiations. They are vitally important to our fishing communities, economy, food policy and marine environment. Today, we will debate not only total allowable catches and quotas, but a way of life and a valuable part of Scotland's heritage. The debate is not just about the vessels and crews that go to sea, but about the thousands of Scots who work onshore in our processing factories and on the quayside.

People throughout Scotland know the risks that our fishermen take to put healthy food on our tables and we should reflect on the fact that, once again this year, some have tragically made the ultimate sacrifice in doing so. I am sure that members will join me in paying tribute to the Stornoway coastguard and the wider service, following last night's rescue of the crew from the Banff-registered Enterprise II that got into difficulties.

Scotland's people look to their Government to fight hard for their fishermen, and the fishing industry can rely on the Scottish Government to represent the industry's interests relentlessly. The negotiations come at the end of a year that has brought positive developments and challenges in equal measure. The year started on a high when we secured an historic deal in the European negotiations, which brought back to Scotland a degree of fisheries management that enables us to pioneer our own days-at-sea regime.

The resulting Scottish conservation credits scheme allows fishermen to benefit from additional days and acknowledges the steps that they take to conserve valuable stocks. We have designed a regime that provides rewards and incentives for responsible behaviour and moves away from the previous emphasis on penalties and disincentives. The fleets have benefited because they have adopted cod avoidance actions, which include avoiding closed areas and using more selective fishing gear.

The unprecedented joint working between the Government, industry, scientists and the environmental community was a key feature of our approach to last year's negotiations and has continued throughout the year. Most important, the Scottish sector has shown leadership in Europe by

rising to the challenge of ensuring that cod fisheries are sustainable, leading the debate and offering solutions. It has ensured that its own house is in order, as more than 50 per cent of Scottish fisheries are now under full assessment for Marine Stewardship Council certification as being fished sustainably.

Our industry's leadership in fisheries conservation is now recognised in Scotland and beyond by retailers and consumers who seek the stamp of sustainability on Scottish seafood. A commitment to sustainability has underpinned the approach that we have taken to ensure the good management of our seas. In March this year, the Parliament supported our bid for additional responsibilities in the waters around Scotland to ensure better integration and a coherent framework for planning and nature conservation.

I am pleased to tell members that, following the First Minister's initiative in reactivating the joint ministerial committee machinery, we have now reached agreement with the United Kingdom Government and the devolved Administrations on nature conservation and marine planning out to 200 nautical miles. That will result in additional executive devolution of marine planning and nature conservation responsibilities to Scottish ministers. It will also provide a framework for joined-up marine planning within the UK, while respecting different constitutional responsibilities; and it will support the Scottish economy by enabling us to manage marine resources coherently. That is good news for our fishermen, our other marine industries and our precious marine environments. Scotland will now take the lead on nature conservation and marine planning out to 200 miles—I know that members in the chamber will welcome that as a step forward for Scotland and for the Parliament.

Throughout this year's fisheries negotiations, I have been acutely aware of the fragile economic situation of the Scottish fleet, which will not be immune from recession. Those difficulties come on top of a rollercoaster year, during which there have been soaring fuel prices and now falling prices for seafood. I am under no illusions about the need to work creatively and energetically with the sector to secure a thriving future. During the summer, the Government worked with the industry on a response to soaring fuel prices and we did what we could within our limited budgets to back up industry ideas with cash.

We want to take a more strategic approach to funding from the European fisheries fund, seeking quick expenditure with a strategic impact. Therefore, we are accelerating the allocation of EFF expenditure and giving priority to projects that can start quickly and can guarantee spend by 31 March 2009 to deliver immediate benefits for our

fishing communities. I challenge the industry to bring forward important projects that will have the highest and most immediate impact on meeting the industry's needs.

Our joint aim must be to ensure that sea fishing is an increasingly successful part of Scotland's food and drink industry, because—as skippers well know—adding value is not just about landing more fish, but about finding and keeping new markets and impressing upon consumers around the world the fact that our nation's product is healthy and of outstanding quality. My objective for this year's negotiations will be to secure outcomes that promote sustainable fisheries and that are fair and just for the Scottish fishing sector. Wherever possible, I will seek solutions that increase the choices for fishermen, reward sustainable behaviour, encourage long-term planning and bring decisions under national control.

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): I am grateful to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment for giving way on his point about securing outcomes and increasing choices for fishermen. Shetland's fleet seeks increased days, rather than a loss of days in exchange for an increased cod quota. Will the cabinet secretary assure members and the industry that the Brussels negotiations that are about to begin will not result in a trade that involves an increased cod quota but a cut in days? That would be extremely damaging to the interests of the fleet that I represent in the Parliament.

Richard Lochhead: I take on board the member's point about his constituents' interests—I will turn to that issue in a few moments.

Several stages of the talks are complete. In October, we secured a 33 per cent increase in the mackerel quota. Last week in Brussels, we embedded Scotland's trailblazing conservation credits scheme in the new cod recovery plan, thereby securing the long-term sustainability of cod stocks through cod avoidance measures that have been taken in Scotland, rather than through blunt cuts in fishing effort.

However, there is still much to play for and there are some difficult challenges ahead. In this week's European Union-Norway negotiations, the Government is resisting any attempt to swap our valuable mackerel quota and I will pursue vigorously the issue of discards of cod. During this year, we have been active in generating solutions to reduce discards radically. I hosted a discards summit to discuss the problem and to generate new ideas. There was complete consensus among skippers, industry representatives, environmentalists and policy makers that such a wasteful practice cannot go on and must be tackled now.

There is no benefit to the stock, fishermen or our fishing communities when fishermen have to dump dead, good-quality, marketable fish back into the sea. I have raised the matter with my EU counterparts and I met the Norwegian Government in Scotland in October. Other nations also agree with our stance. This year, we have a golden opportunity to address the dumping of good-quality fish overboard. Land more and catch less must be our guiding principle: we need to focus on what we remove from the sea, rather than what is landed.

A key part of the package at this week's EU-Norway talks must be a significant increase in the North Sea cod quota—with no unreasonable strings attached. We can catch less by reducing the amount of cod that is taken from the sea, but we should land more of what we catch, rather than force the fleet to dump overboard. Fisheries management in a mixed fishery is complex, but we must allow the fleet to catch sustainable stocks, while safeguarding more fragile stocks and avoiding discards.

The European fisheries council negotiations in December are likely to be as difficult as ever. A number of key issues still need to be resolved, which include securing a rollover of the important nephrops quotas; gaining a responsible increase in monkfish and megrim quotas; and, above all, overturning the European Commission's disproportionate and draconian proposal to close demersal fisheries on the west coast of Scotland.

The science on white-fish stocks on the west coast is difficult. We need to develop sensible solutions to the challenge, but the Commission's original proposal would devastate fishing communities from Campbeltown to Kinlochbervie. It will be vigorously resisted by the Government and we will present alternative solutions. We are working with the industry on better technical and spatial measures and I am confident that we can put in place a package to ensure that there are sustainable fisheries on the west coast of Scotland.

I met the European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Joe Borg, last week to express Scotland's fury over the Commission's proposals and to make what I consider to be a good case for alternative Scottish solutions. The Commission has agreed to examine those alternative proposals. In pursuing those objectives, I aim to build on the success of the approach that we have adopted over the past year. That means standing up vigorously for Scottish interests, being prepared to take the lead on the international stage and working in close collaboration with the sector as team Scotland.

I will also make it a priority to think of the needs of not only today's fishermen, but future

generations, which is why we have developed this year's proposals to safeguard fishing rights for future generations of Scottish fishermen. We have been prepared to put on the table the inadequacies of the common fisheries policy. We look forward to the European Commission's green paper on the future of the CFP and we seek the EU's agreement to debate the case for having a common fisheries policy in the first place. I am confident that it will accept the need for that debate, which will allow Scotland to present the case for returning responsibility for fishing to this Parliament—where it belongs. The CFP is discredited. The elected Scottish Parliament should manage our fishing grounds, not 27 member states, many of which are land-locked, sitting around a table in Brussels.

I believe that what we have achieved this year is the start of something better. We have laid important foundations for a sustainable future and have prioritised communities, working with people throughout Scotland to put the needs of our vulnerable fishing communities at the heart of our agenda. We—the Government, industries and communities—have pledged to protect access to our precious fishing resources and the communities that depend on them. Therefore, I urge the Parliament to support our motion and a sustainable future for our fishermen, our fishing communities and our marine environment.

I move,

That the Parliament supports the Scottish Government in negotiating a deal that is fair and just for Scotland's fishing communities and that reflects in full the leadership that Scotland's fishermen are showing the rest of Europe on sustainable fisheries.

09:55

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): In this morning's debate in advance of the sea fisheries negotiations, we want to be both positive and supportive. We do not disagree with much in the Scottish National Party's motion, but we note its suggestion that the negotiations are carried out by the Scottish Government. It is actually the UK Government that is responsible for the negotiations. We believe that it is important that any motion that the Parliament passes is accurate, so our amendment reflects the fact that it is team UK that carries out the negotiations.

In our amendment, we also note the positive approach that the new UK fisheries minister, Huw Irranca-Davies, has taken since his appointment. His predecessor, Jonathan Shaw, made a positive and constructive contribution in his time, and it was partly his ability to work with people that led not just to our having constructive debates in Scotland but to last year's deal, which we talked about as being a good one for Scotland.

When I spoke to Huw Irranca-Davies, I was impressed by the speed with which he got on the case. He understands both the big picture and the potential impact of decisions on the sustainability of our stocks and our fishing industry's ability to be successful. Like his predecessor, he does not just understand devolution but is committed to making it successful. Reading *Hansard*, I was struck by his willingness to listen to his colleagues in the House of Commons, not just in terms of geography but in terms of political representation. That bodes well for the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment's work with him.

One of the most important markers that Huw Irranca-Davies has laid down is the fact that he will come to Scotland next week to meet the west coast fishermen. I welcome his commitment to supporting them and to tackling Richard Lochhead's point about the severe impact on our west coast fishermen if the European Commission's response to dealing with the fragility of stocks is a draconian closure. There must be another way to address the issue.

Our amendment is an add amendment that is intended to keep the spirit of the cabinet secretary's motion. We want to reflect the importance of his and his officials' work in making the case for the Scottish fishing industry, the protection of stocks and biodiversity now and in the future. The cabinet secretary and his officials are a key part of team UK, and their expertise, depth of knowledge and ability to talk regularly to our fishing industry and environmentalists are critical to our putting forward a powerful case in Brussels.

When we debated fisheries this time last year, the Labour amendment was passed. That was a first for us, and I hope that it was not a last. At that time, our amendment highlighted the need for the Scottish Government to draw on the full range of expertise in Scotland, including industry, our environmental non-governmental organisations and, crucially, our scientific community. I welcome the effort that the Scottish Government has made in the past year to ensure that those groups work together and are part of our discussions.

Throughout last year's budget discussions, and since then, Labour MSPs have pushed the Scottish Government to provide proper financial support so that our fishing fleets can obtain the equipment that they need to fish more sustainably. Last year, we discussed net sizes, fishing effort and the need to demonstrate that we have intelligent fishing approaches and reduced effort that is backed up through monitoring. We also discussed how to tackle the scandal of discards. We need a more sustainable and responsible industry and progress is being made.

It is clear that we need a range of measures that are appropriate to the different marine geography and stocks in different parts of Scotland. The fishing industry has responded to that complex agenda too. Our amendment commends the Scottish Fishermen's Federation's recent environmental statement, which is an important marker that shows that the industry is committed to environmental stewardship and management of our fisheries. Crucially, the industry sees itself and our fishing communities as part of the solution. As the cabinet secretary said, the industry is proactively taking up a raft of environmental measures. Today, we put on the record our support for those initiatives.

Our amendment suggests that our fishermen are leading the way in Europe, but that is not just our view. Significantly, that is also recognised by our environmental NGOs. It is clearly the view of the RSPB Scotland, whose briefing states:

"We believe the Scottish Government and Scottish fishermen are leading the way in trialling new methods to conserve stocks and reduce discards. Although there are signs of recovery in cod stocks they must be allowed to rebuild through precautionary fishing methods."

As we move into the final stages of this year's negotiations, we must ensure that we have a constructive and well-made case so that the European Commission understands the effort that has gone into the arguments, which were rehearsed effectively at the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee earlier this month. The cabinet secretary and his colleagues do not have an easy task, but we must get the message across to Brussels that everyone is on board with our approach, both in Scotland and throughout the UK.

The detail is vital. The RSPB is right to point out that the cabinet secretary's land more, catch less approach will have to be monitored. It must work for the future of the industry and it must be credible. It cannot just be about stock management. It must also persuade Brussels that we are serious about making stock management successful.

In last year's debate, we discussed how to deal with discards. I am glad that the cabinet secretary mentioned that in his speech, but I ask him to reflect on the alternatives that could be developed to ensure that we get the best value from the fish that will now be landed instead of discarded. Not all the fish have a premium value; some are currently regarded as worthless. Some thought about how that fish can be used constructively to get value for our fishermen would be a good initiative.

Labour is clear that we need to get certain principles right in the long-term discussions about CFP reform. We need a stronger focus on the

conservation of fish stocks and on long-term viability for fishermen and the associated industries that are so crucial to some of our most fragile parts of rural Scotland. We must not just have a series of prescriptive rules. We need a stable regulatory framework that focuses much more on long-term management planning and involves stakeholders more efficiently. We all agree that we must move away from the annual horse-trading that goes on, which is not good for the future of the industry or for long-term stock management.

We must move away from the one-size-fits-all approach towards more regional management, not just in Scotland but beyond. We must consider the different challenges in our regional fisheries in Scotland, but we must do so within a consistent and principled approach for the whole of the UK.

When I spoke to Huw Irranca-Davies this week, he was clear that we need stability for our fishing industry in the long term and that our priorities must be North Sea cod and whiting, cod recovery, nephrops and west of Scotland white fish. His commitment to keeping talking to our fishermen directly—as his predecessor did—is good news. I hope that it means that he will have a real grasp of the issues as he goes into his first talks along with our colleagues in the Scottish Government.

We all want to achieve the virtuous triangle that Bertie Armstrong mentioned to the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee earlier this month. The virtuous triangle is one that sees the fisheries scientists, civil servants in the Scottish Government and the fishing industry working closely together. That joint work is crucial if we are to be successful in the future.

We have the whole of team UK behind us, but the negotiations will be tough. We must work hard to persuade the EC that closure of the west coast fisheries is simply unacceptable and cannot be the way forward. We need to be successful in the negotiations because the stakes are high.

We support the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee's plea for an improved base of scientific knowledge. As we move towards the marine bill, all the key parties accept the need for a better information base. I am keen to hear from the minister how he intends to take that forward. We now have responsibilities out to 200 nautical miles and we are working with the fishing and nature conservation industries to bring their interests together. We must ensure that we have the best information at our fingertips and that we consider not just our fishing interests but the wider sustainability and ecology of the seas around Scotland. The ecological health of our seas must be part of our agenda. We have a clear opportunity to work together and recent

discussions show that there is strong cross-party support for that.

We wish the cabinet secretary all the best in his work as part of the UK team to put Scotland's interests at the heart of the discussions. There are many positive comments in the amendments from the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives. I hope that there will be constructive cross-party support for the cabinet secretary. That will show the European Commission that Scotland has a positive, united approach.

I move amendment S3M-2966.3, to leave out from "the Scottish Government" to end and insert:

"Team UK and in particular the positive approach taken by the new UK Fisheries Minister and the work of the Scottish Government in seeking to negotiate a deal that is fair and just for Scotland's fishing communities, and which will secure sustainable fisheries for Scotland, and commends the Scottish Fishermen's Federation's recent environmental statement and for the leadership and innovation being shown by Scotland's fishermen, demonstrating the way forward for the rest of Europe."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): I point out that, as the debate is fully subscribed, if everyone goes over by a quarter of a minute, someone is going to lose out severely at the end. Members must stick to their time.

10:05

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): As we begin this debate, I feel a sense of déjà vu. Once again, we prepare for Scottish ministers—and UK ministers, whom the Government's motion curiously omits to mention—to go off and do battle in Europe for our fishermen. Notwithstanding that, I welcome the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment's statement that agreement has been reached on marine planning out to 200 miles. Such a move is, on the face of it, a step forward.

However, I regret to say that many issues that have dominated fishing discussions in years past remain. The most important of those issues—which include finding enough fish to catch in the first place, rising costs and the CFP itself—is how to reduce discards effectively. It has been calculated that, between 1992 and 2001 500,000 to 880,000 tonnes of fish were discarded annually into the North Sea. Taking the upper limit of 800,000 tonnes—and bearing in mind that, regrettably, practices have not changed that much—we might conclude that in the past 12 years have caught, killed and wasted almost 1 million tonnes of fish. That is a massive problem.

As a result, we must start to address this issue seriously. The time for talking about this kind of wastage has long gone and serious effort must be put into developing and using better, more effective and more efficient selective gear. To that end, the Scottish Conservatives welcome

September's discards summit as a means of beginning to tackle the problem seriously. Moreover, I welcome the cabinet secretary's comments on the issue and his commitment to a land more, catch less policy.

Although that is an enduring problem that still has to be solved, of more immediate concern to the livelihood of west coast fishermen is the Commission's proposal virtually to close the west coast fisheries this year to assist the recovery of demersal stocks, which have apparently reached critically low levels. In evidence to the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, the cabinet secretary said:

"The scientific knowledge base for the west coast is a lot smaller than it is for other fisheries".—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs and Environment Committee*, 5 November 2008; c 1167.]

If the end result is that fisheries have to be completely closed to allow stocks to recover, the situation as explained by the cabinet secretary seems extraordinary at best and at worst almost negligent.

Richard Lochhead: The member raises an important issue. I should clarify that, unlike the situation in the North Sea, Scotland has a predominant interest in the west coast and very few other nations fish there. As far as sharing scientific responsibility is concerned, we are basically on our own.

John Scott: I do, of course, accept the cabinet secretary's explanation. However, the fact that a suggested closure of this size and scale has crept up unexpectedly on fishermen and Government alike is shocking, and the threatened loss of livelihoods as a result is worse. The displacement of boats from the west to the east coast, where stocks are under pressure, will put at risk the viability of many other fishing businesses and communities, as there will simply not be enough fish to go round. The knowledge gap must be plugged first if we are to safeguard livelihoods.

We must also find ways not only of keeping west coast boats in west coast fisheries but of allowing them to catch at least prawns and scallops in addition to monkfish while keeping to a minimum the bycatch of demersal species, particularly young cod, haddock and whiting. Principles and techniques employed in other fisheries for conserving stock, namely the use of separation grids and increased mesh sizes, might be adaptable for use in the traditionally smaller west coast trawler but, as we know, time is of the essence if any practical measures are to be put in place for this year.

Another problem is west coast herring. A 52 per cent cut has been proposed in stocks, which appear to have reached a critical level. How has

that critical situation developed? Is it a surprise to everyone? I am also concerned that herring stocks are not growing. More research should be carried out into the disappearance of plankton on the west coast and the possibility that climate change is reducing the viability of that precious stock.

I welcome the modest recovery in cod stocks. However, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea's proposal of a complete ban on landing North Sea cod in 2009 is unrealistic and unwelcome. Catching and landing of fish should be permitted, without allowing them to be specifically targeted. If we believe that ending the wasteful discards policy is at least a primary concern—if not the primary concern—we must believe that caught fish must be landed. However, we need to strike a balance between allowing fish to be landed as a bycatch and discouraging the targeting of at-risk species. As a result, the price paid to fishermen has to be enough not just to discourage targeting but to encourage landing. That is what happens in Norway, and more work needs to be carried out in the UK and the EU to allow us to reach that position.

Of course, the situation is more complicated in our warmer waters because the fisheries are more mixed. However, that does not mean that we should not try to find our own formula for achieving a balance and we welcome the conservation credits scheme pioneered in Scotland as a way of dealing with the issue. We are also hugely encouraged that the European Commission is keen for similar methods to be rolled out EU-wide. It is a tremendous tribute to the work of our fishermen.

The cabinet secretary will know that the Commission has proposed a zero TAC for another under-threat species, the spurdog. Although the proposal is well intentioned, it will have the unwelcome effect of guaranteeing the discarding of any spurdog caught as bycatch. That said, the fact remains that Scotland's once-thriving spurdog stocks have been decimated in recent years and are in dire need of recovery.

We welcome the Government's motion, commend our amendment to Parliament and wish the cabinet secretary, his team and the UK Government every success in representing Scotland's best interests in the forthcoming negotiations.

I move amendment S3M-2966.1, to insert at end

“; notes with concern the European Commission's proposals for west coast stocks that, if implemented, could especially damage the viability of the west coast langoustine sector, and therefore calls on the Scottish Government to work towards a settlement that successfully balances the need to conserve depleted west coast whitefish stocks with a thriving langoustine fishery.”

10:11

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): I am delighted to open the debate on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, although I have to say that I feel a little like the warm-up act. More observant members will have noted the presence on the benches behind me of my colleague Ross Finnie, nostalgia and déjà vu doubtless washing over him. I do not for a moment want to compare Mr Finnie to an ageing rock star, but his appearance does have the feel of a comeback gig about it. However, I am sure that I am not alone in looking forward to his speech. His participation today is certainly an appropriate reminder of the historical context to the subject under discussion and to what has become a unique annual ritual in the parliamentary calendar.

As the cabinet secretary is aware, the serious challenges that he and the rest of the UK negotiating team face this year are not unusual. EU negotiations and the December fisheries council have rarely been viewed with anything other than trepidation by our fishing industry and others involved.

Thankfully, we have come some distance since the particularly difficult times that we experienced five or six years ago. However, without some of the tough decisions that were taken at that time, it is inconceivable that any minister would have been in a position to deliver the speech that Mr Lochhead delivered this morning. Although the prospects for certain key stocks are still deeply worrying, the fact that catching capacity is now more in line with available fishing opportunities means that the options open to ministers and officials to secure a deal that is indeed “fair and just” as well as sustainable are immeasurably enhanced.

That difficult period also saw much of the early trialling and promoting of gear selectivity and a range of other technical measures and the development of a more flexible system of managing effort through kilowatt days. The idea of closing certain areas of the sea to fishing at certain times was also being worked up, although early Commission counterproposals on that were blunt and misdirected.

It is encouraging that the industry, in close collaboration with scientists, environmentalists and the Government, has taken forward work on that suite of measures to the point that they are starting to be rolled out. As the Government's motion rightly acknowledges, that is something for which Scotland's fishermen deserve credit for having taken the lead. Like Sarah Boyack, I congratulate the cabinet secretary on his role in that effort, although I caution him against making any suggestion that he has taken on the work from a standing start. Although more must be done to

refine this more sophisticated management regime, not least if we are to address the economic and environmental affront of discards, it is to be hoped that we can start to draw a line under the sort of blunt, one-size-fits-all measures that elevated simplicity over effectiveness.

Key to that shift has been and will continue to be the work of the regional advisory councils. Introduced in the reform package of 2002, the RACs have not all operated as effectively as they might have done, but we are fortunate that the councils that are key to our industry have proved their worth. I trust from his declarations since taking office that Mr Lochhead now regrets dismissing the North Sea RAC as

“nothing short of a worthy but glorified talking shop”.

Richard Lochhead: Will the member give way?

Liam McArthur: I am sure that the cabinet secretary will clarify his position on the matter.

Richard Lochhead: The member might recall that all those years ago the RACs were criticised for not having management powers. Indeed, it was said that such a move would require a treaty change. Does he feel that such a criticism was justified?

Liam McArthur: Liberal Democrats have long argued that RACs must eventually take on more of a management role. There seems to be no reason why that cannot and should not happen.

Commissioner Borg himself admitted to the European Parliament Fisheries Committee recently that micromanagement from the centre does not work. He is right. He is right also to point to the need for fishermen to be given proper incentives—a little more carrot and a little less use of the stick. The conservation credits scheme reflects that, and it is important that such an approach is built into any reform of the CFP, which is now under discussion.

Our negotiating position in the talks on the future of the CFP will not be strengthened by people noising off and suggesting that Scottish ministers are hell-bent on a unilateral withdrawal. Although the First Minister has been cagey of late, the recent consultation paper on quota management was less equivocal. It boldly declared:

“The Scottish Government is seeking to withdraw from the CFP”.

That position is both unrealistic and unhelpful. Although the 2002 CFP reforms did not achieve everything that we would have wanted, the key objectives were secured, not least the safeguarding of relative stability, the Hague preference and the much-cherished Shetland box. Those are fundamental features of the CFP that have served our industry well. They will be under

threat again in any reform negotiations and must be defended at the same time as we argue for even greater regional management of our fisheries.

Of course, there are more immediate priorities. Although the prospects for a number of stocks are fairly promising, there are still serious concerns in some areas. Of particular concern is the situation on the west coast, as John Scott rightly said. The Rural Affairs and Environment Committee took evidence on that recently. Nobody disputes the depleted state of the key white-fish stocks, but a wholesale shutdown of the west coast fisheries is neither sensible nor justified.

John Scott rightly pointed to the threat to the extremely valuable prawn fishery. I agree entirely with the points that he made about a fishery that has been prosecuted sustainably. Those fishing grounds are also crucial to parts of the white-fish fleet, including boats from my constituency as well as from Banff, Macduff and Fraserburgh. A complete closure could force some boats to the wall or displace effort back into the North Sea, neither of which is desirable. I do not expect the cabinet secretary to disclose his negotiating position, but I was encouraged by the reassurances in his opening speech.

Tavish Scott has highlighted concerns about attempts to reduce effort as part of a trade-off for more quota. That could pose a serious threat to the economic viability of the Shetland and Orkney fleets. I hope that the cabinet secretary will bear that in mind as the negotiations progress.

This will be a more consensual debate than those that we have had in the past. Liberal Democrats offer our full support to Scottish ministers and the rest of the UK team in these important negotiations and we are happy to support both the motion and the amendments in the names of Sarah Boyack and John Scott.

I move amendment S3M-2966.2, to insert at end:

“welcomes the work that Scottish fishermen have been taking forward with government, scientists and others over recent years to develop a more sophisticated approach to protecting cod and safeguarding fishing opportunities; recognises that the process of improving stakeholder involvement in EU fisheries policy began with the establishment of the influential regional advisory councils, and calls on the Scottish Government to continue driving forward this regionalised approach as a means of improving fisheries management decisions within the Common Fisheries Policy in the interests of sustaining stocks, Scotland’s fishing fleet and the communities that depend on it.”

10:17

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary’s announcement

this morning of new powers out to the 200-mile limit. His announcement is a welcome relief from what I would otherwise call groundhog day—or, rather, groundhog month. Every year, with monotonous regularity, the EU delivers initial proposals that would be unbelievably damaging to entire communities in Scotland. Then, with equal regularity, subsequent negotiations result in a final determination that pulls back from the more apocalyptic predictions and everyone breathes the annual—partial—sigh of relief. One fishery or another is lined up for annihilation, then a reprieve is offered at the last minute. Frankly, the annual round of brinkmanship is doing the EU no good at all. It is little wonder that the whole CFP is called into question.

We should remember that more than two thirds of the UK fisheries industry is based in Scotland. It is of massive economic importance: the total value of the catch that was landed by Scottish vessels last year sits at £380 million.

In the context of this year's negotiations, it is also worth remembering that there are many ways in which the Scottish industry is a pioneer. For example, our approach to sustainable fisheries is set to be adopted throughout the EU as part of the new cod recovery plan; levels of fishing have been reduced substantially over several years; and further voluntary measures are being taken that will continue to make a difference to cod stocks in the future. Scotland is also the first country in Europe to implement a new cod conservation scheme. Under the voluntary real-time closure scheme, skippers will signal when they encounter lower than expected numbers of cod and the area will be closed. The Government will also close areas where there appear to be too many undersized cod.

Such measures show that there is no lack of willingness to take the issue seriously, but this year—once again—the industry has been initially confronted with a proposal that would amount to almost total shutdown of the west coast fisheries. In an attempt to assist recovery of the whiting, cod and haddock stocks, an effective zero catch suggestion would lead to the destruction of the langoustine trade, which would no doubt be regarded by Brussels as nothing more than collateral damage.

As might be expected, my colleagues from the Western Isles are shocked by the implications of the EU's stance. Indeed, in the debate in the House of Commons last week, Angus Brendan MacNeil commented that it would mean the tie-up of 400 boats from Kinlochbervie southwards—or, perhaps, their appearance in the North Sea, which would be equally unwelcome. Maybe there is room for manoeuvre on that, but approaching negotiations in such an alarmist manner is no way

for the EU to win friends and influence people. Perhaps it has even given up trying.

In passing, I add my voice to the request from other members of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee that, however difficult it might be, the Government ensure that research is conducted into the west coast fisheries. If we are on our own with that one, we had better get the ammunition that we need for the negotiations.

Most people agree that tackling the problem of discards may go some way towards ensuring that cod stocks will recover. Few can regard the existing system as making any sense at all. Chucking back fish that are already dead is of no use to anyone and, frankly, it looks like a criminal waste of food. We need much more information about the level of discards, but we must also ensure that measures are in place to reduce those levels. The cost of discards is enormous. In the North Sea, whitefish vessels discard between 500,000 and 880,000 tonnes of fish every year—that is €75 million-worth and about 42 per cent of total landings in a year. Scottish fishermen alone dump about 100,000 tonnes a year, which is £14 million-worth of fish. That is a lot of fish and a lot of money. It is not just a waste of food; it is also having damaging environmental and ecological effects.

The discards summit in September identified potential solutions involving net-size changes, temporary closures of fisheries and restrictions on the number of days at sea. Those indicate the willingness of the industry to self-police, so it would be interesting to hear whether there has been any response from the EU to that.

I cannot cover all the issues in one speech, but I reiterate the point that I made at the start: Scotland's fisheries make up the greater part of the total UK fishery. Therefore, I cannot see why Scotland's fisheries minister must sit outside the negotiations. It makes no sense at all, regardless of anyone's position on the constitution, and it hampers Scotland's ability to be heard on the issues that are most vital to our industry's future.

Even the Commission acknowledges that the CFP as a whole has been less than successful. It has been criticised as being overcentralised. In that context, the SNP's anti-CFP stance seems, ironically, to be more in keeping with the EU's stance. I ask the other parties in the chamber to reflect on that reality instead of lodging rather silly amendments, such as the Labour amendment, to the motion that we are debating today.

10:23

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in favour of the Labour amendment. We believe that it is important

to highlight the partnership working that we all hope will be successful in achieving progress in the December talks. It is a partnership that, of course, includes the Scottish Government but which also includes the new minister—Huw Irranca-Davies—and Bertie Armstrong and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. It is team UK that is taking the issue forward, not team Scotland.

All partners are united by the need to reduce discarding. During his evidence to the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee earlier this month, the cabinet secretary stated:

"The future cod recovery plan should be based on a regime that allows us to catch less but land more."—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs and Environment Committee*, 5 November 2008; c 1168.]

In last week's debate in the House of Commons, the Minister for the Natural and Marine Environment, Wildlife and Rural Affairs, Huw Irranca-Davies, referred to the very successful conclusion to the first stage of the negotiations at the November Council and stated that

"our Government's approach is to land more and to discard less."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 20 November 2008; Vol 483, c 457.]

Bertie Armstrong described to the committee the

"perversity of cod stocks being nearly as much bother on their way up as they were on their way down."—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs and Environment Committee*, 5 November 2008; c 1148.]

He also described the need for the TAC to match abundance in order to reduce the level of discarding. If the TAC is to be increased, measures must be in place—such as temporary closures and monitoring—to ensure that discarding really is being reduced and that we can prove it.

During the budget discussions last year, my colleague Karen Gillon argued for assistance to be provided to fishermen to enable them to purchase new gear, such as nets that are designed to reduce the catch of unintended species. Those may be nets with larger mesh sizes that allow juveniles through or nets that are designed to enable certain fish that swim in a particular way—such as cod, which swim downwards when they are caught in a net—to escape.

In January, the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee's report to the Finance Committee on stage 2 of the Budget (Scotland) Bill recommended that a significant proportion of the marine management budget line should be set aside in the first year of the spending review to support the fishing industry in progressing its commitment to sustainable fisheries by, for example, adopting use of the best available gear in order to reduce by-catches and discards.

When I raised the issue of funding for new gear with the cabinet secretary this month, he advised me that funding is available for trials through the Government's partnership with the SFF, and that fishermen can also qualify for grants for new gear through the European fisheries fund. Will the minister provide further information on that funding route when he sums up?

I will deal now with species that are less familiar to most of the population, but which are affected by fishing practice, although they are not the main focus of the forthcoming negotiations. Sharks do not generally inspire the same level of affection as other well-known endangered species but, as the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network and the save our sharks campaign have demonstrated, many of our native shark species are now endangered.

Commercial recreational sea anglers release their catches alive back into the sea. They recycle fish but like commercial fishermen, they also make a valuable contribution to remote and rural communities. Those fishermen have monitored dramatic reductions in the populations of sharks, skate and ray in Scottish waters. Many of the species that were once plentiful in the Solway Firth, for example, are now rarely to be found.

The removal of one species from the marine environment can have unexpected consequences on other species that inhabit the same waters. Spurdog, which John Scott referred to, were targeted by commercial fisheries in the late 1980s—for the purposes of their sale as an edible fish, they were known as rock salmon. The population was decimated within five years, but as a result of the removal of that predator, whiting stocks in Luce Bay thrived. The whiting, in turn, preyed on the flatfish population, which has still not recovered from that period.

Tope is in the frame as a commercial species, partly because of the market for shark fins for shark fin soup. This year, the UK Government and the Welsh Assembly have regulated to prohibit commercial fishing of tope. It is disappointing that Scottish ministers have refused to give the same protection to the species in Scottish waters but instead intend to wait until ICES states that the species is at risk.

The European Commission proposes to set zero TAC limits for spurdog and porbeagle and to prohibit retention of angel sharks, common sharks, unguulate rays and white skates. It is also proposed that existing skate and ray quotas be reduced by 25 per cent and that new TACs be introduced for those species in currently unregulated areas. I would like to hear Scottish ministers' views on that. Ministers have stated in answers to written questions that there should be no fisheries that are directed to commercial fishing of elasmobranchs—

as rays and sharks are collectively known—but that small, unavoidable by-catches should be landed. I disagree with John Scott's view, but the issue needs to be discussed. We need to think about how "small" and "unavoidable" are to be defined, and what will happen to those by-catches. Will they be sold commercially? If so, how do we prevent the creation of a commercial market for those species and stop them being targeted, albeit that the number in Scottish waters is low? I am sure that such topics will be on the agenda of the cabinet secretary's meeting with the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network on 11 December.

I am pleased to support the amendment in Sarah Boyack's name, and ask ministers to consider some of the points that I have raised.

10:28

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am grateful for the chance to speak once again in a fisheries debate. However, rather than speak about fish, I wish to speak about the people who fish for them and the people on the mainland whose jobs depend on the industry: we should never forget that for every job at sea there are four on land. Fishing is one of Scotland's most important primary industries, so it is absurd that the Scottish fishing fleet, which has done more for conservation measures than any other fleet in Europe, has continually to bear more pain than any other fleet in the EU.

I am well aware of the impact that the meteoric rise in fuel prices—which doubled between 2007 and 2008 from 30p to 60p a litre for marine diesel—had on the fishing industry, particularly on smaller vessels, many of which simply had to stop fishing. Fuel prices have since reduced, but we must ensure that our Government is better prepared should that happen again, especially as fishermen from other member states received direct help with their fuel costs through de minimis aid payments, which also put our fishing people at a competitive disadvantage.

Others have mentioned the appalling waste and the damage to the marine environment that are caused by discards. Can any member justify throwing dead fish back into the sea? It makes a mockery of the CFP.

I would like to concentrate on the problems on the west coast and sector VI A. In the north-west, we still have 10 large boats fishing for white fish off the edge of the shelf on the 100 fathom contour line. The Commission proposes to close all fishing for white fish inside the line and to make boats that fish for prawns inside the line use grids to stop any white fish from going into the net. I am sure that the minister will have talked to prawn fishermen who will have told him that it is pretty much

impossible for the smaller boats that use power blocks to use those grids. As the minister knows, those 10 large vessels in the north-west will be tied to days next year, which means that, when the kilowatt days that those boats have saved in the past run out, they will have insufficient days to make a living. Ironically, French and Spanish boats that are fishing in sector VI A will not be tied to days because their catch of cod is under 5 per cent—according to them.

Basically, in that case, unless the minister can secure extra quota of monkfish and megrim for our fleet, he will be leaving that area of the north-west coast to French and Spanish boats at the expense of our own fleet. I know that the minister said that foreign vessels do not fish that area—I presume that he was referring to dedicated prawn vessels rather than to whitefish vessels. Will he please fight for the extra quota for monkfish and megrim, in order to give those fishermen a chance to earn a living?

Because of the under 5 per cent rule, the smaller artisanal boats that fish for prawns in sector VI A will be able to continue to fish. However, because of the new cod recovery plan, the effort on the west coast is facing a reduction of 25 per cent. The cod recovery plan proposes to eliminate that reduction in return for good behaviour. The rules for this buy-back must be rapidly established, and those groups of fishermen that might benefit from the entitlement should be consulted. Will the minister please do that as soon as possible? Will he consult the west coast fishing associations on that as a matter of utmost urgency? It has been pointed out to me that the cod recovery plan allows the possibility of excusing from the plan vessels that catch less than 1.5 per cent of cod. If that turns out to be practical, it should be taken further, with a view to implementation.

Earlier, I mentioned the grids that the EU wants Scottish fishermen to use. The fishermen do not think a great deal of the idea—in fact, the chairman of one association suggested implementing a grid to eliminate a large proportion of MEPs' expenses. If the proposal is not amended, it will prohibit scallop fishing altogether.

There are two main questions. First, is the grid appropriate for the west coast, in conservation and practical terms? Secondly, even if it is, is there a net configuration that could be adopted that would avoid having to use the grid? Square-mesh panels are a good conservation measure and could be made to work better if they were put nearer to the cod end of the net. I know that fishermen in mixed fisheries—that is, demersal and prawns—do not want a square-mesh panel of above 110mm, and they want a cod-end mesh of a minimum of 80mm. However, the Clyde Fishermen's Association has

proposed for the clean nephrops fishery—which has an extremely small by-catch—a non-mandatory alternative of 160mm square-mesh panel set closer to the back end of the net.

That proposal fits in well with the good-behaviour practice that would allow prawn fishing to continue. It also fits in with the European Commission's proposal that a more flexible approach is required to allow genuine conservation measures to be taken where they are most needed, while helping the industry to benefit from recovery once that recovery has taken root. It is vital that the minister consider that matter. I am somewhat horrified to see that the 2008 autumn fisheries negotiation paper, which is headed "UK Priorities", has no reference whatsoever to the west coast closure. That is simply scandalous, so I hope that the minister will highlight that dangerous situation.

Richard Lochhead: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No—the member is just concluding his remarks.

Jamie McGrigor: In fact, I had just concluded them, Presiding Officer.

10:34

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): I welcome this morning's announcement that marine planning and conservation are to extend to 200 miles. As a former fisheries minister, I remember beginning elementary negotiations in which the concept of marine planning was much misunderstood and great efforts were made, largely by Scottish civil servants, to explain the concept and why it was naive to believe that simply linking conservation and fisheries would be sufficient. A risk always existed that if a planning regime was superimposed at a later date, Scotland's absolute right to control its sea fisheries could be totally disrupted. Therefore, the news is welcome.

We are back at the annual round of negotiations about which I probably have a greater sense of déjà vu than any other member. I am sorry that Roseanna Cunningham has left the chamber, because she spoke about something that many people pick up on—the somewhat alarming news that always comes at the beginning of the process. We must always be cautious about such information, because it is largely founded on the advice from ICES, which is, after all, scientific advice. If a scientist finds that a stock is in a state of collapse, it would not be expected that he would say other than that he believes that, in extremis, stopping the fishery is probably the best solution. I have always thought that it would be better to await outcomes from the scientific, technical and economic committee for fisheries, which asks how

proposals will impact on communities, before we start to draw unnecessary conclusions.

I welcome the fact that the European Commissioner for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, Joe Borg, continues to show interest in reshaping the CFP into a more decentralised model. That is reflected in how he has approached the changes to the cod recovery plan. I also welcome the fact that Scotland, whose civil servants have operated in, and at the head of, the committees that consider fishing conservation, has been able to progress the conservation credit scheme and to build on earlier work. I say to Jamie McGrigor that, in 2006, Scotland specially designed the panel at the rear end of the cod net to prevent juvenile cod mixing with nephrops. I am sure that the minister already knows that there is evidence on that, and that it will form part of his negotiations on the threat to the west coast nephrops fishery.

Jamie McGrigor: Does Ross Finnie agree that it is possible to improve the square-mesh panel so that it is better than the grid, which the fishermen do not seem to want?

Ross Finnie: I do not wish to become controversial with fishermen; I am more interested in what the scientists have to say. The scientists positioned the cod panel as far to the rear as is possible without the net becoming unstable. It was proved to the European Commission that that worked, and the Commission accepted its impact.

I am pleased that agreement is beginning to be reached on discards. However, the cabinet secretary is well aware that one difficulty among many in dealing with that complex issue is that landing more fish is complicated by our need to maintain relative stability across member states, in the allocation of catches across TACs, and across producer organisations. That adds pressure to getting agreement on such a critical matter.

I am concerned for three reasons about the new plan setting the target rate for F—fish mortality—at 25 per cent in year 1, one of which is historical. Finding that a target had been set that was very difficult to achieve in year 1 has always been a bugbear. This year's ICES report states that the biomass precautionary point

"cannot be achieved in two years even with a zero catch."

Therefore, I am concerned that increasing the spawning stock biomass—the SSB—consistent with an improvement in F of 25 per cent is a tall order. It is always important to try to give the fishing fleet a sense of stability. If that is not achieved, things are more difficult.

It is clear that the west coast is the problem of the year. As the minister has said, the ICES advice is not acceptable. As I said, the STECF points at least to the opening of the negotiation

door, although the TAC reductions that it has referred to will be difficult to achieve.

Scotland has always entered the negotiations better prepared than any other fishing nation, and Commissioner Borg is a much more rational and pragmatic commissioner than other commissioners in the recent past have been. Given the Scottish Government's armoury and its ability to propose constructive technical measures—its excellent officials have always been prepared to do that—we may make progress, but solutions will not be easy, because dealing with collapsing fishing stocks and the competing social pressures of fishing communities is not an easy circle to square.

10:41

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): As members know, I am a Lossie loon fae a fishin toon. Therefore, I would like to start by telling a story about Lossie, which has a long fishing history.

Some 202 years ago, on 25 December 1806, Lossie suffered a fishing disaster. The disaster was really the Stotfield disaster—Stotfield was a small village to the west of Lossie, which has now been incorporated into it. On that Christmas day, the village lost its fleet of three fishing boats in a violent storm. Each skaffie boat had a crew of seven—there were 21 men and youths. The morning was fair when the boats set sail for the fishing ground, which was just a mile or two offshore, but the weather took a dramatic turn for the worse, and violent winds from the south-west blew the boats away from land and down the firth. The boats were overcome by the storm's violence, and the village lost all its able-bodied men and youths in one afternoon. The boats and men, who had the shoreline in view, were never seen again, and the village was left with 17 widows, 47 orphaned children and two old men. Stotfield never recovered from the disaster, and no fishing boats have set sail on Christmas day since then.

I have told that story because the disaster is talked about in Lossie to this day. It illustrates the lengthy and strong connection to the sea and fishing that places such as Lossie and other Scottish communities have. Unfortunately, such links are being broken; indeed, they will soon be merely history if we do not ensure that our fishing industry is supported and developed. I do not know whether the marina in Lossie will ever be converted again into a busy fishing port, but I know that the Scottish National Party Government, unlike our unionist colleagues, who have presided over the destruction of our fishing industry, will do all that it can to ensure the survival of that industry.

Liam McArthur: Will the member take an intervention?

Dave Thompson: No. I do not have much time.

Labour's amendment mentions team UK leading us. Is that the same team UK that created the credit crunch and has led us into recession?

The Tories started the destruction of fishing when Ted Heath's Westminster Government sold out our fishing industry in negotiations to enter the European Economic Community in the 1970s. The callousness of their approach was revealed in a memo from senior civil servants that described our fishing communities as "expendable". That is why the people who live in places such as Lossie no longer vote Tory.

Labour and the Liberals have been no better: their Scottish coalition consistently let down our fishing communities in eight years of tugging forelocks to Westminster. In that time, those parties managed to lose 1,000 Scottish fishing boats, 3,000 Scottish fishermen's jobs and more than 1,000 fish processing jobs.

Ross Finnie: Will the member take an intervention?

Dave Thompson: No. I do not have much time.

During the Labour-Liberal coalition's period in office, the Scottish white-fish fleet was reduced by two thirds, while other EU countries, such as Spain and Ireland and non-EU countries such as Iceland and the Faroes, expanded their fleets. The Liberals now want to compound the folly of their years in power by supporting the common fisheries policy, which has been a disaster for Scotland. That is despite the fact that Tavish Scott has consistently rubbished the common fisheries policy in the past. Supporting the CFP will go down like a lead float in the Highlands and Islands. However, every cloud has a silver lining—even fewer members who support that policy will be returned to Parliament after the next election.

Despite the unionist cabal's best efforts, we still have a fishing industry that contributes immensely to the Scottish economy. In the Highlands and Islands, where 66 per cent of the Scottish fleet is based, the value of landings is £144 million. Fishing directly supports 2,800 jobs there and Highlands and Islands Enterprise estimates that it supports as many as 2,200 jobs indirectly.

Fishing is particularly important on the west coast. That is why the European Commission's ludicrous proposal to reduce to zero the number of white fish that are caught there must be defeated. I was pleased to hear the cabinet secretary's robust views on that. The proposal would have a particularly bad impact on prawn boats. As Jamie McGrigor said, they would require to be fitted with

a special plastic grid to retain prawns and allow white fish to escape.

The proposal would affect about 350 vessels and cause severe financial hardship to hard-pressed fishing communities, which have already suffered because of high fuel prices in the summer. Such grids are not even usable on many west coast vessels, which tend to be 10m to 15m long and to operate with low engine power and small crews. If grids were adopted, such boats would be unable to fish.

The grids become easily blocked with weeds and debris, which leads to a loss of catch. They have serious safety issues—Danish fishermen stopped using them after they became stuck in power blocks. According to fishermen, a better solution to the problem is square-mesh panels in place of grids—that has been mentioned—and spatial closure of fisheries at spawning times, to reduce discards of juvenile cod, haddock and whiting.

The market situation is dire, because the credit crunch is affecting consumers on the continent. Our cold stores are full of prawns, the crab market has collapsed and lobster is at £10.50 a kilogram, compared with £16 a kilogram last year.

I know that Richard Lochhead and our pro-fishing SNP Government will do their best to safeguard Scotland's fishing. They should have the lead in the forthcoming talks, because two thirds of the UK's fishing industry is based in Scotland, although I cannot see that happening, short of independence.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member must wind up.

Dave Thompson: Happen it will an it's nae far awa.

10:47

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I will discard the previous speech and return to the more consensual tone of the debate hitherto. I have reflected on the debate that we had last year, which showed a growing consensus not just among the parties in the Parliament but among the UK Government, fishing organisations, conservation bodies and the Scottish Government acting in concert on the policy direction for the fishing industry's future. There is little debate among us all about the need for greater action on discards; the need for more technical measures; the important benefit to the whole scene of real-time closures of fisheries; and the benefit of having observers on boats. There is much debate about the detail but little debate about the policy direction. That is a good thing.

Recently, I have been encouraged that the European Commission has bought into that consensus. It has shown welcome signs of being interested in the approach that has developed for many years in Scotland, as Liam McArthur said. That consensus appears to be holding—with one or two wobbly moments, which we might just have detected.

In the evidence that the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee has heard in recent weeks, I have detected almost no disagreement between the Scottish Government and the UK Government's negotiating line. Fishing organisations felt involved in the development of the UK line and everybody has been moving in the same direction. In any negotiation in which different parties come to the table, differences in emphasis and nuances in arguments will always exist, but it is generally good when all parts of the UK head in the same direction on such important matters. That should give us grounds for optimism.

However, we must continue to be realistic about the challenges that we face throughout Europe and more widely on our fish stocks. The sad truth is that, despite the encouraging signs in some areas and in some fishery sectors, the overall state of stocks is not good. People are generally optimistic that things are on the turn in cod stocks and that we can make further progress, but WWF Scotland reminds us in its briefing for today's debate that, despite the signs of recovery in the North Sea following a strong year group in 2005, 84 per cent of the international landings in 2007 consisted of juvenile cod between the ages of one and three. That means that only 12 per cent of the two-year-old cod of the 2005 year class will survive to maturity. WWF also reminds us that, despite the focus on reducing discards and the welcome measures to do that, the level of discards in 2008 was even higher than that in previous years.

There is still much more to do. We can advance, but we cannot be cavalier in doing so. In some traditional waters, to which members have referred—I will talk about the west coast—agreement appears to be widespread that the state of whiting, haddock and cod is alarmingly poor. It is clear that the reasons for that are not fully understood.

However optimistic we are about progress on policy and on working methods, we need to continue to apply the precautionary principle to how we advance the policy. The advice to the Commission from ICES takes that approach, to which Ross Finnie referred. However, the Commission and national negotiators also need to decide on the actions that follow scientific advice—they need to factor in practical, social and economic considerations. The Commission has

traditionally staked out firm and sometimes alarming positions early in the process, but it is a negotiation, so some movement will always take place. In any negotiation, movement might have to be on more than one side.

Movement is still required from the Commission on the west coast plans, to which other members have referred. The Commission's original signal that it would close the entire fishery was unacceptable. We still need to close a deal that continues effort at current levels in the nephrops fishery. We are having problems with white-fish stocks, but prawn, megrim and monkfish stocks appear to be capable of continued exploitation.

We must ensure that technical measures suit the fishery, as others have said. The proposal to use separator grids in nets in that fishery is unworkable. However, fishermen already use square-mesh panels. They would be happy with further advances in such panels, if that were necessary to secure a deal. If that were necessary in the short term to secure a deal, I would be interested in hearing the cabinet secretary address the measures that he could take to support the industry to make such a dramatic change.

West coast fishermen have a bycatch problem not with cod but with dogfish. In last year's negotiations and agreement, a 5 per cent dogfish bycatch was accepted. The problem is that the agreement resulted in increased discards. If the 5 per cent were applied over the whole year, it would be workable and a reduced bycatch would be deliverable, but that is not the case for a 5 per cent measurement per landing. I hope that that will be picked up in the next negotiations. I am pleased that Sarah Boyack's discussions with UK ministers on the west coast issues have revealed not only that they understand the issues but that they are willing to work with the industry to find solutions.

Scientific knowledge about what is happening in the west coast fishery is in a poor state. The lack of such knowledge could hamper future negotiations. I note what the cabinet secretary said and I would be grateful if he could say what more we can do to improve that scientific knowledge and therefore the capacity to secure deals in the future.

We need to convince the Commission that the constructive and helpful measures that are being taken in Scotland will deliver in the long term. I hope that the cabinet secretary will address what we can do through transparency and openness to reassure the Commission that what we are doing in Scotland is not just good but successful.

10:53

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): My speech was originally going to be something of a jeremiad but, after listening to the debate, I have taken some comfort from much of what has been said. When I first saw the SNP's motion, I was concerned about the complacency that seemed to be inherent in it. As Sarah Boyack said, the motion does not contain much with which to disagree, but it is so short that it does not contain much to agree with, either. However, it has left room for an informative debate.

I note that the European Commission's directorate-general for maritime affairs and fisheries said in a communiqué last month that ecological sustainability must have top priority because it is the basis for social and economic benefits. The word "ecological" is missing from the SNP's motion. If the motion referred to ecological sustainability, I would be more impressed.

Given that it was not accepted for debate, I cannot speak to my amendment to the motion, but I will skim through it briefly. After that, I will comment on aspects of the speeches that have been given thus far. I sought to add at the end of the motion:

"acknowledges that, while progress has been made in moving to more sustainable practices, these are still at a very early stage and much more work is required; understands that the scale of damage to our marine ecosystems leaves no room for any level of complacency whatsoever; recognises the huge challenges that face European fisheries ministers as they negotiate this year's round of fisheries talks, especially given that most of the world's fish stocks, including those in European waters, are low-to-endangered; believes, therefore, that it is important to undertake a suite of measures to prevent discards, such as encouraging greater use of selective fishing gear, banning of the most destructive fishing technologies, greater coverage of onboard observers and the temporary closure of fishing grounds to prevent the capture of juvenile or spawning fish, especially to support cod recovery, no-take zones and days in port".

Many of those things are being done, although on-board observers and no-take zones have not been mentioned and days in port have been mentioned just once.

My amendment concluded:

"and believes that it is important to negotiate a deal that is fair, profitable and sustainable for all of Europe's fisheries in order to restore all European marine ecosystems and secure sustainable fisheries for the foreseeable future."

When the cabinet secretary takes part in the negotiations at European level, it is important that he presents the progress that we have made and tries to persuade the rest of Europe to follow our example. He must not allow that aim to be swamped by the many concerns about specific Scottish fisheries that have been expressed today, many of which are reasonable, or by the many

other concerns that he will carry with him. Our fishermen are leading the way in Europe but, given how far other European fisheries are from achieving the restoration of an ecologically sound and secure marine ecosystem, that is not particularly challenging.

I have some questions for the cabinet secretary, some of which he may be able to address in his summing up, although that will depend on the state of Government monitoring. Does he know how many boats use the new nets that reduce still further the catch of non-targeted species and undersized fish? Will he build on the progress that we have made in order that we can reach the point of being able to commit unequivocally to making ecological sustainability the key aim of his fisheries management policy?

Some time ago, the cabinet secretary announced his welcome commitment to a land more, catch less strategy. How is that being monitored? How will future progress be monitored? For example, when I last asked for details of temporary closures, they seemed to be few in number and not particularly significant. However, I understand that he may have better news to impart. Also, have any skippers been cautioned for breaking the voluntary limitations on activity? How is compliance in that regard being ensured?

I turn to members' speeches in the debate. Liam McArthur mentioned catching capacity, saying that it is more in line with available fishing opportunities. I am not certain of that. As everybody knows, catching capacity is measured by the total power of the engines in the Scottish fleet. Indeed, that is the most sensible way in which to measure it. Members need to be careful not to cite the total number of boats when speaking about the impact of the fleet; they should instead cite total power. In answer to a recent parliamentary question, I was informed that total power has decreased by roughly 1 per cent per annum since 1996 and yet, subsequent to the registering of a boat, no monitoring is done of current engine power.

I was very impressed by much of what the cabinet secretary said in his speech. I am also impressed with his achievements so far and I wish him all the best in the negotiations. However, I departed from agreement with him at the point at which he spoke about leaving the CFP. That is an irrelevant fantasy. We cannot do it. He should not waste the chamber's time in talking about it.

11:00

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): The other day, I was contemplating what it is that Governments do. I did not do so in a desperately

philosophical vein, given that I am not a desperately philosophical man but, at a practical level, I thought about what Governments can actually achieve. My conclusion was that, in the general run of things, Governments should try to smooth out the perturbations that come along in life, in recognition of the fact that they cannot resist trends. Recently, we have discovered a substantial perturbation in our economic system. If we had seen it coming—a few did—more proactive actions might have reduced the perturbation, but the trends, including long-term economic trends and the effects of technology, are irresistible, and we know it.

The same thing applies to the North Sea and all our marine waters: we cannot resist the trends, whether they are climatic, technological or ecological. We may never understand much that goes on in our seas, but Governments should try to smooth out the perturbations as we go along.

Today is the first time that I have taken part in the annual fisheries debate. Clearly, the problem in debating the issue is the fact that the negotiations are held on an annual cycle. That is simply far too short a timescale within which to debate the kind of things that we are discussing today. I am not being critical; I understand that that is what we have to do and that the cabinet secretary has to work with the timescale, as was the case for his predecessors. However, although I understand it and agree that it is right, an awful lot of what has been said is too short term. I encourage the chamber, the cabinet secretary and his advisers to think more about the longer term.

Liam McArthur: I am sure that the member will take some reassurance from the fact that the CFP reform that is going forward features the idea of multiannual programmes and plans.

Nigel Don: Yes. I recognise that that is how folk see it.

If we are prepared to look that little bit further ahead, we should be able to envisage, somewhere in the future, a more stable fisheries environment. I am talking not about having an environment in which the numbers are the same every year—that is not what stability is about; everything in the natural world has its oscillations—but about taking the longer-term view.

Surely by now, Government and its scientific advisers should be able to say, "If we sort it out on the way, perhaps in 10 years' time, these are the kinds of stock levels that we could have." I do not know whether the timescale will be five, 10 or 20 years—the people who know about fisheries will know that. All I know is that, by now, we should be able to look forward to the time when we have a relatively stable environment. The projections may

not be desperately accurate, but if we can do the numbers, we will start to see how many fish we can pull out of the water, how many boats will be needed and what the economics of that will look like. In that way, we can see what the total industry that is sustainable for the long term will look like. All of that is simple maths.

I see no evidence that anyone has the numbers. I assume that people have started to do them and that they have started to do the modelling. In calling for that, I am neither asking for the unimagined nor expressing any particularly imaginative or far-ranging thoughts. If we can do the numbers, in future we should start to see where we are, what short-term changes need to be made and where we expect to go to. All of that will, of course, be modified as time goes by.

Instead of talking annually about the disaster that scientists are predicting, about the stance that the EU is taking and about this or that fishery—all of which is relevant, of course—we ought to be saying, “This is where we are, this is roughly where we think we are going and this is the kind of chart we could plot.” Is that asking too much? I do not think so. The only other member who said that was Ross Finnie. Perhaps it is because he was the fisheries minister in the past, but he was the only member to say that we have to look to the longer term.

I agree absolutely with John Scott about the need for research into plankton levels. Other members have mentioned the need for research. When we put together a model of how the seas work—which is surely not beyond our scientific communities—and put numbers into that, we ought to be able to see where we could go and be better at plotting how to get there, instead of having annual negotiations at which everyone throws in numbers. I commend Scottish fishermen on what they are doing. I also commend the cabinet secretary and his predecessors on getting us into a position where Scotland is leading the way, through all the schemes that have been mentioned—I have no desire to repeat them, as I normally would. However, as members will have understood, I am concerned that we should find a longer-term model to which we can work.

11:05

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I rise to support the amendment in the name of Sarah Boyack. Like other members, I wish the minister well in the negotiations that will take place imminently.

Although Scotland has a population of just over 5 million out of a UK population of around 60 million, Scotland's fisheries account for almost 80 per cent of the UK's fishing activity. Fisheries are

the mainstay of some of the most peripheral rural communities in Scotland and Europe, and a sustainable industry is vital for the future of all of us. It is right to remember in this debate that, across the ages, fishermen have faced genuine dangers every day—dangers such as those that led to the tragic loss of the Solway Harvester. Our hearts go out to the families who have suffered tragic losses over the ages at the mercy of the sea. Many fishing communities besides Lossiemouth have experienced losses. One such is Eyemouth, where I had the privilege of standing as Labour's candidate at the Westminster elections in 1997. It was salutary for me to learn about fishing life in that community, and the lesson has remained with me.

During my term of office as vice-president of the North Sea Commission, which ended in 1999, I learned much about the fishing industry. The commission embraced all the countries around the North Sea and included a major thematic group on fisheries, which continues to the present day. At that time, Drew Ratter became a well-known figure in other EU countries, representing the views of Scottish fishermen. I was also a member of the European Committee that reported to the Parliament on how the common fisheries policy should be renegotiated.

It is helpful that a debate takes place before the European Union's December fisheries council, as that gives all of us an opportunity to shape the way in which negotiations proceed. I am aware that 2009 is important because of the introduction of a marine bill and the consultation that has been initiated on improvements to the common fisheries policy.

When reading the *Official Report* of the annual fisheries debate in the House of Commons, I was interested to note that the fisheries council had reached agreement on a revised cod delivery plan. We know that there are other headline priorities—whiting, nephrops and west of Scotland white fish—that are of major importance not only for Scotland but for the UK industry as a whole. We all want to see more cod landed and sold, and fewer caught and thrown away—more landed, fewer killed.

Some say that there needs to be more focus on the EU-Norway negotiations, which are viewed as crucial, and that the December fisheries council should be left simply to carve up what has been agreed. It is argued that the EU-Norway talks are of such importance that they merit direct input from politicians, rather than just officials. I know that Huw Irranca-Davies is involved at ministerial level, for the talks are pivotal, not least in deciding what will happen to total allowable catch adjustments. I hope that Richard Lochhead is involved in those meetings. I will be interested to

learn from him when he winds up how many times he has met Huw Irranca-Davies and how he reports back to the Parliament on those meetings.

At the Westminster fisheries debate, Huw Irranca-Davies spoke about the important upcoming review of the common fisheries policy. He said:

"I want the UK to play a key role in shaping the reform agenda."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 20 November 2008; Vol 483, c 395.]

I agree with Robin Harper that it would be very wrong for us to pull out of the common fisheries policy. Labour in the Parliament believes that the CFP needs to have a stronger focus on delivering outcomes that secure both the conservation of fish stocks and long-term economic viability for fishermen and associated industries. We believe in the emphasis on long-term management planning and better stakeholder involvement, and the move away from a one-size-fits-all approach towards stronger regional involvement, to which many members have referred. There is immense potential for regions to play a major role in the regionalised strategy towards which Europe is moving. I strongly disagree with all those who say that we should withdraw from the CFP—many people do not realise that that would mean our having to leave the EU.

I ask members to reflect on the finance that the EU and Brussels have provided regularly to help our fishing communities. For example, last year, it was announced that the Highlands and Islands would get about one third of the money that would come to Scotland from a new fund set up by Brussels to support the fishing industry. The European fisheries fund was to hand out £39 million to fishing and aquaculture, to help the industries to modernise and to make them more competitive. Almost £12.5 million of the Scottish cash was to be delivered to the north of Scotland. The money went initially to the Scottish Government, and it was expected that the Government would invite applications for grants that year, after it had sorted out its priorities. It would be interesting to learn how much of that money the Scottish Government has granted to the fishing industry in Scotland in the past year.

Scotland was to receive 40 per cent of the total funding for the UK under the scheme. Given that Scotland's fishing activity accounts for 80 per cent of UK activity, I am surprised that the minister, Richard Lochhead, negotiated only 40 per cent—why not 80 per cent? I am pleased to note that the European Commission has approved the UK operational programme and that the scheme is up and running.

Richard Lochhead: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The member is in her last minute.

Helen Eadie: More than £100 million has been provided to improve sustainability and to provide marketing and technology to help the fleet to adapt. I hope that the minister will ensure that Scotland's fishermen receive a fair share of that European funding—80 per cent, not 40 per cent.

11:11

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): Today's debate has been mainly good. The cabinet secretary and Sarah Boyack recognised that our fishermen have worked hard to develop and adhere to sustainable fishing methods. Scottish waters are some of the richest in Europe. Elaine Murray gave a long list of the fish that are in our seas—who knows, with a change of habit and climate, we may see piranhas in Palnackie one day, although that is doubtful.

Fishing is an economic mainstay in many parts of Scotland. We have witnessed a large-scale decrease in employment in the industry, due to restrictions on tonnage, but parts of the area that I represent, the South of Scotland, still have an interest in fisheries. They include Eyemouth, which experienced a disaster rather worse than the Lossiemouth disaster that was mentioned; coastal Berwickshire; East Lothian; and, to the south-west, Annan, Solway and the Ayrshire coast. The industry is vital to retaining population and maintaining viable communities—Jamie McGrigor focused on that issue.

Liam McArthur stated that we need to ensure that there is a balance between economic activity and profitability. The aim should be to have a sea fishing industry that is sustainable and profitable, to support communities. The industry must be allowed to use quotas sensibly, while meeting commitments to conservation. That is a difficult balance to strike.

It has been recognised today that the Scottish fishing sector has already made a substantial contribution to achieving the sustainable management of cod stocks—that has been evident recently, even under the three-year plan. It is clear that cod stocks are heading in the right direction, thanks to the efforts of our fleet. Many members, including John Scott, have noted that increases in total allowable catch for cod must be part of any solution. Combined with other measures such as changes to net size, that approach will reduce the number of discards; prevent the catching of juvenile fish, spawning fish and non-target species; and help to create an economically sustainable sector. Nigel Don was right to suggest that we need to look even further into the future than we are looking at the moment.

In the coastal waters of Berwickshire, vessels are reliant on nephrops, which many speakers have mentioned—especially langoustines. By value, langoustines are probably the single most economically important species that the Scottish fishing industry catches. In 2005, landings were worth £38.5 million, compared with £22.5 million or thereabouts for haddock. Rightly, many members have mentioned the west coast problem, which is serious, but in Berwickshire fishermen are concerned about recent Commission proposals to reduce some North Sea catches by up to 15 per cent—a reduction of 13 per cent is proposed for the crucial langoustine catch in the area. A cut of that size would have an impact on the livelihoods of fishermen in Berwickshire. I would like to hear from the cabinet secretary how it is proposed to fight the case for the Berwickshire fleet. Like others, that fleet has had to bear increases in fuel costs, as Jamie McGrigor mentioned. The proposed catch reduction will do nothing to help those fishermen, and I question the science behind it. In his discussions with Joe Borg, will the cabinet secretary be resisting the proposed reduction which, if it is applied, will press even further an already hard-pressed sector?

My colleague Michael Moore MP and I have been campaigning on the draft European fisheries fund programme and its implications for Eyemouth and the Berwickshire coast. In particular, we have sought fisheries-dependent area status for Berwickshire and the creation of local committees of industry representatives to oversee the allocation of programme funds. I am delighted to say that it looks as though the hard work of many people in the industry, including the Scottish Fishermen's Federation and the Anglo-Scottish Fishermen's Association, has paid off, as it seems that the developments that I have mentioned have been achieved.

Axis 4 funding, together with local control of spending, will be crucial for areas such as Berwickshire, because that will build on the sector that is already there. It will provide support for diversification and will potentially attract inward investment, from tourism initiatives for example. The goal is the long-term sustainable development of coastal communities. I hope that efforts in that regard will provide another opportunity for people in fishing communities.

The good work of my colleague Liam McArthur, who recently met Joe Borg in Strasbourg, has been well outlined today. The Liberal Democrats' position is clear: the SNP must make a strong case for Scotland, as part of the UK. I am glad to hear that Scotland now has jurisdiction out to 200 miles, which Ross Finnie and the Liberal Democrats have long argued for in order to have more regional management of our fisheries. Our past involvement in setting up the influential

regional advisory councils, with Ross Finnie, was an integral part of that process. We need to continue to make progress there.

We have consistently argued for further reform of the common fisheries policy to give local fishermen and other stakeholders a better say in the management of their own regional waters. Dave Thompson must have had his head in the sand when he was speaking earlier. The industry must be quite disgusted by his poor contribution. Liam McArthur noted that, when regional advisory councils were introduced, both the SNP and the Tories described them as glorified but toothless talking shops. That is not the case.

I hope that the cabinet secretary will make the defence of Scotland's fisheries sector as strongly as the Liberal Democrats did in the past—and will continue to do. I welcome the extension of jurisdiction to 200 miles and the work that is being done on discards. I look forward to having a sustainable fishing industry in the long term.

11:17

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):

The December fisheries council will once again be of crucial importance to Scotland's fishing communities, particularly those on the west coast. Today's debate has fairly reflected the issues of concern that the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee raised and were agreed on by all parties.

We are happy to commend the work that has been done on sustainable fishing. We particularly praise the leadership that Scotland's fishermen have shown over the past year, following the acceptance last November by the European Commission of a different approach to the management of species such as cod, founded on mortality-based targets rather than biomass-based targets.

It is good news that the conservation credits scheme, which was piloted by Scottish fishermen, has been such a success that the Commission is set to roll out a similar approach EU-wide next year. We were also very pleased to hear this morning about the co-operation on marine planning between all the UK Administrations, which will be welcomed by all who depend on our seas for their livelihoods.

We are extremely concerned, however, that the Commission's proposals for west coast stocks could severely damage the nephrops sector, which is worth more than £30 million to the west coast economy, hence our amendment stresses the importance of achieving

"a settlement that successfully balances the need to conserve depleted west coast whitefish stocks with a thriving langoustine fishery."

That view is held across the chamber, and we think that it needs to be reflected in the Parliament's resolution at decision time. I hope that our amendment will attract cross-party support.

We can all agree that the European Commission's commitment to a more flexible, localised approach to fisheries management, with a focus on conservation measures rather than on the discarding of over-quota fish, is a welcome policy change. Despite its decimating the Scottish fleet, the ill-thought-out and aggressive quota reduction policy of recent years has not benefited fish stocks. There is no doubt that the main problem with the system has been the huge number of discarded fish. Between 50,000 and 80,000 tonnes of fish per year were thrown back into the sea dead between 1992 and 2001. That amounts to up to 60 per cent of the North Sea cod catch. We fully support the Government's commitment to pursue vigorously the issue of discards in mixed fisheries.

It is to be hoped that the new cod recovery plan, which was agreed in Brussels last week, will lead to reduced mortality. Linking time at sea allowances with voluntary measures should allow fishermen to land more of their catch and reduce discards. The EC target of a 25 per cent reduction in cod mortality next year will be hard to meet, but it will be up to member states and their industries to work out how to achieve it, rather than there being central control from Brussels. That is to be welcomed. I hope that Scotland will be able to achieve the target by continuing with its pioneering efforts to avoid catching cod, including the voluntary closure of areas where there are young or spawning fish and the technical alterations to nets to release unwanted fish. Those measures should protect cod and reduce discards.

As I indicated earlier, we share the general dismay at the draconian proposals for the virtual closure of west coast fisheries, which have been made without consultation of the industry and are quite unacceptable. It is shocking, as John Scott said, that a proposed closure of such magnitude should come out of the blue, catching both fishermen and Government unawares. In an area such as the west coast, where white-fish stocks are known to be low, surely there are ways to allow for the catching of nephrops while minimising the bycatch of species such as haddock, whiting and cod.

Far be it from me to argue with Ross Finnie, given all his experience of fisheries, but we know that urgent steps are being taken by fishermen to develop suitable nets, as they consider the proposed grids to be impractical. There is still a danger that virtually the entire west coast nephrops sector could be closed down to secure

the demersal stocks, even though such scientific evidence as is available suggests that nephrops stocks are stable and are not being overharvested.

I support the plea that Roseanna Cunningham and other members made for more research into west coast fish stocks, because as long as there is a knowledge gap, the stance taken by Europe is likely to be overly precautionary.

Liam McArthur: Nanette Milne has spoken about cross-party support, and I do not disagree with any of what she has said so far. Will she support the amendment in my name, and indeed the amendment in Sarah Boyack's name?

Nanette Milne: I will not make a decision on that at this point. We are still reflecting on the amendments.

The proposed closures would have a major adverse impact on remote west coast fishing communities, whose existence is already fragile. As others have said, if the fishermen who are threatened are forced into other parts of the north-east Atlantic in search of fish, it will help nobody. I hope that the cabinet secretary's alternative proposals will be accepted by the Commission, and that he will pursue the matter vigorously and relentlessly.

We welcome the Government's motion, but we urge the cabinet secretary to work with his UK colleagues towards a settlement that will successfully balance the need to conserve depleted west coast white-fish stocks with a thriving langoustine fishery, in line with our amendment. We join others in wishing the UK and Scottish Government teams every success in next month's negotiations in Brussels, and we hope that they will be able to achieve a good settlement for our hard-pressed and very well-deserving fishermen.

11:23

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The debate has been useful, and it signifies that the majority of the Parliament wishes to be constructive and to support team UK in the fisheries negotiations. The Scottish Government plays a pivotal role in that. It is important that all devolved Administrations and the Westminster Government come to the negotiating table united around a strong case with sound arguments, which must be based on good science. Our case is surely strengthened by our fishing industry's pursuit of sustainability. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation must be one of the first fishermen's organisations to produce its own environmental statement. As Sarah Boyack said, its stance is endorsed by RSPB Scotland, which is a high accolade indeed.

It is welcome that the UK lead for the fisheries negotiations, Huw Irranca-Davies, is coming to Scotland to meet representatives of the west coast fishing industry. While the work of the Scottish Government in bringing the case of the Scottish industry to the UK team is crucial, such hands-on involvement by the UK minister is welcome. I accept that the cabinet secretary would prefer to be alone at the negotiating table, although we will always differ on that. However, he must put aside his ideological aims in order to represent the needs of our industries and communities. Indeed, I think that he is doing that, which is commendable.

There are no easy solutions to the many issues that have been discussed in this debate, although much of what has been said has been supportive. I will try to cover as many of the issues as possible. Helen Eadie said that perhaps there should be a discussion before the Norway negotiations. Maybe we need to take that on board, because negotiations at EU level sometimes dwarf what goes on at the Norway level, which is important to our fishing industry.

Sarah Boyack and Liam McArthur referred to the virtuous triangle of scientists, Government and the industry. Jamie McGrigor built on that idea when he said that, although the Scottish Fishermen's Federation is involved in the talks, we need to talk to other fishermen's associations and involve them as well. That was a useful contribution, and I urge the cabinet secretary to consider ways of bringing the associations on board. They have a lot to say about gear changes.

Richard Lochhead: I reassure the member that I enjoyed a recent visit to Mallaig to discuss with the Mallaig and North West Fishermen's Association the impacts of the proposals on future fishing policy, and that I have met a number of other fishermen's associations.

Rhoda Grant: That intervention is welcome.

Megrim have been mentioned in the debate. I recently met fishermen in Shetland for whom the megrim fishery is valuable, and they are concerned that the megrim TAC is not rooted in science, because it is based on landed catches, which are restricted due to TAC levels that do not take into account discards. Indeed, the science on the TAC dates from 1999. The fishermen were so frustrated by the lack of science that they commissioned their own research, which shows that the TAC should be increased. I ask the cabinet secretary to examine that research and decide whether it can be included in our scientific appraisals for the negotiating table.

Many members have talked about the need to reduce discards. There is agreement that discards are wasteful and that we need to look at ways of getting round them. However, as John Scott and

Elaine Murray said, that is not straightforward. We cannot make it financially viable to take overquota fish back to port, but at the same time we must make the system attractive enough that people will adhere to it. Mention was also made of discarded species that are not marketable, and whether we damage the environment by using fuel to bring them into port just to stick them into landfill. There are no simple answers, but we need to do more work on discards. In fact, everyone agrees that discards must be tackled in the round, but that that will not be straightforward. My colleague Peter Peacock made the only positive comment about discards when he said that we should discard Dave Thompson's speech—I think I will do that. In passing, I contrast his speech with Nigel Don's thoughtful speech, which we should all take notice of and reflect on.

Members have agreed on the alarming state of the west coast fishery's white-fish stocks and the concern about what will happen to the prawn fishery. Many members talked about going back to Europe and discussing how we can use technical measures and new gear to protect the fishery. The measures that Europe offers do not fit our boats and are unworkable. We need to go back to the negotiating table and find a solution. Many members also talked about ways in which we can assist the west coast fishery by implementing measures that will allow the fishermen to pursue the area's prawn fishery while protecting the white-fish stocks, which we all agree are in a difficult position.

Members agree about the technical measures that are in place. Elaine Murray pushed for assistance for fishermen in that regard. She also referred to Karen Gillon's request last year for assistance for fishermen to improve their gear and mesh sizes. Jamie McGrigor clearly asked that the industry be listened to on changes to technical measures. It is important that we bring the industry into the discussions, because it knows what works.

There is also agreement on the science and on the lack of it. Ross Finnie was clear that we need to take scientists' work on board. I do not think that any member disagrees. The concern is that, for many of our fisheries—for example, the west coast megrim fishery—there is little science. We must look at ways to reduce that scientific shortfall. As Roseanna Cunningham said, if we are on our own in those fishing waters, we need to take the scientific aspect on board and pursue it on our own. I am interested to hear what the cabinet secretary says about that in his winding-up speech.

Elaine Murray referred to sharks, which I do not think any other member did—sorry, I remember that John Scott did as well. She said clearly that a

reduction in the numbers of one species has a knock-on effect on the ecological balance, which we must take into account.

Comments were made about the challenges in the cod recovery plan and, I suppose, how cod is as much trouble on the way down as it is on the way up, and vice versa. We need to deal with the issues and ascertain whether we can work with the industry to ensure that there are no rapid changes, so that it can rebalance itself to work in prevailing conditions.

Jamie McGrigor and Ross Finnie mentioned the onshore industry. I am disappointed that I am running out of time, because it means that I cannot talk much about that. We need a way forward. We were happy to hear about the devolution of planning, but we want it to be devolved further, maybe through regional advisory councils. It is important that people who have a stake in fishing work with the industry.

We wish team UK well in the negotiations and hope that it will work well for our fishing communities. We will support all the amendments to the motion.

11:32

Richard Lochhead: I welcome the first-class and thoughtful contributions from members throughout the chamber, beginning of course with the speech of Sarah Boyack, the new secretary of the Huw Irranca-Davies fan club. I am sure that her colleagues will want to find out how much it costs to join. I promise that when I meet the minister, whom we have invited to Glasgow to meet representatives of the west coast fishing sector, I will get a signed photograph to bring back to Sarah Boyack.

A number of important issues have been highlighted in the debate. I will do my best to touch on as many of them as I can in the limited time available. Perhaps the first issue to discuss is discards, because I think that members mentioned it more than any other issue. I very much welcome the unanimous support from all parties for taking radical action to address discards. The issue is complex, and there will be no overnight solution. However, there is momentum, involving the industry, the environmental community and the chamber, that has not existed before.

Of course, the issue of discards is not just for fisheries debates; it is an issue for the public, because discards are seen as precious food that is dumped overboard and back into the sea. At a time when the whole world is debating food shortages, healthy and valuable food is being dumped overboard. Of course, it is not just the Scots fleet that must abide by regulations or face being accused of breaking the law. Across all

fleets in the North Sea, 1 million tonnes of fish has been dumped overboard each year for the past few decades. It will be a huge breakthrough if, over the next few weeks, we can successfully tackle the important issue of discards, around which there is so much consensus.

The cost to the Scottish fleet alone of discarding marketable fish is £40 million a year. If the fleet could keep even part of that, it would increase the income of the sectors around Scotland's coasts. It is unacceptable that the fleet is asked to spend money on expensive fuel to catch fish that it is forced to dump overboard dead, then to catch more fish later that it is likewise forced to dump overboard dead. At the moment, it is a lose-lose situation, but I believe that we can get to a win-win situation.

Elaine Murray and others mentioned spurdog in the context of discards. We support the Commission's position that there should be 5 per cent bycatch of spurdog. I know that people think that there should be no such bycatch, but if there is no bycatch of spurdog, there will be a discarding of spurdog. While we must ensure that spurdog is not a targeted fishery, we must allow a bycatch to be taken or spurdog will simply be discarded overboard. The same applies to many species that are up for discussion in the next few weeks. We have to bear in mind the fact that the discards issue relates not just to cod but to other species.

I welcome Ross Finnie's speech, which reflected his many years' experience in the talks. We may not have much in common in other areas of politics, but we have our experience of the bizarre machinations of EU fisheries councils in Brussels and Luxembourg. It is testament to Ross Finnie's strong character that he survived eight years of the talks. Last week, in Brussels, I had only six hours' sleep during three days of negotiations.

Jim Hume: Nightclubbing?

Richard Lochhead: I was not nightclubbing. I was fighting hard, first for Scotland's fishermen and then for Scotland's farmers.

Ross Finnie highlighted the complexities of the discards issue. We should bear in mind the fact that there will be no overnight solution.

Sarah Boyack mentioned the important issue of adding value to the fish that are landed. We must work more with the industry in Scotland to get the message across that increasing income and making more profit are about not just landing more and more fish but getting a better return from the marketplace for the fish that are landed. That is important, which is why the Scottish fisheries council set up a working group, in which retailers and the industry can sit down together to try to achieve greater value.

The concept of catch less and land more has won widespread support among members. We are promoting that new approach to fisheries management in Scotland. Where we apply that concept, it is possible to catch less by avoiding cod stocks and other valuable stocks while landing more of what we catch. In a mixed fishery, we will catch cod and other stocks, so fishermen should be allowed to land them. It is possible to promote fisheries conservation, increase the income of our fishermen and achieve many of our objectives by simultaneously catching less and landing more.

Robin Harper wondered what measures have been in place in 2008. We have had 15 real-time closures on the basis of 169 inspections. The compliance rate for those closures has been nearly 100 per cent. We have in place not only real-time closures but seasonal closures. The first closure of the season will be on 1 December. Over and above that, many new selective gear measures have been adopted throughout the fleet and more than 200 vessels are using much larger square-mesh panels.

Robin Harper: How do we know that there is 100 per cent compliance?

Richard Lochhead: We know because the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency monitors it for us, and works with the fleet on implementing the voluntary closures.

As we speak, fishermen are at sea trialling new nets. John Buchan of the Fairline and his partner vessel are at sea with a Government-funded observer on board trialling a new net that it is hoped will allow them to avoid cod but catch more haddock. In the past few weeks, Tam Harcus from Orkney has been trialling a couple of new nets. Those are fishermen coming up with their own ideas and innovations. The Government, with the industry's support, is funding those innovations to see whether they work and whether we can take them forward as part of fisheries management in Scotland.

Some members mentioned Bertie Armstrong's comment at the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee about the virtuous triangle that we now have in Scotland, with conservation interests and environmental interests working with the industry and the Government to take forward measures. That has been extremely productive over the past year or two, and it is going from strength to strength. Only last night, I met WWF Scotland and RSPB Scotland to discuss some of the issues that we are debating today.

Other members mentioned the impact of fishing on the wider marine environment and ecology. The marine bill will address that. I am glad of the warm welcome for today's announcement that we are getting executive devolution out to 200

nautical miles, following agreement with the UK Government. It is only executive devolution, not legislative devolution, but it is a huge step forward for Scotland, and it means that if marine protection areas are to be established in Scotland's waters, they will be proposed by the Scottish Government and no one else. That is an important message of comfort for Scotland's fishermen, who care deeply about executive devolution coming to the Scottish Parliament.

The other big issue that was mentioned during the debate was the future of the west coast fishery, which is a priority for the UK and Scotland. I am not sure what Jamie McGrigor was quoting from, but I assure him that the west coast fishery is a priority for the UK and the Scottish Government in the forthcoming negotiations. We cannot allow our major fleet on the west coast—the nephrops fleet—to be decimated by measures relating to white-fish stocks, because that would decimate our fishing communities there. The nephrops fleet is extremely valuable. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we are seeking alternative solutions. We are also seeking an increase in monkfish quota, because that will make an alternative fishery available to the west coast of Scotland.

We accept that the science must improve. In conjunction with the industry, we are putting a lot of effort into ensuring that we have better science in future.

On involving fishermen directly in the alternatives, the conservation credits scheme steering group, which is the industry body that comes up with alternatives to European Commission proposals, has been a major success.

Let us put the debate into context. The five most valuable stocks in Scotland are all being fished sustainably in Scotland or are on the road to recovery, for example cod, which is the fifth most valuable stock. This is a good-news story. We should not always get caught up in doom and gloom. We are sustainably fishing our main commercial stocks in Scottish waters. We pay huge tribute to our fishermen for their change of attitude over recent years and to everyone who has contributed to the debate. Dave Thompson reminded us that today's debate is about not just Scotland's past and that of our fishermen—we remember tragedies that affected Lossiemouth, in my constituency, and Eyemouth—but securing a future for Scotland's fishing communities.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

11:40

Licensed Premises (Drunkenness)

1. Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive how many people were reported between 31 March 2007 and 1 April 2008 for (a) entering licensed premises while drunk and (b) being drunk on licensed premises. (S3O-4957)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2008 there were (a) 156 offences recorded as “drunk and attempting to enter licensed premises” and (b) 35 offences recorded as “licensed person, employee or agent drunk in licensed premises”. That is a total of 191 offences under those two crime codes.

Bill Aitken: The minister will no doubt agree that people do not become drunk the instant they hit the streets. It would seem therefore that of the 191 reported offences, there has not been the appropriate enforcement of the law as it stands. Does the minister agree?

Kenny MacAskill: We are aware that people who are under the influence are being served alcohol. The licensed trade has made considerable strides in improving the professionalism of the service. Given recent tragedies and events that have been drawn to the attention of licensees by the police, the Government and the Lord Advocate, there is an understanding that this is a journey. We accept that it can be difficult for licensees when people who are unsafe or unfit enter their premises, but it can become clear when someone is well under the influence of alcohol. Fatal accident inquiries have shown that there are serious and tragic consequences. We must be ever vigilant on this matter.

Strathclyde Police (Meetings)

2. Bashir Ahmad (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met representatives of Strathclyde Police. (S3O-5008)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): I regularly meet representatives of all Scotland’s police forces. I last met Chief Constable Steve House on the morning of Wednesday 5 November. Later that day, I met the chair, vice-secretary and treasurer of the Strathclyde Police Muslim association. The First

Minister will formally launch the association in Glasgow next week.

Bashir Ahmad: Will the cabinet secretary join me in welcoming the formation of the Strathclyde Police Muslim association, which is Scotland’s first-ever Muslim police association? Does he agree that the organisation, due to be launched next week, will be important to further build up trust between the police and the Muslim community?

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely. Scotland has been well served in the past by organisations such as SEMPER Scotland—Supporting Ethnic Minority Police staff for Equality in Race. The Strathclyde Police Muslim association is a welcome venture, and it was a pleasure to meet its officials. I hope to be able to join the First Minister next week. The association has two purposes. The first is to try to reassure those coming into the police force that there is no institutional racism—I do not believe that there is any in the Scottish police force, but we must be ever vigilant and ensure that people feel safe and comfortable in joining the police. Secondly, the association can provide a good element of bonding and trust to show our communities that our police represent them all. I have said previously that we are all Jock Tamson’s bairns. Our police force comes from all our communities; it must do so. Equally, the police must represent all our communities fairly and equally.

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): Has the cabinet secretary discussed with the chief constables the possibility of providing headcams to police officers? The experience of the police force in Plymouth demonstrated that the introduction of such new technology helped to reduce bureaucracy, increase the number of offenders brought to justice, and reduce crime. Would the cabinet secretary consider such a proposal?

Kenny MacAskill: I have seen evidence of, and we are watching with interest, what is happening south of the border. Evidentiary matters may arise, and police safety is paramount. If such technology can assist in prosecutions, in the prevention of crime, and in the protection of police officers, we will be happy to consider it. However, these are operational matters for the chief constables and it would be wrong for me to interfere. The justice department and I will monitor the situation. If the chief constables or the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland feel that such technology is appropriate, we will be more than happy to work with them.

Rail Services (Fife)

3. Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking

to improve rail services for passengers to and from Fife, from both the north and south. (S3O-4986)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): From December this year there will be 500 more seats daily, each way, between Edinburgh and Fife during the peaks, and better connectivity to Edinburgh, London and the south with new early-morning services from Fife. The new timetable provides approximately 40 additional southbound and 50 additional northbound stops, each weekday, for stations in Fife, including a new hourly service between Edinburgh and Perth via Fife.

Marilyn Livingstone: I have written to the minister on this issue. Does he agree that many Fife commuters are being disadvantaged by the changes to the service? Many people who are trying to get to Dundee and Aberdeen cannot get to work in time because of the changes.

I have just received a 200-signature petition on the changes. Will the minister take the issue back to the drawing board, and will he discuss, with the major stakeholders, the impact of the changes on Fife commuters?

Stewart Stevenson: In the new timetable, there are now 21 trains heading south from Kirkcaldy between the start of services and 10 o'clock, and 20 trains returning in the evening peak. Relatively few passengers have been joining the through trains to head north to Aberdeen. We have replaced all the services that no longer stop in Fife with new services within Fife. We seek to ensure good connections between Dundee and Aberdeen.

If the member continues to have concerns, we will look again for the next opportunity to consider the timetables. However, we continue to invest in improved services for Fife. That is undoubtedly evidenced by the huge number of trains that now run between Kirkcaldy and Edinburgh.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Is the minister aware that the timetable changes, which were designed to improve services in Fife, have led to knock-on changes north of Fife? Is he further aware of a level of discontent among passengers in the north-east of Scotland over the timetable changes that are to be implemented in the middle of December? Has he had any contact with passenger groups, and will he raise the matter with ScotRail?

Stewart Stevenson: I would need to check with my office, but I am not aware of having been contacted on this matter by passenger groups. However, such contact may be yet to come to me.

A clear effect of reducing the number of stops of the through trains in Fife will be to improve the

timeliness and speed of services to Aberdeen. However, if issues remain that people feel that I should resolve, I would certainly wish to consider them at the next available opportunity.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The minister will know that constituents of mine in the Borders are currently unable to travel by rail from the south to Fife. Will he continue the constructive approach taken by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth yesterday, and will he meet me and the Scottish Borders Council to consider whether—in light of the pre-budget report on Monday and the increased capacity for accelerating capital spend—the Waverley line project can be accelerated?

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I think that there was a link, minister.

Stewart Stevenson: Services from the Borders to Fife will certainly be among the services delivered when we recreate rail in the Borders. Like Mr Purvis's constituents, my constituents have limited access to rail, and I am always anxious to ensure that we improve rail services throughout Scotland.

I hope that the cabinet secretary had an enjoyable evening with Councillor Parker last night. He has not yet reported to me the substance of any conversation that took place.

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): Is the minister aware of how widely the new timetable from Perth to Edinburgh is welcomed? Does he agree that an enormous improvement has been made for my constituents? Hitherto, they had to put up with appallingly low levels of service. Will he accept my thanks on their behalf for the new service?

Stewart Stevenson: It has long been our ambition to improve services to Perth. I am happy that the member, many of her constituents, and people further afield are happy that we have made the changes.

Leven to Thornton Rail Link

4. Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made towards the proposed reopening of the Leven to Thornton rail link. (S3O-5022)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Transport Scotland received the first draft of the Leven to Thornton feasibility study on 23 June 2008, and it is being considered as part of the strategic transport projects review. The review will set out national investment priorities for 2012 to 2022.

We will make an announcement on the STPR later this year. It will set out the Scottish

Government's programme of transport interventions that best contribute to our overall purpose of increasing sustainable economic growth.

Tricia Marwick: The minister will know that the final report on the Leven to Thornton railway will go to the board of SESTRANS—the south-east Scotland transport partnership—next week. Will he seek to convince SESTRANS, which is the regional transport authority, of the importance of the reopening of the line to the people and businesses of Leven?

Stewart Stevenson: We are in the fortunate position of having rail still in place, although it might not be fit for purpose. I await the outcome of SESTRANS's deliberations with considerable interest, and I will listen carefully to what it has to say.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Does the minister agree that the Leven to Thornton link clearly meets the aim of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth to maximise jobs, business, the economy and sustainability with accelerated capital spend? Will he therefore consider every possible option for bringing forward the rail link as part of the Scottish Government's plans to accelerate capital spending, so that Levenmouth and wider Fife can benefit during these difficult economic conditions?

Stewart Stevenson: We are certainly aware of the need to support the communities of Levenmouth, where there are areas of significant economic disadvantage. The people in that part of Fife can be assured that the Government takes seriously the need to ensure that they have an equal opportunity to contribute economically and benefit socially from any links that we may be able to bring forward.

National Concessionary Fares Scheme

5. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive when it plans to extend the national concessionary fares scheme and to which groups. (S3O-5017)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The Scotland-wide free bus travel scheme for older and disabled people is currently being reviewed. Consideration will be given to any possible changes—including the proposal to include injured armed forces veterans—once the findings of the review are known. I expect to announce the outcome of the review in the new year.

Kenneth Gibson: Does the minister agree that the Scottish Government's clear intention via the review—to extend concessionary fares—should act as a signal to the Labour Party that it is time to stop frightening old people into believing that the

national concessionary fares scheme is at risk?

Stewart Stevenson: Like many of our other interventions—including the extension of the central heating programme and the numbers of systems installed—the free bus travel scheme will assure people that this Government will step up to and meet its responsibilities to older and disabled people.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Will the minister confirm that eligibility was under consideration but that that changed in early July? Will he also confirm that active consideration was given to the idea of abolishing unlimited free travel and, instead, giving each pass holder a fixed annual value on their smart card? Will he confirm that that idea has now been ruled out?

Stewart Stevenson: No; no; yes.

Health Provision (Perthshire)

6. Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met NHS Tayside to discuss health provision for Perthshire. (S3O-5049)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Officials from the Scottish Government health directorates meet NHS Tayside regularly to discuss a wide range of service provision matters, including those affecting Perthshire. I last met the chair of NHS Tayside on Monday at my regular monthly meeting with all national health service board chairs.

Roseanna Cunningham: Will the cabinet secretary join me in congratulating NHS Tayside on being one of four health boards that have achieved the target for 95 per cent of cancer patients to be treated within the designated waiting time? Does she agree that that is good news for those people in my constituency who, sadly, are diagnosed with cancer? Will she remind us of the previous Administration's record in that regard?

Nicola Sturgeon: I join Roseanna Cunningham in congratulating NHS Tayside on meeting the 95 per cent target, which is extremely important for everyone who is diagnosed with cancer in Scotland and, of course, their families. Although we are not quite yet meeting the 95 per cent target across all of Scotland, significant progress has been made during the past 18 months.

In response to Roseanna Cunningham's final question, I remind members that although the previous Administration set the target in 2000 it did not get anywhere near 90 per cent—let alone 95 per cent—in seven years. That was a shocking record and one that I am glad that this Administration has improved considerably.

Economic Development (Southern Ayrshire)

7. John Scott (Ayr) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what support it is giving to the regeneration and economic development of southern Ayrshire. (S3O-4952)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): We place great importance on regeneration and economic development throughout Scotland, including Ayrshire. 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.

John Scott: As the minister knows, tourism is a major component of the southern Ayrshire economy and supports thousands of local jobs. That being the case, it is disappointing that all key tourism destinations have been concentrated in and north of the central belt, with no provision being made in the south of Scotland. Will the minister please look favourably on proposals to designate Ayrshire as a key tourism destination?

Jim Mather: I will indeed. Last night, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth met Hugh Hunter, the leader of South Ayrshire Council, who is also keen to promote tourism destination status. The cabinet secretary volunteered that I am keen—as I am—to meet to explore means to achieve that end.

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): Does the minister agree that the regeneration of and potential for tourism in south Ayrshire would be enhanced by the construction of a Maybole bypass? Will he work with the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change to ensure that when funds are being allocated for capital projects that worthwhile project is considered at the earliest opportunity?

Jim Mather: I understand that the strategic transport projects review will come out towards the end of the year. Meanwhile we are working hard across the area. We have had useful sessions in east Ayrshire and north Ayrshire and I welcome the opportunity to have further sessions in south Ayrshire. Indeed, all the industrial sectors in south Ayrshire—energy, tourism, life sciences, financial services, food and drink and aerospace—have engaged with us during the past year and made, among others, the points that members made.

Aviation Growth (Greenhouse Gas Emissions)

8. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what level of aviation growth is compatible with its target of 80 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. (S3O-4961)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): There is no direct relationship between growth in aviation and our 80 per cent emissions reduction target. The target applies across all sectors of the economy and not to individual sectors.

Robin Harper: There is a relationship. We expect the Scottish climate change bill to be introduced next month, and the national planning framework is likely to give the go-ahead for airport expansion at Edinburgh and Glasgow. Given the disproportionate damage that aviation emissions do to the climate, will the minister accept that the Government's objectives are incompatible and do the planet a favour by abandoning airport expansion? Will he use the Scottish climate change bill to set a good example and institute a ban on the public sector's use of domestic flights when alternatives exist?

Stewart Stevenson: The member will be aware of our keen interest in high-speed rail links, which will make a significant contribution to the reduction of air travel between central Scotland and London. I very much welcome the change in the mood music that is emanating from the Department for Transport in that regard and I hope that the member will work with us to ensure that alternatives to certain aviation routes are in place.

However, aviation remains an important part of Scotland's economy and, like every other contributing part of our economy, deserves support.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S3F-1215)

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

Let me say a word about the atrocity in Mumbai, which we all obviously unite to condemn. There were some indications this morning that employees of Scotland-based companies could have been caught up in the atrocity. I emphasise to members that there has been no confirmation of that. Indeed, at this stage, it may be just that some companies were unable to contact their employees because of the overnight situation.

Officials have been in contact with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office this morning, and there will be ministerial contact this afternoon. However, I know that members will appreciate that, regardless of the nationality of those caught up in the atrocity, there will almost certainly be Scottish families with close connections to the area. Scottish families will be affected, and I know that members will want to express their solidarity with those families, wherever they come from, and will unite to condemn the atrocity.

Iain Gray: The First Minister knows that he can count on Labour members' solidarity with those who are caught up in and dealing with the atrocity.

Monday's pre-budget report was described in the media as the biggest budget statement since world war two. All eyes were on it. Is that why the Scottish National Party Government chose to publish on Monday its response to the consultation on Mr Salmond's so-called local income tax? Did the First Minister think that no one would notice?

The First Minister: The consultation exercise was published five hours before the pre-budget report. To be helpful to the Labour Party, we put it as the number 1 item on the Scottish Government website. The people who responded to the consultation were written to individually. However, as the Labour Party, alone among the political parties, did not make a submission to the consultation, it did not get a letter and had to read the website.

Iain Gray: The First Minister is not normally known for his shyness. He is always happy to turn up to the opening of an envelope or, better still, one of the schools that Labour planned and built. However, when it comes to his Administration's

flagship policy, he sneaks it out the back door of Bute house under the cover of darkness and the PBR. Why? Perhaps it is because so many of the organisations that replied to the consultation roundly condemned his tax: the Confederation of British Industry, the Scottish Trades Union Congress, the Institute of Directors, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, Unison, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, and the Law Society of Scotland.

Let us be fair. Some organisations supported the tax, including Dumfries and Galloway Council's SNP group, East Dunbartonshire Council's SNP group and South Lanarkshire Council's SNP group. Not all those organisations were SNP branches—the Association of Scottish Liberal Democrat Councillors was in there, too.

Will the First Minister listen to his own consultation and dump his discredited tax plan now?

The First Minister: Far be it from me to defend the Association of Scottish Liberal Democrat Councillors, but at least it managed to make a submission.

Iain Gray should not be too dismissive of the details of the consultation because they confirm what every single opinion poll on the matter has confirmed: overwhelming support for a local income tax that is based on the ability to pay over the discredited council tax policy of Labour and the Tories.

Was there another reason why Andy Kerr was unable to make a submission to the consultation? Perhaps it had something to do with Iain Gray's interview in *The Sunday Times* on 5 October:

"‘We don't have our own proposals,’ he says candidly. ‘We went into the 2007 election with a proposal to try and make the council tax fairer and it didn't add up. Central to our new manifesto is a properly worked out suggestion for how we make the council tax fairer.’"

The interview also states:

"He is not prepared to give any further details of a putative scheme. ‘I've always resisted being asked to do that immediately on the back of a fag packet,’ he says. ‘We made that mistake once before.’"

Iain Gray: The First Minister really needs to read his opinion polls and consultations more carefully. He well knows that the most recent opinion poll evidence showed that a minority of Scots supported the local income tax proposal. That is almost exactly what his consultation showed: fewer than half the individual respondents were in favour of a local income tax; and only 34 per cent of the group most likely to be in work—34 to 54-year-olds—supported it, which is not surprising, as it is a tax on work.

On Monday, a Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer put £2 billion into the pockets of Scotland's working families. On the same day, the SNP Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth insisted that he would go ahead with his plans to take £1.5 billion in extra income tax out of those self-same Scottish pockets. Labour has taken strong, decisive action to put money into the pockets of hard-working Scottish families and to help us weather the global economic storm.

The First Minister talked about a mistake that I said we had made. Alistair Darling made a mistake too on Monday—a mistake on whisky duty—but he fixed it in 48 hours. The First Minister is making a far more damaging mistake with his local income tax. Will he fix his mistake and drop the policy now?

The First Minister: Alistair Darling's somersaults on the whisky tax do not give us much confidence that the pre-budget report was carefully worked out. I welcome the about-turn on the whisky tax, because it might forecast about-turns on other aspects of policy. Iain Gray had better get used to the figure of £500 million. That is the cut—the Labour cut—that is coming to Scottish councils, the Scottish Government and the Scottish people. We are not talking about efficiency savings that councils get to retain for the first time or which health boards can reinvest in front-line services; we are talking about direct cuts in spending coming down the line from the Labour Party. He and his team had better get used to that figure—the £500 million bombshell—because it will haunt each and every Labour MSP from now until the general election.

Iain Gray: That £500 million—it may well be less than that, as we know—

Members: Oh!

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order.

Iain Gray:—follows naturally from the belt tightening that will happen throughout the United Kingdom, and Scotland must take its share of that. However, the First Minister's local income tax proposals would take £900 million out of the budget in Scotland for no reason whatever.

The First Minister told us his engagements for the rest of the day. We read that his finance secretary will meet the big six business organisations of Scotland this afternoon. They will tell him that no one wants the local income tax. They will plead with him not to make Scotland the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom.

This is a seminal moment for the First Minister. Will he step in, overrule his finance secretary and do what is right for Scotland's economy and

working families, or will he continue to put his own party interests before the national interest? Is he First Minister for Scotland, or First Minister for the SNP alone?

The First Minister: I will tell Iain Gray who wants a system that is based on the ability to pay: the people of Scotland.

Iain Gray says that he is not quite sure whether the figure is £500 million or not, so I will make a deal with him. I will tell him why we believe that it is £500 million: the Barnett consequential of the cut in expenditure by Darling, Brown and Murphy are £380 million; and the latest jiggery-pokery with the health budget adds another £129 million. I understand that those figures have been confirmed by David Bell, the adviser to the Finance Committee. That is the £0.5 billion cut that is coming from the Labour Party. Perhaps when Iain Gray gets the time to think about it, he can consult further with Andy Kerr and tell us what he thinks the figure is next week.

There is a tax giveaway next year, followed by spending cuts in 2010. That is a move from John Maynard Keynes to Milton Friedman, with no intervening period whatsoever. It is new Labour to hard labour, and Iain Gray had better get used to it, because it will undermine and hole below the waterline his entire political attack. In a phrase, "You're sunk."

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S3F-1216)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans to meet the Prime Minister in the near future, but I will be delighted to ask for an urgent meeting with him to find out whether he can estimate the figure for the cuts and say whether it is £500 million or some other amount.

Annabel Goldie: Iain Gray is absolutely right to condemn the SNP's local income tax. Unfortunately for Iain Gray, however, he is the man with no plan; he is stuck in the past with the local government finance status quo.

The First Minister's tax on jobs—that is what the local income tax is—is based on three things: a growing economy; a tax rate of 3p in the pound; and a £281 million subsidy. However, we know from this week's devastating and bleak news that those assumptions have been smashed to smithereens. The black hole has more than doubled in size. Can he tell us where he will find the money to plug that bigger black hole of £300 million? If he cannot—I would be astonished if he could—I ask him to come clean: how much will the new tax rate really be? How much higher will it be than 3p in the pound?

The First Minister: I direct Annabel Goldie to the pre-budget report, and I remind her that the implementation date for the local income tax is 2011-12, not 2010-11. That is significant, because the pre-budget report gives a significant increase in projected taxation revenue for that year.

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): You do not believe that, do you?

The First Minister: David McLetchie says that I should not believe that. It is probably true that Alistair Darling is the Eddie the Eagle of tax forecasters at the moment, but that is precisely the premise of Mr McLetchie's leader's question, so I am answering it on that basis.

There are two other factors to consider: the impact of the recession on projected council tax revenue; and the council tax rebate—the help that should come from Westminster. Will Annabel Goldie confirm the comments of David Mundell, who said that the Conservative party had no plans to obstruct the implementation of a fairer tax system by withholding Scotland's money?

Annabel Goldie: The First Minister is either deluding himself or conning the public, because even in his own Government, no one has disputed the existence of the burgeoning black hole. For the First Minister's sums to add up, a 25 per cent increase in income tax revenues would be needed in just one year. That is not going to happen—it is total self-delusion.

Britain already faces a tax bombshell from Labour. Now Scotland is going to get an additional tartan tax bombshell from the SNP. There we have it—Brown and Salmond, the architects of insolvency. Gordon Brown has broken Britain's economy. Why does Alex Salmond want to shatter Scotland's? Will he drop the proposed tax on work and cut council tax instead?

The First Minister: Annabel Goldie should know that the pre-budget report actually projects an 18 per cent increase in income tax revenue over that year. If she goes with the pre-budget report figures, she must be able to analyse them and should not deduct a year from her forecast.

Let us be clear. Annabel Goldie and her press officer's statements assume that the withholding of council tax benefit will continue under the next Government. Is she assuming that the Labour Party will still be in Government, or that any party at Westminster will defy the clearly expressed will of the Scottish Parliament on the matter? Clarity on that subject would be useful.

I know that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Given that David Cameron stood in the House of Commons on Monday and extolled the virtues of a council tax freeze, saying that such a freeze was important in restoring the economy, will

Annabel Goldie follow the line of her leader at Westminster and compliment and continue to support the Government when we give help to hard-pressed families?

The Presiding Officer: Questions should be to the First Minister, not from him.

Annabel Goldie: There is nothing like a late convert to the cause. I distinctly recall challenging the First Minister, in the chamber, on council tax. I asked, "Is a freeze enough?" and he said, "No." Let us hear how he is going to cut council tax.

The First Minister: Of course the freeze is not enough. That is why we are working so hard to help hard-pressed families and businesses with the range of things that John Swinney announced. Let us remember that we need a council tax freeze because of the 40 per cent increase in council tax under the Tories and, over 10 years, a further 60 per cent increase. Labour and the Tories are an unholy alliance—they are the unheavenly twins of the council tax. Annabel Goldie lacks credibility on the issue.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S3F-1217)

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

Tavish Scott: The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth's budget statement yesterday contained 2,000 words. How many new proposals did the Government reveal?

The First Minister: The six-point plan has a range of new proposals to help the Scottish economy at this particular moment. The range of proposals includes, for example, the acceleration of housing investment long before it was thought of by the Government at Westminster, and detailed proposals across the Scottish Government's range of activities. That is effective action to combat the downturn in Downing Street, effective action to help Scottish families, and effective action from John Swinney on the Scottish economy.

Tavish Scott: That was certainly a new definition of "new". The £25 million for council housing was announced in April and the £100 million for housing was announced in August—of course, we now know that only £9 million of that is already committed. We have heard it all before. The list is not new and it has not changed. It is all out of date.

At such a time, the test of a Government is its plan B—its ideas and its competence in dealing with change. We need change to deal with

unemployment, which is up by 13,000, change to deal with mortgage lending, which is down by 20 per cent, and change to deal with the tens of thousands of banking jobs that the United Kingdom Government put at risk over HBOS.

What will it take for the First Minister to grasp his budget and change it to respond to the urgent needs that Scotland faces right now? How much worse does it need to get?

The First Minister: Tavish Scott is out of date on that and so much more. The next tranche of £9 million of housing investment was announced this very morning. He needs to catch up. *[Interruption.]* Of course, that is in addition to the genuine acceleration of regional development money during the period—the acceleration of the rural development programme.

When Tavish Scott was busy opposing the budget last spring, did he countenance the fact that measures in it such as the council tax freeze—which I think he opposed—and the benefit to small business through the small business programme were exactly the sort of measures that anticipated the downturn in the economy? *[Interruption.]* I see Mike Rumbles rumbling. I say to Mr Rumbles that there must be a reason why Scottish consumer spending is holding up better than consumer spending in the rest of the United Kingdom. Might that be something to do with the council tax freeze in Scotland, rather than the council tax increases that Liberal Democrats voted for?

The Presiding Officer: As Tavish Scott has been asked a question, I will give him a final supplementary.

Tavish Scott: From what I remember, the council tax policy was announced in 2006. At that time not even Prophet Salmond would have been able to work out that a recession was going to happen. The country wants to hear what he is going to do now, not what he did two years ago, so let us have some answers.

The First Minister: I have never underestimated the capacity of a Labour Government to make a mess of the economy. I should also point out that my question was addressed not to Tavish Scott but to Mike Rumbles—the lost leader sitting beside him.

My question to the Liberal Democrats remains: given what we now know, will they oppose the council tax freeze for next year or will they try once again to tax hard-working families in Scotland? *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Anti-poverty Agenda

4. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the First Minister, after the launch of “Achieving Our Potential”, the Scottish Government’s framework on tackling poverty and income inequality, what plans there are to work with the United Kingdom Government on the anti-poverty agenda. (S3F-1240)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Following the launch of “Achieving Our Potential”, we will continue and build on the work that we are engaged in with the UK Government on the anti-poverty agenda. Today, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning is meeting the UK Minister of State for Employment and Welfare Reform to discuss the welfare reform proposals from the Department for Work and Pensions. We are pushing the UK Government to recognise the different circumstances in Scotland and are far from convinced that placing additional conditions on vulnerable people who are in receipt of benefits will either help to get them back into sustainable work or tackle poverty in Scotland in the current economic conditions.

Bob Doris: I know that income maximisation is a key part of the Scottish Government’s framework for tackling poverty, and its new energy assistance package to tackle fuel poverty includes at stage 2 a good-quality benefits and tax credits check to ensure such maximisation. However, I am worried that, in cash terms, the UK Government is not as committed as the Scottish Government is to tackling fuel poverty. Will the First Minister commit to working with the UK Government on this matter and to ensuring that Scotland gets every single penny of the renewables obligations and carbon emission reduction targets cash that it is due?

The First Minister: Yes, we will continue to work with the UK Government on this important issue.

I saw quizzical looks on some Labour MSPs’ faces when Bob Doris mentioned cuts in the fuel poverty budget elsewhere. The fact is that buried in the pre-budget report is a slashing of the fuel poverty programme. As a percentage of resources committed to fuel poverty, the Scottish contribution in 2008-09 is 14 per cent of the warm front budget; according to current projections here and in the UK, by 2010-11 the contribution will have risen to 28 per cent because of the slashing of fuel poverty programmes in the pre-budget report.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Go down to the House of Commons and tell them that.

The Presiding Officer: Lord Foulkes, please be quiet.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): Does the First Minister think that it

helps the battle against poverty and inequality for 40 per cent to be cut from the budgets of a large number of well-established projects in north Edinburgh that are supported by the Scottish Government's fairer Scotland fund? At a meeting of local activists that I attended this morning, one well-respected activist said that the work and developments of 30 years had been undone in just 18 months. Will the First Minister speak urgently to his colleagues in the SNP coalition administration in the City of Edinburgh Council so that they take action to stop that carnage?

The First Minister: The fairer Scotland fund amounts to £435 million over the three-year period. Moreover, for the first time, we have direct funding for third sector organisations.

I draw Malcolm Chisholm's attention to a quote about the pressures on local government. Yesterday, a representative of local government spoke about the financial pressures that it is currently under—the squeeze, as it has been called. A prominent leader of local government, looking at the pre-budget report, said:

"It means rises in bills for council taxpayers and leaves huge pressure on services".

That was Margaret Eaton, the chairman of the Local Government Association in England.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Last week, the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee heard evidence on the measure to provide free school meals for middle-class families, which we will debate later. The Minister for Children and Early Years was asked how many additional children would be lifted out of poverty by the measure. He asked his official to reply, and the official said:

"We will need to do some more number crunching and to get back to the member on the issue."—[*Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee*, 19 November 2008; c 1691.]

Will the Government publish a clear demonstration of how the £40 million policy will lift additional children out of poverty?

The First Minister: Yes, we will. The pilot exercise shows that the policy will lift additional children out of poverty. The policy is not—as the member so disparagingly puts it—for middle-class families; it will increase the uptake of free school meals among those who are entitled to them because it will remove the stigma. I do not know how much understanding the member has of working-class families, but he should look at the pilot study and the increase in the uptake of free school meals and stop trying to take food out of the mouths of children in Scotland.

Child Protection

5. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Government intends to respond to official figures showing an increase in child protection referrals, including for unborn babies. (S3F-1237)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The increase in child protection referrals is a sign that more children who are at risk of harm are receiving the help and support that they need before a crisis is reached. Midwives are increasingly important in supporting vulnerable pregnant women and their unborn babies and in referring vulnerable newborns forward for multi-agency discussion. Additional support is then provided for the mother and child, as necessary.

We are developing an early years early-intervention framework for pre-conception to age eight, which we intend to publish imminently. The framework will shift services away from crisis intervention to prevention and early intervention. The aim is to identify risks as early as possible and to put in place effective supports and interventions to improve outcomes from pregnancy onwards. The framework will also set out the role of intensive family support services for those children and families who face a particularly high risk.

Karen Whitefield: I hope that that early years strategy will be forthcoming. Ministers have been saying "soon" for several months. I hope that it will be published before Christmas.

What modelling work is the Government undertaking to project the number of children who will be the subject of child protection referrals in the future? What plans does the Government have to resource and put in place the much-needed services that will support those children now and prevent further increases in the future?

The First Minister: That information informs the framework, which will, indeed, be published soon.

I welcome the fact that, although the overall number of child protection referrals has gone up substantially this year to 12,400, the number of children who have been placed on the child protection register has fallen by 10 per cent. It is reasonable to argue that the fall in the number of children who have been placed on the child protection register provides early evidence that early interventions are starting to have a positive impact on the lives of vulnerable children. I know that, given her interest in the matter, Karen Whitefield will welcome that.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Does the First Minister share the concerns that were expressed today by Alan Baird, the president of the Association of Directors of Social

Work in Scotland, that the vilification of social workers in some sections of the press, following the Baby P case in London, is undermining front-line social services staff? Does he acknowledge the need for not just social workers, but all professionals who work with children and families to focus on the welfare of the child at all times, notwithstanding the different approaches to child protection that are taken north and south of the border?

The First Minister: Yes, I do. A tragedy such as the Baby P case always makes people, rightly, want to focus on the unacceptability of the case. However, when people identify the faults and failings that took place, it is important that they are careful not to generalise about the entire workforce in the social work sector. Those who work in child protection in Scotland do a fantastic job. They are highly qualified and motivated professionals, and they should not be the subject of a general attack because of an individual incident—tragic though it was—in one council area.

Forestry

6. Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the First Minister what recent discussions the Scottish Government has had on the future of the forestry sector. (S3F-1219)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Minister for Environment met leading forest industry representatives earlier this month to discuss the impact of the current economic situation on the sector. The Forestry Commission Scotland is now working with the industry to agree a range of measures to help ease the pressure on hard-pressed businesses. Those measures will be announced shortly.

Jamie McGrigor: The Scottish Conservatives have long argued that the private sector has a big part to play in ensuring that Scotland has a dynamic forestry sector. Therefore, we welcome the Government's plans to consider leasing off around 25 per cent of forests. That said, we recognise the legitimate concerns that exist among Forestry Commission staff in Scotland. Will the First Minister state clearly today that, if his Government goes ahead with the proposal, he will guarantee that there will be no compulsory redundancies, that the terms and conditions of transferred workers will remain the same, and that current arrangements for access to Scotland's forests will remain in force?

The First Minister: Yes. That is what the Minister for Environment is working towards.

Jamie McGrigor has put his finger on what people's concerns might be. However, if it is possible to protect access, employment and

training rights and to generate significant and badly needed investment in the forestry sector, those would surely be good things to do. The purpose of the consultation is to ascertain what can be done in that regard and to get people's opinions in. Jamie McGrigor has identified the key issues that people must be reassured about if the policy is to move forward.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): In the current economic climate, how can giving away the most commercially successful parts of our forests be good news for skilled jobs and our fragile rural communities? Is this not all about short-term cash for the Government at the expense of access, biodiversity and vital income for the next 18 Scottish Governments?

The First Minister: This is not the selling-off of anything; it is an attempt to get more investment, with guarantees, into the forestry sector, which badly needs it.

I do not know whether Sarah Boyack has had time to read the full pre-budget report documents. If she reads them, she will see that

"Departments are also working to achieve efficiencies on other Government assets",

and that

"a study of the Forestry Commission's portfolio in England is being launched to examine options for delivery of public value from the estate in the long term".

Before there is scaremongering from the Labour Party on this issue, Sarah Boyack should address not only the £500 million of cuts and the slashing of the fuel poverty programme but what the pre-budget report has to say about English forestry.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. According to the standing orders, members are required to be courteous to one another in the chamber. I and other back benchers believe that it is completely discourteous for front benchers to dominate a session that is supposed to be a calling to account of front benchers by the back-bench members of the Parliament.

Presiding Officer, I suggest that you enlist the services of some back benchers to discuss with you and the party managers and leaders how we might best recalibrate the question time sessions in the interests of all members.

The Presiding Officer: I do not accept that the issue is a matter of courtesy; I think that it is a matter of procedure. As I intimated last week, I am considering the procedure, and I will continue to do so.

12:34

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Education and Lifelong Learning

Science Education

1. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to support science education. (S3O-4962)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): The Government is fully committed to supporting science education. That is being addressed through the curriculum for excellence, the Scottish science baccalaureate and the new science framework that I announced to Parliament this morning.

Patrick Harvie: My question is on an issue that was not covered in this morning's statement. The cabinet secretary will be aware of the controversy that broke out in the Royal Society in recent months over calls to allow the teaching of creationism within the science curriculum in England and Wales. What is the Scottish Government's position? Should Scottish schools be actively challenging absurd, superstitious notions such as creationism and intelligent design?

Fiona Hyslop: Scottish schools and the Scottish Government would challenge creationism if it were taught in our schools. However, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education reports that no schools in Scotland currently conduct education on creationism.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Earlier, the minister announced details of the science baccalaureate. She did not answer my question then, so perhaps she will have another go at answering. Is she aware that there is grave concern about the science baccalaureate among teachers, headteachers, parents and university staff? Will she agree to publish the evidence that there is demand for the proposed change?

Fiona Hyslop: I am certainly prepared to publish the support that we have for the proposal. The member's concern is misplaced and she exaggerates in saying that there are grave concerns. I think that stretching our most able pupils will be welcomed. Many parents and secondary 6 pupils report to me that pupils drift through S6 if they have already been successful in their application for university. We need to challenge our brightest and best if we are to

capitalise on science in the future as we take ourselves through the economic downturn.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Small Businesses (Staff Training)

3. Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what support and funding it is providing to small businesses to assist them in training their staff. (S3O-5001)

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): Through Skills Development Scotland, we provide support for learning and skills development in small businesses. Sector skills councils also play an active role in assessing skills and training needs and in influencing education and training provision to ensure that those needs are met.

We offer support to small businesses as part of the learndirect Scotland for business programme, which acts as a broker in matching the learning needs of businesses to appropriate solutions. In addition, in the Scottish Enterprise area, help and support are available through the Investors in People improvement programme, which is structured to allow businesses to use it in a way that suits them best, with a mix of approaches that is tailored to business needs, such as one-to-one services, workshops or the bespoke IIP interactive online tool.

Cathy Peattie: Does the minister agree that small businesses, including hauliers, are vital to the Scottish economy? The United Kingdom Government has provided £350 million for their training needs. What is the Scottish Government doing?

Maureen Watt: The Scottish Government intervenes in skills in a number of ways through Skills Development Scotland, which came out of the skills strategy. If Ms Peattie writes to me on her specific point about hauliers and transport firms, I will see what I can do.

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): One of the main problems for small businesses is their lack of capacity to let staff off site for training. Might the Government think about creating a web-based training programme so that people could receive some basic training on site without the business needing to close down while they are away?

Maureen Watt: The member makes a fair point. The Scottish Government supports the use of web-based training and e-learning where appropriate. We encourage all businesses that face the challenge that the member mentions to contact their respective sector skills councils and Skills Development Scotland to identify innovative

work-based interventions. We realise that small businesses need more bite-sized courses than full-blown programmes.

Scottish Borders Council (Children's Services)

4. John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met officials from Scottish Borders Council's education department. (S3O-4956)

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram): The Minister for Schools and Skills and I met Scottish Borders Council on 27 August 2008. Officials from the Scottish Government met Scottish Borders Council's director for education and lifelong learning on 18 October 2008 while on a routine visit to the local authority.

John Lamont: The minister is aware that Scottish Borders Council will shortly consider whether to adopt the recommendations contained in its "Transforming Children's Services" report, which, among other things, could see a number of schools being forced to share headteachers. I do not expect the minister to comment on specific proposals, but will he reassure me, teaching staff and parents that the Government will not allow Scottish Borders Council to implement any proposals that could adversely affect the education of young people in the Borders?

Adam Ingram: As the member ought to know, Scottish Borders Council's education budget will increase by 3.2 per cent from £89.3 million this year to £97.8 million next year. Funding pressures are not a problem for the "Transforming Children's Services" project.

As the member rightly says, the provision of education in Scotland is the responsibility of the appropriate local authority, so it is for Scottish Borders Council to determine how it allocates its resources and co-ordinates its children's services delivery. However, I note that Scottish Borders Council issued a news release on 4 November stating that it had

"received several hundred responses to the 19-week consultation on its Transforming Children's Services review"

and that it has postponed a meeting from 20 November to 18 December so that it can fully assess those responses. I also note that the director of social work is on record as saying:

"We are very mindful of the central place that children have in the life of the Borders and the responses, both written and verbal, have fully justified the extended consultation on this important review."

It would not be appropriate for me to comment any further than that.

Bullying (Schools)

5. John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what initiatives are taking place to reduce bullying in the school environment. (S3O-5033)

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): The Scottish Government supports all those who work directly with children and young people to prevent and tackle bullying effectively. We provide that support in various ways. We wholly fund respectme, Scotland's anti-bullying service, which provides advice, information, resources, support and training to develop, refresh and support the implementation of anti-bullying policies in schools, local authorities and communities, and to build capacity to prevent and deal effectively with bullying. We also provide funding of £160,000 per year for three years to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children for the ChildLine bullying helpline that helps children who are directly affected by bullying.

John Wilson: Will the minister regularly review the anti-bullying strategies that are operated by schools, education departments and local authorities to ensure that no one in the school environment is subjected to bullying behaviour, whether they be pupils or staff, particularly those children who are on the autistic spectrum, and other children who are vulnerable?

Maureen Watt: All bullying, wherever it happens, is unacceptable and must be tackled. Bullying is not, and should never be seen as, a normal part of growing up. The Government is committed to tackling and preventing bullying.

Last Monday, I launched Scotland's anti-bullying week and respectme's awareness-raising campaign, which is called you can make a difference. One of the prize-winners in the special schools category was a severely autistic girl, and the audience was extremely supportive. Where children are made aware of anti-bullying when we raise awareness throughout the school and community, we can deal effectively with bullying of any sort.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Does the minister believe that the cuts in pupil support that have taken place in local authorities around the country have helped or hindered her anti-bullying strategy? How many anti-bullying initiatives have local authorities ended and how many have they initiated since the concordat was signed?

Maureen Watt: I am not aware that any anti-bullying initiatives have been stopped. As my colleague said, funding to local government has increased, so the money is there for it to use. Given that take-up of the anti-bullying resources has been widespread throughout the country, I am

not aware that the issue is not firmly on the agenda of schools and local authorities.

Early Years Education

6. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what its plans are for early years education. (S3O-5004)

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram): The Scottish Government is committed to giving children the best possible start in life. That is why we have increased entitlement to pre-school education and announced a further increase from August 2010; we are making significant progress towards a 50 per cent increase in entitlement. The concordat includes a commitment to improve the quality of early years provision by giving every pre-school child access to a teacher. In parallel, we have developed a new standard in childhood practice and are supporting new qualifications that will improve the skills base of the non-teaching workforce.

Karen Whitefield: Is the minister aware that Government statistics show that while in 2007 the number of whole-time equivalent nursery teachers was 1,685.6, in 2008 it was 1,672? Those are Government figures, which have been provided by the Scottish Parliament information centre. Will that reduction in the number of nursery teachers improve nursery education for Scotland's children? Does the minister intend to take steps to increase the number of whole-time equivalent nursery teachers in Scotland—yes or no?

Adam Ingram: I have given answers to that question in the past—I recall Mr Macintosh pressing me on the point—and the First Minister was asked a similar question. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Adam Ingram: It was made clear in all those answers that we are dealing with two different sets of figures. There is inconsistency and double counting with regard to previous years.

Karen Whitefield: They are the Government's figures.

Adam Ingram: I am explaining the differences. The reality is that this Administration has turned round the situation that we inherited, whereby nursery teacher numbers were falling across Scotland. The situation has bottomed out and we are now back on the up curve. I certainly want that figure to improve over the next few years.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Is the Scottish Government able to confirm whether it is having regular discussions with voluntary sector groups that are involved in providing support for young parents with children in the early years?

Adam Ingram: We most certainly are. Not only are we having discussions with them, but we are asking them to participate in initiatives. For example, in the construction of our early years framework we have been remarkably all-encompassing in bringing together people who have a vital interest in that area. I hope to make an announcement in that regard in the next few weeks.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I have a point of clarification. Are the nursery teacher figures "substantially increasing"?

Adam Ingram: Certainly, if we look at the situation—

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Yes or no.

The Presiding Officer: Ms Brankin, I would like to hear the answer.

Adam Ingram: Given that about 200 teachers were double counted in the year before last and that the same figure is being reported for this year, we can certainly make a case for a substantial increase.

UHI Millennium Institute (University Title)

7. Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made towards granting university title to the university of the Highlands and Islands, given that it now has the ability to award its own taught degrees. (S3O-5018)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council are actively working with the UHI Millennium Institute to assist with its preparations for an application for university title. The timing of such an application to the Privy Council is ultimately a matter for the UHI Millennium Institute in the light of its assessment of its ability to reach the quality and standards that university title in Scotland carries with it.

Rob Gibson: I hope that the cabinet secretary agrees that it would seem appropriate for the UHI to achieve full university status in the year of homecoming, given that the collegiate model that it represents has been exported throughout the world, and that the UHI can and will play a huge role in leading the Highlands and Islands towards sustainable development.

Fiona Hyslop: I recognise and share the member's ambition, and perhaps impatience, to proceed to university title. However, it is important that we recognise that university status will be granted not only on the basis of taught-degree awarding powers, but on the basis of research.

That is a differentiation between the Scottish university system and the system in England, where the number of teaching-only institutions is increasing. We are working extremely hard on the issue. Meetings took place as recently as 4 October. Scottish Government officials and the sponsoring universities are working to ensure that provisions are in place and that the concerns that the QAA has raised are dealt with swiftly but properly, to allow university title to be granted.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

Will the cabinet secretary join me in congratulating Professor Bob Cormack and his team on their tremendous efforts in gaining taught-degree awarding status? Does she share my view that full title will enable the UHI to become an agent of economic and social regeneration in the Highlands and Islands?

Fiona Hyslop: Indeed, I do. There is great excitement, not only about the potential for the UHI, but about the existing research, the standards that are being transmitted and the co-operation, intellectually and academically, throughout Scotland, supported by other universities. University title for the UHI will be a driver for economic progress for the Highlands and Islands. Its innovative way of working will be a benchmark for other institutions in Scotland and elsewhere—they will want to follow that approach.

**Dumfries and Galloway Council
(Education Budget)**

8. Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what representations it has received from Dumfries and Galloway Council with regard to pressures on its education budget. (S3O-4997)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth and I discussed a number of issues, including education budgets, when we met Dumfries and Galloway Council on 29 July 2008.

Elaine Murray: Is the cabinet secretary therefore aware that the council's education budget is forecast to be overspent by £833,000; that, on top of that, reducing class sizes in primary 1 to primary 3 to a maximum of 18 pupils will cost Dumfries and Galloway £2 million; and that providing free school meals for all pupils in P1 to P3 will cost the council £900,000? Does the cabinet secretary expect her policy priorities in Dumfries and Galloway Council to be funded by cuts elsewhere in the education budget?

Fiona Hyslop: We expect that the welcome policies on the extension of free school meals for P1 to P3 and the reduction in class sizes will be met from the agreed provisions of the local

government settlement for the next three years. As the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has acknowledged, the resources are in place for maintaining teacher numbers in the face of falling school rolls. As the member knows, Dumfries and Galloway has an ageing population, so there is potential to use the headroom resulting from falling rolls to ensure that teachers are employed in classrooms.

I acknowledge that, when we met Dumfries and Galloway Council, it raised issues about capital in relation to classrooms. At the meeting, we made it clear that funding for the commitments is included in the local government settlement. Clearly, the Government cannot be held responsible for overspends by individual council departments. I relay to the member that we made our position clear when we met Dumfries and Galloway Council at the end of July.

The Presiding Officer: Question 9 was not lodged.

Biometric Fingerprinting (Schools)

10. Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with local authorities on the use of biometric fingerprinting in schools. (S3O-5028)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): I congratulate the Presiding Officer on reaching question 10.

We are consulting on draft guidance for local authorities on the use of biometric technology in schools. While preparing the draft guidance, and since the launch of the consultation, we have either spoken to or been in contact with all local authorities in Scotland.

Gil Paterson: Several constituents have approached me because they have not been consulted on the matter by their local authority. Does the cabinet secretary agree that parents should always be consulted on such issues?

Fiona Hyslop: Yes, and the consultation on the guidance makes that point. Indeed, the position was raised initially by Patrick Harvie in discussions of previous legislation in this Parliament.

Europe, External Affairs and Culture

International Development (Budget)

1. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what allocation is made to the Indian subcontinent from its international development budget. (S3O-4994)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): We have not as yet made any specific funding allocations within the

international development fund to the Indian subcontinent development programme.

Decisions on funding will be informed by discussions with the relevant communities in Scotland. Initial discussions have begun and officials will be meeting the Network of International Development Agencies in Scotland and others to inform us where Scotland can add value.

Pauline McNeill: I express a bit of surprise that no allocation has yet been made, given that the Indian subcontinent has been incorporated into the international development plan. Will the minister tell us when we will see details on the allocation and will she give us a broad outline of the purpose of including it in the international development policy? When will we see hard copy, or details on the website, of where she intends to go with the policy?

Linda Fabiani: There is quite a lot in this. It is important that we take the time, as we did with other areas of the international development policy when we focused and streamlined the policy, to consider where Scotland can add value and develop a robust programme that will deliver sustainable results. We have been keen to investigate the Indian subcontinent because of our historical links with the area, and to reflect modern patterns of migration and the cultural diversity in Scotland. It was selected in recognition of those links, to build a strong, fair and inclusive national identity and to express solidarity with communities that are represented in Scottish society. Such links are not altogether new: we already have a number of continuing commitments in Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Quite rightly, commitments that were made by the previous Administration focused on humanitarian aid. We will take lessons from that work into account as we move forward.

Scottish Mining Museum

2. Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to secure the future of the Scottish mining museum in Newtongrange. (S3O-4970)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): The Scottish Government has recently received advice from Historic Scotland on the state of the Scottish mining museum buildings and we are considering with the museum the case for potential capital funding over the current spending review period. We expect the museum to provide further details shortly.

Rhona Brankin: I take this opportunity to reiterate to the minister that the buildings at the Scottish mining museum—the former Lady Victoria colliery—form Europe's best preserved

19th century pit complex and are hugely important to Scotland, not just to Midlothian. Last year, the museum was voted by the public Scotland's most treasured place.

Given the museum's international significance, will the minister update Parliament on whether the capital funding that is urgently needed to repair and preserve the fabric of the buildings is forthcoming from the Scottish Executive? Will she also pledge to review the museum's revenue funding, which is currently a tenth of that of the Big Pit in Wales?

Linda Fabiani: Revenue funding is a matter for Museums Galleries Scotland, which deals with the industrial museums. This Government takes seriously the matter of capital funding for the industrial museums, whereas the previous Administration provided no capital assistance to such museums. We have already given £60,000 to the Scottish maritime museum and £25,000 to the Scottish mining museum for urgent repairs.

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister join me in congratulating those who run Scotland's museums and buildings of historic importance—including Bothwell castle in my area—on marking St Andrew's day by offering free admission? Does she agree that St Andrew's day is an appropriate time to celebrate Scotland's heritage and culture and will she encourage people to take up that free admission offer?

Linda Fabiani: Absolutely. As part of St Andrew's day, many of Scotland's visitor attractions will be open free of charge or at discounted prices. Castles, museums, gardens and abbeys throughout Scotland will be participating as part of a joint initiative between the National Trust for Scotland, Historic Scotland and the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions. The initiative was designed to encourage Scots and visitors to Scotland to celebrate Scotland's heritage and culture on Scotland's national day.

Department for International Development (Headquarters)

3. George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture has to visit the headquarters of the Department for International Development in East Kilbride. (S3O-4977)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): I have no plans to visit the headquarters of the Department for International Development in East Kilbride in the near future.

George Foulkes: I am absolutely astonished by that answer. The minister says that she has no plans to visit the headquarters, yet a few weeks

ago she said that her international development plans were going to be closely integrated with the Department for International Development's work. Forty per cent of the DFID staff are at East Kilbride, including the civil society unit, which spends hundreds of millions of pounds in Malawi and elsewhere. When I was a minister there, I hosted a meeting with the President of Malawi.

The Presiding Officer: The member should ask a question, please.

George Foulkes: Would not the minister's rhetoric about integrating with the Department for International Development's programme and making her work complementary be more acceptable, and more like the reality, if she took the trouble to go to East Kilbride—it is not far away—to talk to the people who know what they are doing in international development, unlike her?

Linda Fabiani: I visited DFID's Scottish headquarters on Friday 7 November—three weeks ago. There are currently no plans to undertake another visit but, as always, we will continue to liaise with DFID.

Local Newspapers

4. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that Scotland's culture is enhanced by a viable local newspaper sector. (S3O-5034)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): Yes. Both the local and national newspaper sectors play an important part in reflecting the character and identity of Scotland. Newspapers also play a vital role in providing plurality in the media, which is important to democracy.

Robert Brown: The minister will be aware that the BBC Trust has said that it does not support plans for the BBC to get into the local and community digital broadcasting market, partly because of competition arguments. Does the Scottish Government have a policy view on that? Does she agree that Scotland's cultural identity is reflected and given colour by the diversity of our regional and local newspapers? Do ministers recognise the importance of local newspapers and will they do whatever they can to ensure that such newspapers continue to operate vigorously and independently?

Linda Fabiani: We acknowledge a lot of the points that Robert Brown has made. Following the provisional conclusions of the BBC Trust, I encourage members to keep up the campaign that has been started, if they feel strongly about it. Local newspapers play a very important part in all our communities. Mr Brown might be interested to know that the First Minister, Mr Swinney and Mr Stevenson have all met press and print media

associations over the past year because those associations have expressed concern about the potential loss of revenue to local newspapers.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): Will the minister amplify her reply to include the value to Scottish culture of a healthy and competitive television industry?

Linda Fabiani: Yes, of course—I am happy to do that. A healthy and competitive television industry is vital to Scottish culture, which is why the Scottish Broadcasting Commission looked specifically at culture as one of its three phases of work and published "Interim Report on Cultural Phase" in March 2008. The findings of the commission's cultural report are reflected in its final report and recommendations.

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Although I welcome the BBC Trust's decision not to press ahead with local video news websites, which could well have disadvantaged local newspapers, will the minister give us any assurances about the Government's intentions vis-à-vis switching its situations vacant advertising and public notices on planning and licensing to websites, rather than using the local and national press, which it uses at present?

Linda Fabiani: The Government has not issued any guidance promoting or recommending that local authorities advertise or broadcast services online. The current UK code of recommended practice states that the primary criterion for decisions on using publicity should be cost effectiveness.

As part of the shared services agenda, local authorities have developed a single online portal for all local authorities' recruitment and will be developing an online portal for public information notices. Although that will impact on the use of local and national press for advertising, it will deliver significant efficiency savings and allow funds to be diverted to front-line services. All those in public services must recognise that there is a duty to the people of Scotland to ensure that we make the best use of public funds.

Europe and External Affairs (Priorities)

5. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what its priorities are in respect of Europe and external affairs. (S3O-4971)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): The Scottish Government's priority is always Scotland and what is in Scotland's best interests.

Our international engagement is driven by the Government's economic strategy and the need to place Scotland as a responsible nation and partner on the world stage. Our international

framework informs that work and sets out how international activities will contribute to the Government's purpose of increasing sustainable economic growth. The draft action plan on European engagement falls directly from the international framework and informs our European work. I recently presented our updated European Union priorities to the European and External Relations Committee.

Bill Butler: The minister will be aware of the massive potential benefits that Scotland can gain from closer links with China: indeed, exports to China have increased substantially in recent years. That is illustrated by the fact that in 2002 China was Scotland's 30th most significant export destination and had become by 2006 the 14th largest, purchasing goods and services to the value of some £400 million.

Given the growing importance of trade with China to the Scottish economy, will the Scottish Government reconsider its penny-wise but pound-foolish decision to remove £500,000 of funding for the world expo 2010 in Shanghai, especially given the SNP's stated desire to protect the economy from the threats that are posed by recession?

Linda Fabiani: When I met Ian McCartney MP to discuss the matter, it was made plain—it has been reinforced since—that the United Kingdom has responsibility for representing Scotland at the Shanghai expo, as it does for Wales, the North of Ireland and England, as part of the strategy.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): So somebody else is standing for Scotland.

Linda Fabiani: I do not understand why Labour members think the UK Government should not represent Scotland on trade issues: it has responsibilities in that respect. In my discussion with Mr McCartney, I said that if the UK Government could come up with anything specific that could bring added value to Scotland—which is what the Scottish Government stands for—we would consider it.

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): Can the minister state whether one of the Government's more immediate priorities is communicating its congratulations to the people of Greenland on successfully voting in a referendum to extend their autonomy from Denmark? Does the minister agree that that decision by a population of 50,000 people can serve as an example to our population of 5 million people, and that there is no reason why we cannot move forward constitutionally with confidence at this time?

Linda Fabiani: I absolutely agree with Mr Hepburn that it is the right of the people to state their case for peaceful and democratic transfer of powers.

Scotland and Malawi (Community Partnerships)

6. Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what support it can offer to groups trying to strengthen partnerships between communities in Scotland and Malawi by bringing small groups of Malawians to Scotland, or vice versa. (S3O-5037)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): The Scottish Government's international development policy enables Scottish organisations to apply for funding for projects in Malawi that meet agreed priorities, that are sustainable and that help the Government of Malawi to meet its millennium development goals. To support that activity, the Scottish Government provides core funding to the Scotland Malawi Partnership to encourage networking and to facilitate partnerships between communities in Scotland and in Malawi.

Liam McArthur: The minister will be aware of the strong links between my constituency and Malawi that have over recent years been developed between schools—for example, my alma mater, Sanday junior high school, and Minga school—churches and other community groups. Does she recognise the enormous benefit at grass-roots level that is derived by all those who are involved in such exchanges? If so, does she accept that Government policy—to which she has referred—particularly in relation to what projects can be supported, has little to offer many of the initiatives that people are trying to develop in Orkney? How would she respond to the concern that has been expressed by several of my constituents that the approach that is taken at present is too top-down?

Linda Fabiani: It is important for everyone who is involved in international development to recognise that what Government does is only one small part of the massive contribution that is made right across civic Scotland to international development. Whether it involves schools, churches, community groups or individuals, that has been going on for decades, if not for centuries.

We in Government have a responsibility to ensure that resources are targeted effectively. When such exchanges are essential to the long-term sustainability of the programme, they would be eligible for funding from the international development fund. In the recent development programme, funding was provided for a number of projects that include an element of exchange between Scotland and Malawi. Stenhouse primary school, for example, is involved in an initiative that is designed to promote effective leadership in primary schools. That project will give senior school and district staff from Malawi the

opportunity to shadow appropriate Edinburgh counterparts.

I recognise that a great deal is going on; Government cannot be responsible for it all. As I said, that work has been going on for decades. Our core funding of the Scotland Malawi Partnership helps to pull some of that work together and gives appropriate advice.

Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): I am sure that the minister will appreciate that Scotland's third sector has an important role to play in strengthening the partnerships between communities in Scotland and Malawi. In the light of the thematic approach that the minister is taking with the policy on international development in Malawi, can she outline the areas in which she believes Scotland's third sector could play an important part in delivery of that policy in Malawi?

Linda Fabiani: I could talk about that for a long time, but I will talk about only one example. I am delighted that, following long discussions with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations—a marvellous organisation that is the umbrella group for many in the third sector—we have provided it with funding to enable it to work in partnership with an equivalent organisation called the Council for Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi, which is trying hard to build capacity so that the links in Malawian civic society can be strengthened. That is a great relationship. I believe that strengthening civic society underpins every other policy strand that we are involved with in Malawi.

Culture (Priorities)

7. Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what its priorities are for culture. (S3O-4976)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): The Scottish Government has a single purpose: to create a more successful Scotland that can flourish through increasing sustainable economic growth. A key part of achieving that purpose will be a vibrant, strategic and forward-thinking development organisation for the arts and culture that is fit for the 21st century. That is why creative Scotland remains a priority for us.

I could go on with many more examples, such as the Edinburgh festivals and the expo fund, homecoming 2009, Gaelic and Scots, the national performing companies, the national collections, the creative industries and our built heritage.

Patricia Ferguson: I note the importance that the minister has attached to creative Scotland. However, given that the public services reform bill is unlikely to take effect until the end of 2009, that the minister is on record as saying that legislation is not required to establish creative Scotland, and

that the Parliament has already given its approval for the establishment of the organisation—subject, of course, to adequate financial arrangements being in place—why does the Government not just get on with the job, establish creative Scotland and end the uncertainty that is faced by arts organisations across the country?

Linda Fabiani: Because the Government shares the desire of the arts and culture community to avoid further delay after the unanimous agreement in this chamber—which was then voted down on the financial memorandum through the incompetence of the Opposition—we are setting up the new organisation, limited by guarantee, which will take everything forward. That will enable us to combine speed in establishing the new organisation—

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): The Government does not need to wait for a bill.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Just do it.

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Linda Fabiani: If I am hearing that the Opposition does not want such things to be underpinned by legislation, that it does not want a proper public appointments process to be undertaken, that we should just ignore the will of Parliament—which quite clearly wanted to establish creative Scotland as a statutory body—and that, rather than enshrine the organisation in legislation, we should just take a hands-off approach, I am very surprised.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Among the Government's priorities in arts and culture, has the minister had any time to give some thought, in a national context, to the future of the Glasgow police museum which, as she will probably know, is threatened with closure as a result of organisational changes?

Linda Fabiani: I am happy to consider any application for funding assistance for any museum. The Glasgow police museum's business case will, of course, be considered along with the many other applications that we receive. I would encourage the museum to talk in the first instance to Museums Galleries Scotland, which does a good job in respect of independent museums and local authority museums.

St Andrew's Day

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-2965, in the name of Linda Fabiani, on St Andrew's day. The minister has 11 minutes.

14:56

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): Eleven minutes, Presiding Officer. Really?

I am delighted to move the motion in my name. St Andrew's day is a time for everyone—whether at home or abroad—to celebrate the best of Scotland. It is a time when we can all enjoy ourselves and acknowledge Scottish achievements. It is a time when we recall our rich history and culture but also look to the vibrant, creative and confident nation that is Scotland today.

All over Scotland, people are marking this important date in our calendar. Schools in places from Barra to Burntisland are joining in the national day of celebrations, with many of them using the occasion to engage pupils in exploring Scotland's culture and heritage and what it means to live in modern Scotland.

Young people studying maths at St Columba's high school in Inverclyde have been exploring the symmetry of the saltire flag and looking at the work of great Scottish mathematicians. Annette Street primary school in Glasgow is bringing children together from the eight different countries and backgrounds that are represented at the school—including Pakistan, Malaysia and Afghanistan—around the theme of one Scotland, many cultures.

Larkhall academy, which is visiting the Parliament today with Aileen Campbell MSP, is celebrating St Andrew's day with a unite Scotland campaign. We welcome the group's ethos and the range of activities that have been planned as part of that initiative to celebrate Scotland's cultural diversity—it is great stuff. The school is also working to raise funding of £20,000 as part of the Prince's Trust scholars challenge.

Yesterday, as part of the fun of St Andrew's day, I was up at Edinburgh castle with Lorne primary school from Edinburgh, celebrating the fact that Historic Scotland is opening so many doors for free over the weekend of 29 and 30 November.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am delighted that Historic Scotland is offering free admission, but does the minister agree that its properties ought to be specifically linking information to St Andrew's day? For example, at

Culblean, which is 10 miles south of Kildrummy castle in Aberdeenshire, a battle was won by the Scots on St Andrew's day in 1335.

Linda Fabiani: As always, one of our resident historians manages to throw me completely, but I am more than happy to consider the issue and to discuss it with Historic Scotland.

Another good event is happening on Monday 1 December. With joint sponsorship from the Scottish Government and the Parliament, students from seven Scottish universities and a team from Oxford will take part in a debating championship in the Parliament, with the final being held in the chamber. We thank the Presiding Officer and the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body for agreeing to the use of the chamber.

Building on last year's success, more visitor attractions than ever are opening their doors for free over the coming weekend. I am delighted that this year, for the first time, Edinburgh zoo has joined the initiative.

This year, also for the first time, the Government has provided financial support not only to our six cities but to Blairgowrie and St Andrews for their celebrations. I know that Ted Brocklebank, after many months of lobbying, will join me in congratulating St Andrews on its success in attracting a substantial amount of additional local sponsorship. That is why I am delighted to accept his amendment. It is a mark of how important everyone feels that St Andrew's day is that his was the only amendment that was lodged. This is a time for consensus in celebration of our national day.

Celebrations are taking place not just in Scotland, but throughout the world. Not just expatriate Scots, but people who have an affinity with Scotland are celebrating our national day. Our Scottish affairs offices in Beijing, Brussels and Washington are involved in a range of events. More than 90 diaspora groups around the world, from Ankara to Australia and from Ōsaka to Luxembourg, are organising celebrations.

On our national day, we celebrate our rich cultural heritage and our national identity—everything about Scotland. It is a time to reflect not only on what it means to be Scottish, but on how we see the future of Scotland. Our national conversation on Scotland's constitutional future allows everyone to debate the kind of Scotland that we want and how we best achieve that. St Andrew's day is the perfect time to celebrate and reflect.

This year's St Andrew's day is particularly special, because it provides the warm-up to the year of homecoming next year. Picking up the thread from St Andrew's day and the winter festivals, homecoming will be the biggest-ever

celebration of Scotland's achievements, culture and ties around the world. More than 300 events throughout Scotland are already planned to celebrate some of Scotland's great contributions to the world: Burns—2009 is the 250th anniversary of his birth, after all—as well as whisky, golf, great Scottish minds and innovations, and that rich culture and heritage.

The year of homecoming promises to be an extraordinary celebration of Scottish art, culture and heritage. Our national collections and performing companies and Edinburgh's festivals will play a prominent role in showcasing the wonderful creativity and energy that make up modern Scotland. With the Scottish Arts Council, Scottish Screen and other cultural bodies, we are working to develop a lasting legacy for Scotland's cultural sector.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): The minister will recall the furore last year when it was found out that pupils were waving saltire flags that were made in Taiwan. In reply to a written question that I lodged in July, she said that Scotland-based suppliers would be invited to bid to supply the flags this year. Given that, why did she tell me on 13 November that this year's flags were made in the far east?

Linda Fabiani: The situation is as it was under the previous Administration. The question has been answered. In a consensual celebration of Scotland's national day, it is inappropriate to reduce ourselves to such petty questioning.

Our national day is a time for enjoyment and celebration, as is right. While we celebrate, St Andrew's day has a serious side. Given the global economic downturn, we need to promote Scotland this year more than ever as a great place to live, learn, work, do business and invest in and to visit. We need to position Scotland to take early advantage of any recovery and continue our drive to increase sustainable economic growth. That is why, as part of the Government's economic recovery programme, we are intensifying our activity and support for homecoming 2009 and promoting it through the St Andrew's day and winter festivals programmes.

Tourism is already a key sector in which Scotland has a comparative advantage but, in the light of recent changes in the exchange rate, we are focusing our efforts even more on boosting tourism and raising our international profile. We and our public sector partners are investing in all the important events in the Scottish calendar to promote Scotland domestically and internationally as a quality must-see, must-return destination. VisitScotland has brought forward £1.5 million of spending to 2008-09 to increase its marketing activity, which includes the marketing of homecoming.

We are also harnessing the contribution of the Scottish diaspora, through the globalscot and friends of Scotland networks, to boost the year of homecoming and encourage business development opportunities. We have set a clear target of 100,000 additional international visitors, which we expect not only to meet, but to exceed.

As part of the Government's economic recovery programme, we will promote the food and drink sector. St Andrew's day serves as both a timely reminder that Scotland is one of the finest food producers in the world and an opportunity to showcase Scotland as such. It provides the perfect occasion to celebrate the wealth of high-quality and internationally trusted produce from our farms, seas and food manufacturers.

While we encourage everyone to celebrate St Andrew's day, it is also good to remember why we celebrate it. St Andrew's day is part of our history and heritage. Around 832 AD at Athelstaneford in East Lothian, the broad white cross of St Andrew was seen against a bright blue sky. The National Flag Heritage Centre at Haddington celebrates year round the event that led to the saltire being adopted as our national flag. Each year, such celebrations culminate in the national celebration on 30 November, which this year falls on Sunday. I wish everyone a happy St Andrew's day.

I move,

That the Parliament believes in the importance of St Andrew's Day, Scotland's national day; recognises the opportunity that it presents for everyone in Scotland, and friends of Scotland around the world, to celebrate our history, culture and traditions as well as the vibrant, creative and dynamic nation that Scotland is today; notes the Scottish Government's support for a programme of events throughout Scotland as part of the Winter Festival, and supports the opportunity that St Andrew's Day provides to prepare the way for the 2009 Year of Homecoming, which will give a much-needed boost to the Scottish tourism sector and to the economy generally.

15:05

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am grateful to the minister for accepting my minor amendment, which I commend to the chamber.

I am delighted at the amount of excellent publicity that St Andrews is receiving in BBC Scotland's new series "A History of Scotland". As those who have followed our St Andrew's day debates over the years will know, I am always happy when someone other than me extols the virtues of my home town. Young Mr Oliver is doing an excellent job in that regard. I thoroughly commend the series to any member who has not viewed it, and I congratulate the BBC on an absolutely splendid production.

However, even as a dedicated St Andrean, I question the need for the chamber to debate St Andrew's day yet again, given the fact that the act that made it a voluntary public holiday was passed in November 2006 and received royal assent as long ago as January 2007. That said, given that we are approaching the Christmas period, I will embrace the consensual spirit of tidings of comfort and joy—at least for part of my speech.

As the minister outlined, this year's St Andrew's day should form the gateway to what we hope will be a successful year-long homecoming celebration. The motion says that the aim of the St Andrew's day events is to boost Scottish tourism. I totally endorse that, particularly at a time of economic uncertainty. Tourism is worth some £4 billion a year to the Scottish economy and, as we know, the tourism industry employs more than 200,000 people.

The aim of the year of homecoming—to encourage Scots abroad to return to our shores during 2009—is to be commended. That aim contrasts somewhat with the aims of tartan day or Scotland week, about which I continue to have reservations. I refer to bekilted politicians, most of whom should never bare their knees to the elements, marching through Manhattan in the fond belief that doing so somehow promotes Scotland. *[Interruption.]* I give way to Iain Smith

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): I am not seeking to intervene on the member; I am just protesting at what he is saying.

Ted Brocklebank: I have not seen your knees, Iain. Perhaps you will show them to me and I can then make a judgment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Brocklebank.

Ted Brocklebank: I apologise, Presiding Officer. I should have directed those remarks through the chair.

I repeat what I said in last year's debate: the Government has missed the opportunity to link this year's St Andrew's day celebrations and the start of the year of homecoming on Burns night. By not making any apparent linkage with the winter festival events in December, the Government has left the St Andrew's day festivities looking like an isolated celebration at the end of November. It has missed a marketing opportunity for a sustained winter festival launch. I hope that the minister will address that in her summing up.

There have been some funding problems with this year's St Andrew's day. I wrote to the minister at the beginning of the month to express my concern about the length of time between the date on which an organisation makes an application and the date on which it is notified whether it has

been successful. One group was given just over a month's notice before St Andrew's day that its funding bid had succeeded. As the minister pointed out, the organisation was duly grateful for its award, but I am sure that she agrees that such notice does not leave groups with enough time to book venues and get advertising in place. I understand that, as of today—three days before St Andrew's day—the group's vital cheque from the Government has still not turned up. The organisers have had to dip into their own pockets to ensure that local events are paid for. I hope that she can assure the chamber that those who have applied for year of homecoming funding will be given at least six months' notice that they have been successful and that the money will turn up well before the event for which it has been awarded.

As the minister said, this year's St Andrew's day festivities will take place in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dundee, Inverness, Stirling and, of course, the town of St Andrews itself. With that in mind, I turn to the amendment in my name.

For the past 13 years—long before St Andrew's day became a voluntary public holiday—the St Andrews festival has taken place in the royal burgh that bears the name of our patron saint. A host of activities and events, from traditional and classical concerts to exhibitions of arts and crafts, as well as dance and drama, enliven the town over an entire week leading up to 30 November. This year there will be an added gem—a son et lumière event in St Mary's quadrangle. This is to be a spectacular display, showing scenes from Scotland's rich history, with music from the Red Hot Chilli Peppers—

Members: Pipers.

Ted Brocklebank: I may not know much about the Red Hot Chilli Pipers, but there will also be music from Phil Cunningham, about whom I know an awful lot.

Linda Fabiani: Nice knees.

Ted Brocklebank: The minister must contain herself and not keep talking about Iain Smith's knees.

I pay tribute to the festival's director, Rob Murray Brown, and his small team of four dedicated trustees for their hard work, enthusiasm and fortitude.

The St Andrews festival committee is now looking towards 2009. What better place to showcase St Andrew's day next year than the place where it all began? St Andrews, par excellence, ticks the boxes of all five major themes of the year of homecoming. I remind members of what those are: golf; our ancestors; the Scottish enlightenment; Burns; and whisky. St Andrews is

the world home of golf. On ancestry, as the BBC's "A History of Scotland" exemplifies, few towns in Scotland have produced more distinguished historical figures. As the home of the nation's oldest university, St Andrews is right there with Edinburgh as the cradle of the enlightenment. The St Andrews Burns club, of which I am a proud former president, is the 13th oldest club in the Robert Burns World Federation—older than the Edinburgh Burns club. Finally, with at least one famous dram named after St Andrews, the town's residents yield to none in their respect for the amber nectar.

I hope that the minister will take into account the unique attributes of St Andrews when planning her diary for next year and that she will commit herself to taking part in at least some of the events that are planned by the organisers of the St Andrews festival. When it comes to funding, we assume that the minister will ensure that St Andrews is not belittled by the large budgets that will surely be available to the major cities next year. We look forward to hearing from her soon on that point.

Scottish Conservatives have no problems with the principle of St Andrew's day being a holiday, with the one caveat that it should not be an additional day off work—a sentiment that the previous Administration finally accepted. On behalf of all who hold St Andrews dear, and particularly those who see it as the natural and appropriate focus for the nation's celebrations around 30 November, I move the amendment in my name, in the hope that all other members will endorse it.

I move amendment S3M-2965.1, to insert at end:

" , and welcomes the example set by the ancient burgh of St Andrews in organising its own programme of events for St Andrew's Day, which provides an appropriate focus for the nation's celebrations at this time of year."

15:13

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): I wish everyone a happy St Andrew's day. We will support the Government motion and the Conservative amendment, although we have clearly been entrapped into supporting an event in St Andrews next year—all credit to Ted Brocklebank for that.

St Andrew's day has been celebrated around the globe for many years, but perhaps it does not have the significance that it deserves. It is the feast day of St Andrew, the patron saint of Scotland. In last year's debate on the issue, in which I did not take part, many versions of why St Andrew became the patron saint of Scotland were suggested. I note the version that is given by the BBC, which suggests that the Scots chose St Andrew because St Peter, his brother, held sway

with the Pope, and the Scots thought that they might need the Pope's influence against the belligerent English. Of course, I make the point that that is the historical context.

Scottish Labour believes that 30 November is Scotland's national day and should be celebrated throughout the country, and that we should work towards its becoming an even more significant event in the Scottish calendar. However, it should not all be about having the fun that we will clearly have this afternoon. I prefer Ted Brocklebank's version—the Red Hot Chilli Peppers—because I am a fan of the American rock band, but that is not to say that the Red Hot Chilli Pipers are not a fantastic advert for Scotland. When taking part in the activities that have been organised, the Parliament should reflect on the kind of Scotland that we want to build. Unlike Ted Brocklebank, I welcome the chance to do that today, because we should use St Andrew's day to discuss our common values and how we can work together to achieve a better quality of life for our citizens.

I do not think that the celebrations are yet big and bold enough, although I am sure that that will come. I recognise, however, that the Scottish Government has attempted to grow the stature of the national day. I was an early supporter of Dennis Canavan's bill, which became the St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Act 2007, and I note that more Scots are opting to take the 30th as a holiday.

On Saturday, I will represent the Labour group at Holyrood on the Scottish Trades Union Congress march. We will be joined by the Secretary of State for Scotland, Jim Murphy, as we march in support of one of Scotland's big interests—the fight against racism. There will be little disagreement among us that we should create a Scotland that welcomes all Scots and those who choose to make Scotland their home. There is no place for racism or fascism, and there is no platform for racism or fascism.

I welcome the United Kingdom Government's recent announcement on opting into the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ending the incarceration of asylum seeker children and migrant children. That is the right thing to do. The matter has been raised by many MSPs, not least the former First Minister, Jack McConnell.

We will continue to talk about what holds us together, although we all know that we have differences, too. That is quite legitimate. We did not lodge an amendment because we recognise that the Government is trying to get consensus around the idea of building the importance of St Andrew's day. We should continue the trend of the former First Minister, Jack McConnell—who, incidentally, introduced the badges that some of us are wearing today.

Scotland's flag—the saltire—is the national flag, and it should fly on all public buildings. In last year's debate, Sandra White said that

“the saltire can belong to anyone”,

but that

“we, as a political party, are identified with it.”—[*Official Report*, 29 November 2007; c 3980.]

I am sure that Labour is not alone in reclaiming Scotland's flag to ensure that, as our national flag, it can be worn by us all. It symbolises that we are all proud to be Scottish, without the inference that it represents the Scottish National Party. It is not the nationalist flag; it is the national flag. I hope that the minister agrees with that.

We in our party are also proud to be part of a successful, modern United Kingdom, and we see the Scottish flag as a flag of unity with other nations as part of the UK. For most of us, being Scottish or British—however we wish to define ourselves—is not the only defining factor. I think of myself as a democratic socialist, a feminist and an internationalist, but being Scottish is very much something for individuals to define.

We have differences of opinion about Scotland's future, however, which we will continue to argue over. Recent trends show that Scots continue to reject independence as the way forward. So far, on the whole, Scots believe that stronger home rule is the way forward for Scotland. The SNP should not attempt to play politics with St Andrew's day—there is some suggestion that a referendum could be held two years from today, on St Andrew's day itself. It would be really wrong to do that. The debate around the referendum should be separate.

Rob Brown, a member of the SNP, has called on the party to drop those plans, because of falling support for independence. It does nothing to help Scotland's future to have uncertainty over our constitutional arrangements hanging over us. Labour does not agree that the future of Scotland lies with a local income tax or the Scottish Futures Trust, and the Government is struggling to demonstrate that Scotland's economic future lies with those policies.

Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Pauline McNeill: I am sorry—I am just finishing.

We strongly believe that Scotland's future lies with stronger devolution and with policies that ensure that there will continue to be new schools, new hospitals and a stronger health service and which tackle poverty. We will continue to hold the Government to account on those issues.

The concept of the Calman commission, which the Parliament endorsed, is critical in deciding the

way forward. With 170 submissions, it has been shown to be a dynamic process. I believe that stronger home rule for Scotland is what Scots will support.

Despite our obvious and deep differences over the constitutional issue, I believe that there is plenty of common ground, across all parties, for us to build on the hopes and values that we have for our country. We will work towards doing that.

15:19

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): I feel slightly guilty that I did not put my kilt on today so that I could bare my knees in the chamber. I was proud to wear my kilt when I represented Scotland and the Scottish Parliament during Scotland week in the United States and Canada earlier this year. I am pleased to hear that at the weekend, the Red Hot Chilli Pipers will visit St Andrews, which is in my constituency. Members and Scottish Government ministers seemed like a supporting act as we followed the Red Hot Chilli Pipers around North America during Scotland week.

I always welcome the opportunity to extol in the chamber the virtues of my constituency of North East Fife, so I thank the Conservatives for their amendment, which will allow me to do that at length today.

However, it is with some regret that I rise to speak in the debate—although I probably do not regret it as much as those who are listening to me do. I do not intend to undermine the importance of St Andrew's day, but is it really so important and pressing that the Scottish National Party Government thinks we should address it when thousands of Scots face their bleakest winter for many years? Small businesses are on the verge of collapse, not because they do not have any work but because they cannot get their hands on working capital. Shop workers in high streets across Scotland, including in St Andrews, face an uncertain future, with household names such as Woolworths and MFI going into administration. Thousands of bank jobs are at risk under the HBOS-Lloyds TSB merger that is being forced through by the UK Government.

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Iain Smith: In a moment.

Pensioners and low-income families face the bleak choice of heating or eating as energy companies fail to pass on the cuts in oil prices by cutting fuel bills, and more and more people face losing their homes as banks fail to pass on interest rate cuts. Surely the Scottish Government should make constructive proposals about how it will implement its six-point plan for economic recovery

for the Parliament to consider and debate, rather than have another filler debate on St Andrew's day.

Gil Paterson: Thank you for taking the intervention. You seem to be blaming the Government, or the Parliament, for debating St Andrew's day. In the next part of your speech, will you suggest that we cancel Christmas?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that remarks should be made through the chair.

Iain Smith: Gil Paterson's intervention does not even merit a response. If SNP members do not think that the issues that I mentioned are the most important ones for the Parliament to debate at this time, that sums them up.

George Foulkes: The member makes a good point. Last week, we had debates on identity cards, which is a reserved area, and on—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. I remind George Foulkes and Iain Smith that we must address the motion that is in front of us, which is not a business motion on whether we should have the debate.

George Foulkes: It is not anything to do with Christmas, either.

We had a debate on the future of Scottish aquaculture last week, too. Iain Smith is right. As we debate St Andrew's day, it is perfectly valid to point out that there are many more important matters that the Scottish Government is frightened to bring before the Parliament.

Iain Smith: I thank George Foulkes for that intervention, although I point out that the billions of pounds that are being wasted on ID cards would be better spent on boosting Scotland's economy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we get back to the motion, please?

Iain Smith: I had thought of starting my speech today by suggesting that we were in danger of turning St Andrew's Day into groundhog day, until I checked last year's debate on the same issue and discovered that that was what I said then. Indeed, most of what I thought I would say today, I covered during last year's debate. I thought at one point that I would just read out last year's speech. It is probably a relief to all that I have only four minutes for my speech, which I have shortened accordingly. However, I stress that I support the Scottish Government's attempts to strengthen the place of St Andrew's day as the official celebration of Scotland and the start of our winter festival.

As we look ahead to the year of homecoming—an idea that was first mooted by my Liberal Democrat former colleague Donald Gorrie and promoted and developed by the Liberal Democrats

in the coalition Government—St Andrew's day must surely have the central role at the culmination of that year of celebration. I would welcome more information about exactly how the Scottish Government is intensifying activity and support for homecoming 2009, which is one of the six points in the cunning plan for the economy. In particular, perhaps the minister can tell us how the Government will support bids for activities for St Andrews day 2009 that are linked to the year of homecoming. I echo Ted Brocklebank's comments on funding and support for bids, about which I have already written to the minister. It is important that early decisions are made.

In my view, it would be entirely appropriate for the focus of the St Andrew's day 2009 celebrations in the year of homecoming to be in St Andrews itself. As the ancient ecclesiastic and academic centre of Scotland, St Andrews is well placed to be the focal point of the culmination of a year that celebrates Scotland's past and looks ahead to its future. That is why I am more than happy to support the amendment in Ted Brocklebank's name, which highlights what is happening in St Andrews this year to celebrate St Andrews day.

As Ted Brocklebank said, the St Andrews festival has been running for many years, providing a series of events in the week leading up to St Andrew's day. I am pleased that this year's programme has been enhanced, and I welcome the support of the Scottish Government, Fife Council and others for the festival. On Sunday, I look forward to participating in the St Andrew's day celebrations, which include the traditional beating of the retreat, the St Andrew's day procession, a play and an oration. There will also be the switching on of the Christmas lights. I have suggested before that we should encourage all burghs, towns and cities in Scotland to switch on their Christmas lights on St Andrew's day and be part of the launch of the winter festival.

I particularly look forward to seeing the son et lumière—sound and light—snapshot of Scotland's epic history, which Ted Brocklebank referred to. That innovative new venture, which is based on festivals of light in places such as Bruges, aims to take advantage of the backdrop of the historic buildings of St Andrews. This year is a trial run of what we hope will be an even more ambitious and spectacular show on St Andrew's day next year to celebrate the year of homecoming.

I hope that many members will visit St Andrews this weekend to join in the celebrations and experience for themselves what we can do to make St Andrew's day special.

15:25

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate, not just as an MSP in this reconvened Scottish Parliament but as a patriot in the best sense of the word, believing my nation to be no more worthy than any other but distinct in its history, culture, social policies and international perspective on the world—*primus inter pares*.

I pay tribute to Dennis Canavan, in absentia. The Labour-Liberal Government initially opposed the St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill, which he introduced. However, the then Executive allowed the bill to be passed, on the basis of a mean compromise that St Andrew's day would not be an additional public holiday. It took the view that establishing a public holiday was not within the competence of the Parliament—what's new? I commend the Conservatives, who, along with the Scottish National Party, supported the bill all along. This, when Scotland has nine public holidays compared with 13 in Norway and Sweden and 15 in Finland.

Among those northern neighbours, and indeed other European countries, we are one of the oldest nations in Europe—we stretch back to the ninth century. We have one of the oldest flags—that universal symbol of nationhood. Wherever and whenever the saltire is flown or carried, it identifies our national DNA not only to the 25 million people who claim Scottish descent but to people throughout the world.

Despite 301 years of union with our larger and historically predatory neighbour, and despite decades of efforts—brutal and subtle—to assimilate us, we have remained clearly and distinctly a nation in our own right. Thankfully, gone are the days when the voice of the BBC was received-pronunciation English, and accents—Scots or otherwise—were considered a mark of the less educated. I speak from childhood experience: children I knew in my street were sent to elocution lessons to learn to speak properly.

Since 1999, the Parliament has grown in maturity and skill—attributes that have even, on occasion, been displayed in debates. For some members, devolution is a process, not an end in itself.

George Foulkes: Will the member take an intervention?

Christine Grahame: I will let Lord Foulkes in a minute.

Four of the Parliament's parties and its independent member believe that we should have increased fiscal powers. Given the economic mess that has been dumped on us by the Blair/Brown years, which Darling is trying to shovel up, such

increased powers cannot come too soon. If you feel the Scots' pain so much, Iain Smith, you should vote for independence.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind the member to address her remarks through the chair.

Christine Grahame: It is symbols of nationhood, such as our patron saint and the flag that is symbolic of his crucifixion, that have carried the heart and hopes of Scots in good and bad, from the confrontations on football pitches to those on battlefields.

It is more than financially astute to celebrate St Andrew's day. I say to Ted Brocklebank that there is money to be made in tourism opportunities. To lead from St Andrew's day to a winter festival would be no bad thing—I would welcome it. However, far more important for me is the symbolic reminder that we are the Scottish people, whether or not we were born here—I was not. We are distinct in our values from our neighbours to the east, south and west. We are proud to be so and determined to remain so.

Where is that symbol of our patron saint more distinct than in our flag, the saltire, which was inspired by the vision at Athelstaneford in 832 AD, where King Angus—Angus is my oldest son's name; there is DNA for you—led the Scots in battle to defeat the Angles? The night before battle, St Andrew appeared before King Angus, assuring him of victory, and in the morning a white saltire against a blue sky appeared to both sides. Would that happen today? It is said that the Angles lost confidence and were defeated, and that image has been our flag ever since.

Today, in commemoration of St Andrew's day, the saltire—symbol of St Andrew and Scotland—flies over many buildings. It flies above the Forth road bridge for the first time, although it does not yet have pole position on Edinburgh castle, over our capital city. I will let a unionist in.

George Foulkes: I always hesitate to intervene when Christine Grahame is in full flow, but I was interested in what she said about received pronunciation on the BBC. When I listen to the BBC, I regularly hear the tones of Jim Naughtie, Kirsty Wark and Eddie Mair coming from London. Does Christine Grahame condemn them for taking Dr Johnson's advice and taking the high road to London?

Christine Grahame: I will give Lord Foulkes my speech to read later. He was not listening. I said "historically". I hope that he knows what that means.

Today, in commemoration of St Andrew's day, his flag is flying over Edinburgh castle, but not in pole position. The British Government, on behalf of the Ministry of Defence, designated it as an

official flag-flying station. The union flag therefore takes precedence. Yet, by the Scotland Act 1998, and by agreement between the Crown Estate commissioners and the Scottish Office, ownership of Edinburgh castle and other historic buildings transferred from the Crown to the Secretary of State for Scotland, and thence to the Scottish ministers. The transfer of 26 properties took place in 1999. Fact. Law. They included, inter alia, Edinburgh castle. The Government, through its ministers, is the owner, and is therefore landlord to the MOD. The MOD is our tenant. It is time the landlords—the Scottish people—told the tenants to take the union flag down and fly the saltire in its place, not only because it symbolises our nation and its patron saint, but because if it is good enough for recruiting Scots to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is good enough to fly all the year round.

15:31

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): Presiding Officer, as they say in entertainment, follow that. However, I am delighted to be taking part in the debate.

The motion calls on us

“to celebrate our history, culture and traditions as well as the vibrant, creative and dynamic nation that Scotland is today”.

No doubt there are those on the SNP benches who believe that that has happened only since May of last year, but they are the ones who look at the world through saltire-covered glasses.

However, I do not want to be churlish today. We should consider what happens in other countries that, like Scotland, have St Andrew as their patron saint. Apologies in advance for what will be poor pronunciation, but in Germany they have Andreasnacht, or St Andrew's night; in Austria the custom is Andreasgebet, or St Andrew's prayer; while in Poland it is simply Andrzejki, or Andrew's.

There are many superstitions related to St Andrew's night in Germany, Austria, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania. It is interesting to note that many of those superstitions centre on the fact that the night before St Andrew's day is especially suitable for magic that will reveal a young woman's future husband to her. In some areas of Austria, for example, young women would drink wine and then perform a spell—the Andreasgebet that I mentioned earlier—while nude and kicking a straw bed. That, it was believed, would magically attract their future husband. Heaven knows why, but that is what they said. Yet another custom saw young women throw a clog over their shoulder. If it landed pointing at the door, they would get married the same year.

Sadly, neither history nor the internet records what happened to the clog throwing after marriage.

To be serious, I particularly wanted to participate in this debate to celebrate the 10th anniversary of another St Andrew's day speech. It was made by our late First Minister, Donald Dewar, when he was Secretary of State for Scotland. Someone had the bright idea that he should deliver it in St Andrews itself on 30 November 1998.

Ted Brocklebank: Me!

David Whitton: Yes, I am looking at him across the chamber. The speech was made only a few short months before the creation of this Scottish Parliament. It was the second of a series of three, setting out what Mr Dewar's vision of devolution for Scotland would mean. Reading the speech again, I see that the message Donald delivered on that occasion is as true today as it was then. It bears repeating.

Commenting on the constitutional settlement put in place through the Scotland Act 1998, he said:

“What we have is a stable settlement. It is stable because it is the right settlement for Scotland, because it reflects what the people of Scotland want. It strikes the balance between the advantages of doing things our way in Scotland and the advantages of working together in the UK.

We are a Government committed to change and modernisation. It would be absurd to pretend that ours will be the last word on every detail of the constitutional settlement. Indeed, the framework put in place by the Scotland Act explicitly allows for adjustment, to reflect changing circumstances. If, through experience and by consent, we want to adjust the settlement, the machinery is in place.”

I think we can infer from those comments that Donald Dewar would have supported the Calman commission on devolution, which is due to report next week.

Donald Dewar, as I know, had a clear view of what he wanted from the Scottish Parliament. He said that it would be

“A Parliament in Scotland, a Parliament with wide powers; this Parliament has the chance—the responsibility—to build a modern Scotland.”

He said that the Government's focus on the economy, education and health care would give Scotland a position of strength on which the Parliament and Executive would build. He called on the new Scottish Executive—as it was called then—to maintain those priorities in order to meet the challenges of social exclusion.

However, no Dewar speech would be complete without a lyrical passage. He went on to say:

“What makes our country special is not just our history, the beauty of the land, a unique and vigorous culture.

What makes our country special is the way we have built our fortunes, not through introspection, but through open engagement with a wider world.

What makes our country special is the strength of our values. Our commitment to equality of opportunity and social justice.

It is the values of the people of this country which will give value to our Parliament. It is the values of the people of Scotland, the way we view the world, which will create the opportunities, the challenges, for that Parliament”.

Donald Dewar was passionate about social justice, as I think we all are. He wanted to see a better and fairer society, with better education to provide opportunities for those who miss out and more people in work, because work provides the chance to build a better life and, in so doing, to contribute to the wider community. On that night in St Andrews, he said:

“Yes, constitutional change matters. Yes, we must get it right. But I am not standing for the Scottish Parliament to prolong a debate on constitutional change.

I want a Scotland which will fight social exclusion.

I want a Scottish Executive which promotes prosperity and uses that wealth to fight poverty.

I want a Scottish Executive which sets high standards for our schools because our children deserve nothing less.

I want a Scottish Executive which shares in the modernisation of the welfare state, working with Westminster to build a better Britain.

And I want that to be our debate—not a wrangle over whether we do or do not tear ourselves out of the Union, but working together to make a stronger Scotland within a stronger United Kingdom.”

I am happy to support the Government’s motion on St Andrew’s day. I hope that St Andrew’s day helps to prepare the way for a successful year of homecoming next year, when we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns. I am pleased that the Government has allocated more resources to homecoming events—better late than never.

As someone who had a hand in organising Donald Dewar’s speech in St Andrews 10 years ago, I am glad to welcome the ancient burgh’s programme of events. I also suggest that an annual state of the nation speech by the First Minister in St Andrews on St Andrew’s day might be worthy of inclusion.

Ted Brocklebank: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is just winding up.

David Whitton: I am winding up.

Let me conclude by saying:

“So there is the challenge to the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Ministers.

Build an inclusive society, an outward looking and prosperous society. Found it on fairness and opportunity for all ... That is what the people of Scotland want, that is what they deserve. And I am confident that is what they will get.”

Those are not my words but Donald Dewar’s words. They are as true today as when he said them 10 years ago. I think that St Andrew would have approved.

15:38

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP):

At this time next year, the year of homecoming will be drawing to its official close, on St Andrew’s day 2009. At this time in two years, I hope that the treaty of union will also be drawing to a close, given the First Minister’s stated ambition of holding an independence referendum around St Andrew’s day in 2010.

St Andrew’s day has always had significance in Scotland. I expect that historic significance to grow over the next few years. Today’s debate takes place not only on St Andrew’s day but, coincidentally, on American thanksgiving day. Many parallels can be drawn between the two celebrations: both are distinctive traditions that have evolved over time and become associated internationally with the countries in which they originated.

Of course, as others have said, Scotland does not have a monopoly on St Andrew. In addition to the countries on David Whitton’s list, Russia and Greece have St Andrew as their patron—as do fishermen, singers and rope-makers—but we have a claim not only to his patronage but to his relics, which were in the town of St Andrews, as Ted Brocklebank’s amendment reminds us.

St Andrew and the flag of St Andrew have become key symbols of Scotland and what it stands for. Again, we can draw on the American thanksgiving day tradition of celebrating cultural diversity and the common humanity that draws us together. I am proud that Scotland’s egalitarian traditions find expression in such days of national celebration. Just as the American holiday season begins with thanksgiving and ends with new year, so Scotland’s winter festival is increasingly seen as starting with St Andrew’s day and ending with Burns night. Those are two hinges on which so much that Scotland has to offer the wider world can hang.

I have already touched on one way that that can happen with the 2009 year of homecoming. The Scottish Government initiative promotes a welcoming image of modern, inclusive Scotland and invites everyone who has an affinity with our country to come home, whether they see Scotland as their ancestral home or a spiritual home, and share in the enjoyment of our culture, heritage and environment.

Of course, the year of homecoming and our national days—St Andrew’s day and Burns night, with hogmanay resting in between—are not just

about the feel-good factor. There is a clear economic and social benefit to making the most of those opportunities. Global marketing and the unique series of events that are associated with the year of homecoming will significantly boost our tourism industry during these tough economic times.

Interestingly, Wendy Alexander's paper "Change is what we do" referred to people aspiring to two foreign holidays a year, as well as a second home and car ownership. Maybe that is how Labour thinks that people will spend their way out of recession, but perhaps the option of holidaying at home will become more attractive and economically beneficial to Scotland. I hope that the year of homecoming will inspire many people in Scotland to stay at home for their holiday next year and take part in the range of special events that are planned, or just enjoy what our multiform and vast Scotland has to offer. As the minister said, the pupils of Larkhall academy are doing their bit to promote a positive image of Scotland with their unite Scotland campaign.

The south of Scotland will have plenty to offer participants in the year of homecoming. Throughout Ayrshire and the Borders, celebration of Burns, golf and traditions such as the common ridings are being promoted not just to the usual suspects but to audiences in Scotland and around the world who might not be so familiar with those aspects of our heritage. In addition, I have spoken in the chamber several times about the importance of world heritage sites, such as New Lanark, to the year of homecoming as a focus for activity and for attracting visitors. St Andrew's day, along with Burns night, acts as a hinge for many of the opportunities that we have for promoting Scotland and celebrating our diverse culture and heritage.

Today's debate also gives us the opportunity to think about how we can build on the potential of our national day. I welcome the Scottish Government's moves to formalise the day as a holiday for its staff and to encourage more employers throughout the country to offer the day as a holiday. This year, St Andrew's day falls on a Sunday, which offers families and workers an opportunity to have an extra long weekend. I hope that many people will be able to take advantage of it.

Unfortunately, as Christine Grahame said, the Parliament still does not have the power to do something as simple as institute St Andrew's day as a full public holiday to which everyone has legal entitlement. Scotland already has a different public holiday schedule from the rest of the UK, despite UK ministers' attempts earlier this year to promote a Britishness day on a public holiday that does not exist in Scotland. We also still have the lowest number of public holidays in Europe. That is one

way in which St Andrew's day differs from American thanksgiving: our friends in the United States of America are enjoying a well-earned rest and a day off work. Even the stock exchange is closed. However, here in Scotland, unionist politicians stand in the way of giving the Parliament the power to give our population an extra holiday as the winter closes in.

Indeed, despite some folk proclaiming to be democrats, they still refuse to accept the democratic right of the people to choose independence as a route for Scotland. That is why I hope that, come St Andrew's day 2010, the people of Scotland will be in a position to reclaim that power for their Government, and all the powers that a normal, independent country enjoys. Greenland has just taken a step closer to independence from Denmark in a democratic referendum. Even in these tough economic times, with a population of just 57,000, the people of Greenland are confident in their ability to play a bigger role on the world stage and manage their own affairs more directly.

St Andrew's day is already a popular chance to celebrate all that Scotland has to offer. The Government's work to develop its potential is commendable and will make a lasting difference to the way in which we mark the day in future. St Andrew's day is one of the hinges on which Scotland's cultural calendar rests. I hope that all members in the chamber and people throughout Scotland have the chance to take a bit of a rest this weekend, and I wish them all a very happy St Andrew's day.

15:44

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate on St Andrew's day and, in a spirit of consensus, I endorse the Tory amendment. As someone who has been a frequent visitor to St Andrews over the years, I know that it offers many attractions, which are not just to do with golf. The town has a number of other facilities and sights.

The debate gives us an opportunity to celebrate St Andrew's day, to reflect on the successes of Scottish life and to contemplate what sort of future we want for Scotland. When we look back at the history of Scotland, there is much to reflect on. It is interesting that the debate is being held on the same day as the statement on science. We have proud engineering and scientific traditions. Each day, as I come to Edinburgh on the train, I look across at the Forth rail bridge and often marvel at what a tremendous engineering achievement it is.

For its scientific achievements, which include those of Fleming, Bell and Baird, Scotland stands out as a beacon to the world. One in every 100

people who are employed in Scotland is a scientist. Challenges have been faced in the past, and our scientists can face them in the future, in key areas such as energy, renewables and climate change. They can help us to tackle some of the Parliament's policy priorities, such as reducing carbon emissions, tackling fuel poverty and keeping Scotland's lights burning.

I welcome Linda Fabiani's comments about the 250th anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns. The spirit of Burns is alive and well in my constituency. Many of the schools in Rutherglen and Cambuslang participate in the Bridgeton Burns competition that is held every January. Calderwood primary school and St Columbkilles primary school were successful in the competition last year, and I wish them every success in the coming competition. Participation in such competitions and celebration of the life and poetry of Burns help with the creation of good young citizens. I see evidence of that in the schools in my constituency, where many of the youngsters who take part in Burns-related events go on to participate in fair trade events and to campaign on such issues.

The debate gives us an opportunity to consider what sort of Scotland we want to create and allows us to speak up for the people of Scotland. We want a Scotland that has modern schools, not a Scotland where a third of schools are not fit for purpose. We want schools in which we can educate our young people so that they can go on to be leaders in society. We want a Scotland that has a strong health service that will tackle health inequalities, not a Scotland where—as is the case in my constituency—there are fewer general practitioners in areas of deprivation than there are in more prosperous constituencies, where life expectancy is higher. We want a Scotland that will make progress on meeting the 2012 homelessness targets and achieve the campaign objectives that many of us signed up to last week when the Shelter campaign came to the Parliament.

A number of members have mentioned the independence debate. Some people wave the saltire and claim that St Andrew's day will help the cause of independence, but I do not subscribe to that view. Recent events have weakened the case for independence. The arc of prosperity has crumbled. One need only look at the situation in Iceland, where the banks are in crisis, where interest rates went up by 6 per cent in one day—a greater rise than took place under the Tories on black Wednesday—

Aileen Campbell: Can the member remind the Parliament of the last western country to go to the International Monetary Fund? I think that he will find that it was the UK under the Labour Party.

James Kelly: The crisis that impacted on Iceland has impacted on Scotland. The fact that a number of local authorities had deposits in Icelandic banks has really brought the crisis home.

The price of oil has come down by a third and the UK Government has come to the rescue of the Scottish banks, thereby shoring up crucial parts of the Scottish economy. The economic case for independence has been weakened. We are stronger together and weaker apart, so it is better to celebrate St Andrew's day within the union.

From Robert Burns to J K Rowling, there is a lot to celebrate in Scottish life. We should remember our heritage, tap into Scotland's talent and speak out for the disadvantaged. If we do that, Scotland will continue to flourish and we can celebrate St Andrew's day with pride.

15:50

Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP): Unlike some members, I am delighted to take part in the debate. The members who have not been able to talk to the motion but who have instead used the debate for other purposes should take a leaf out of the book of Dennis Canavan, who is in the public gallery again and who has tried for many years to have St Andrew's day celebrated properly.

I am happy to take part in the debate for two reasons. The first is the long-standing interest that I have had in St Andrew's day since, some years ago, when I was leader of Clackmannanshire Council, I proposed that it should be a public holiday in the council area. The second reason is much more recent and relates to the People's Postcode Lottery. Before anyone suggests otherwise, I have no interests, as yet, to declare in that regard. However, it transpires that today many of my constituents in part of Kinross have become the winners of the first-ever St Andrew's day belter and will share £1 million as a result. As we debate the significance of St Andrew's day and how and why we should celebrate it, my constituents in Kinross know exactly why they will celebrate that special day forever more.

I should clarify that my good friend and colleague the Minister for Parliamentary Business, although a resident of the fine town of Kinross, will have to satisfy himself with more traditional reasons to celebrate St Andrew's day. To coin a phrase and to refer to another lottery, he should be aware that you have to be in it to win it. I should also mention that the Kinross residents' win will be celebrated on St Andrew's day with a party in Kinross.

As I said, several years ago Clackmannanshire Council established St Andrew's day as a local holiday but, unfortunately, the decision was subsequently reversed by a Labour administration.

When I proposed the idea, I mentioned that it should perhaps be the kick-off for a winter festival that would run through to Burns night. I also suggested, although I would not do so now, that it might be a good idea to make it the first day on which people were allowed to go Christmas shopping. That was a personal ambition, but it did not work then and it perhaps would not go down well today. The day continues to be celebrated in Clackmannanshire. Tomorrow morning, Alva academy will have its second annual St Andrew's day awards, which John Beattie and I will attend. Strathdevon primary school will also hold events. It just so happens that my two sons go to those schools. It is good to hear from members that similar events are happening more widely throughout Scotland.

As others have said, although St Andrew's day is a Scottish event, it is also international. The St Andrew's cross furnishes the flag of Tenerife and the Russian naval ensign, as well as the other flags that members have mentioned. St Andrew was crucified in Greece, in the city of Patras, which now honours him and, of course, 30 November. Coincidentally, Patras is traditionally considered to be the birthplace of the Greek revolution for independence and against Ottoman rule in 1821. Before anyone accuses me of trying to make a national holiday a nationalist one, they should consider that, in Greece, there is no distinction between the two. As one of the definitions of nationalism is that it is the idea of supporting one's country and culture, I do not understand why some members are so afraid of being nationalists, or why some are afraid of being Scottish nationalists when they are happy to be British nationalists.

The SNP has been charged with using the saltire for political purposes. Those comments were made much more widely in the corresponding debate last year, but they were made again today by Pauline McNeill. The reason why that happens is that, in the past, the unionist parties have been afraid to use the saltire in any literature and have not been nearly as ready to use it as they have been ready to use the union jack. Famously, Tony Blair always had a union jack behind him when making public statements and we should remember his entry to Downing Street, with union jacks supplied by the Labour Party. The idea of a Britain day has been touted by the current Prime Minister. Members would do well to ensure that they are not in a glass house before they start throwing those stones. I recall from my time as an elections officer that, some time ago, Fife Council ordered the taking down of a saltire from one of its schools because it was seen to be eliciting support for the SNP—that was the returning officer's decision.

I do not really care whether St Andrew's day is national or nationalist; such a discussion makes me think of angels, or perhaps patron saints, dancing on the head of a pin. I care that the day is accepted as a celebration of Scotland and its shared heritage with Europe and the wider world, which is sometimes all too easy to forget, and I associate myself with Pauline McNeill's remarks about anti-racism in that regard.

Last week I had the chance to speak at a conference in Edinburgh on issues relating to migration to Scotland. I will remember that conference for a long time, not least because, when I left after talking for too long, I found that I had a £30 parking ticket—perhaps we could use such an innovation in Parliament. I mentioned at that conference that when people come to this country, we should take it as a real compliment that they want to make their future here. That contrasts with the fearful tones that we strike sometimes when we talk about immigration. A number of speakers at the conference who are involved with immigration were complimentary of both the Scottish Government's and the previous Scottish Executive's approaches to immigration through the one Scotland, many cultures theme.

The point has been made that although Scotland is internationalist, it has its own culture. We have to bear it in mind that many people come to Scotland to celebrate that culture, so we should not be afraid of displaying it or celebrating events such as St Andrew's day. We should be keen to let the world see what we can do through a revitalised St Andrew's day in a renewed Scotland. I am happy to support the motion, as well as Ted Brocklebank's amendment.

15:56

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): We have had a fairly lively debate. Before I start, I congratulate Christine Grahame on her firebrand speech. I imagine that if we had put a claymore in her hand as she was speaking, we would have cleared the gallery right away.

My fear is that the Scottish Government is likely to suggest that anyone who criticises the St Andrew's day plans shows a lack of ambition for Scotland. In my view, the people of Scotland are not obsessed with the St Andrew's day bank holiday; they are quite content with the current arrangement that allows them to choose to take that day off if they so wish, in exchange for another bank holiday.

The SNP wants to dictate the national mood by using St Andrew's day as a Government-sponsored exercise in flag waving—we heard quite a bit of debate about flag waving earlier. The

Scottish Liberal Democrats recognise and celebrate that Scottish people can be—and most are—patriotic about Scotland, but are also unionists. We believe in Scotland's potential and have contributed to it. The SNP must focus on what people all across Scotland want, whether they were born here or have chosen to make it their home.

I fear that the SNP will use the St Andrew's day celebrations to its own advantage. It appears to have failed to deliver its promise to make St Andrew's day a full public holiday. The much-heralded winter festival about which we heard earlier is to run from St Andrew's day until Burns night. I note that £300,000 has been allocated in each year of the spending review to provide support for St Andrew's day celebrations throughout Scotland. How much, if any, of that money is earmarked to support the winter festival? Although my colleagues and I think that the idea of a winter festival is a sound one that should be supported, we have to maximise its potential and ensure that it is adequately resourced, as well as properly managed and promoted, if it is to be successful.

At the moment, it merely appears that any cultural event that occurs between St Andrew's day and Burns night has been co-opted into the festival. I wish it success. If we compare the funding provided for it with the money given to the Edinburgh festival expo fund to promote the Scottish work of the festivals—£2 million has been allocated to that fund in each year of the spending review—it is apparent that the commitment to the winter festival is nowhere near as much as the SNP would like everyone to believe.

We are told that many public facilities will be open. I understand that more than 60 of Scotland's top tourist sites will be open free of charge on St Andrew's day. I wish them success, but, according to the press reports, there seems to be

"Little enthusiasm for taking time off for St Andrew's Day".

The press also suggested that the

"first state-sanctioned St Andrew's holiday is shaping up to be a non-event."

A spokesman from the Royal Bank of Scotland was quoted as saying that there was

"no indication of a surge in interest"

in taking the day as a holiday.

Perhaps people are waiting for Gordon Brown's special day. He suggested that remembrance day should be set aside as a day for celebration—a bank holiday—to celebrate Britishness.

It will come as no surprise to people here that the Scottish Liberal Democrats support the option that now exists for people to take St Andrew's day

as a holiday, if they so wish, in exchange for another bank holiday. We also welcome the opportunity that it presents to celebrate Scotland and Scottish culture and to promote the very best of Scotland both at home and abroad.

We celebrate Scotland in the early 21st century as a proud and integral part of the United Kingdom and we believe that we continue to flourish as a self-confident nation within the union. St Andrew's day can and should be a celebration of Scotland in all its rich diversity—its culture, language, music and people.

16:02

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): It is interesting to note that the public school near Slough, which was attended by our Presiding Officer; David Cameron, the leader of the Tories; and me, and which endeavoured to teach me to speak properly, always celebrated St Andrew's day as a holiday. It did so out of respect for Scotland, which it considered to be a very important part of the United Kingdom.

Many thanks are due to Dennis Canavan for all the work that he did to get the St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill on the statute book. I am happy to see him sitting in the public gallery today.

The debate has been useful and interesting. The Conservatives have long argued that extending tourism throughout the year is crucial to the future of Scotland's tourism sector and more general economic success, not least in my region of the Highlands and Islands, where tourism is the largest source of income and provider of employment.

We are very successful at attracting visitors in summer, but less successful in winter when, relatively speaking, tourism spend is even more important. We welcome the opportunity that St Andrew's day provides as part of a winter festival and an introduction to the year of homecoming, of which we are wholly supportive. However, we feel that more could have been done to link St Andrew's day 2008 to the beginning of the year of homecoming in 2009. We are not going to have such a valuable opportunity very often. I think that we would all agree that we cannot underestimate the potential for Scotland of the year of homecoming.

We heard yesterday about the vast nature of the Scottish diaspora and I agree with the speakers who have highlighted its importance. Professor Tom Devine summed it up effectively when he said:

"The effect of the Scottish Diaspora was total—economic, political, cultural, social, scientific and educational—and on a massive scale from the medieval period onwards."

The result is a market of millions of people throughout the world who instinctively feel warmth and some kind of loyalty towards this country. The audience of those across the globe who have some appreciation of Robert Burns—surely one of the greatest poetic talents the world has ever produced—is greater still.

It is vital that opportunities are grasped to reach out to those who are related to the Scots pioneers who travelled all over the world and to tell them that they and their families are warmly invited to come and visit modern Scotland to rediscover their familial roots while enjoying what Scotland has to offer to the visitor. People will always enjoy Scotland when they get here; we must give them more reasons to come.

Genealogical and historical tourism is important to Scotland, and I am glad to see an eminent and familiar Scottish historian, Michael Fry, sitting in the public gallery. The recently opened family history centre at the National Archives of Scotland on Princes Street is a wonderful facility. I pay tribute to George Mackenzie, the keeper of the records of Scotland, and his team who secured that development in time for the year of homecoming. The centre will be well used by people from all over the planet who are researching their Scottish family trees.

Following the enactment of the Scottish Register of Tartans Bill, which I introduced, George Mackenzie is now also the keeper of tartans. The Scottish register of tartans is neatly located within the National Archives of Scotland, so that people who are researching their Scottish family roots can find out about their tartan at the same time and, I hope, invest in some quality, Scottish-made tartan. That was one of the driving aims behind my bill, and I hope that the Scottish register of tartans will be heavily promoted by ministers throughout the year of homecoming. I will do my bit whenever I can.

I encourage anyone who would like to indulge in a bit of patriotism to don their kilt for St Andrew's day. If they do not yet own a kilt, there would be no better day to go out and invest in one—as long as it is made by one of our fine Scottish kilt manufacturers. Yesterday, I asked the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism, Jim Mather, what he was doing to promote the wearing of the kilt during the year of homecoming. He said that he was turning his mind to that.

I was interested to hear about the plans for the homecoming in the Highlands, and I welcome the co-ordinated relationship between the Scottish Government and Highland Council on that. Robbie Burns spoke for many of us when he said:

"My heart's in the Highlands, wherever I go."

On St Andrew's day in the Highlands, the street party that is planned for Inverness, with the Red Hot Chilli Pipers, will, I am sure, prove popular—as will the visit-for-free day that John Farquhar Munro mentioned. That initiative will extend to some of the Highlands' tourism gems, including the Blackhouse on Lewis, the Highland wildlife park at Kincaig, Fort George and Urquhart castle. The Highlands epitomise Scotland in so many ways. They are Scotland's heartland and its heartbeat. I hope that the events that are planned for the Highlands are successful and demonstrate to the world the modern, vibrant, dynamic country that Scotland is—a country that has some of the best mountain, land and seascapes in the whole world.

We should not forget that St Andrew was the first of the apostles and also a fisherman. There is something appropriate about Scotland having a patron saint who was a fisherman.

The Scottish Conservatives are positive about St Andrew's day, especially the role that it can play in kick-starting winter tourism. As unionists, we are proud to celebrate St Andrew's day, which is a Scottish national holiday, not a Scottish National Party holiday—let us not forget that. We look to the Scottish Government and all its agencies to do everything in their power to ensure that we reap the full benefits of the year of homecoming in 2009. It is of massive importance to the future of tourism in this country and the future success of our economy. I support the amendment in the name of my colleague, Ted Brocklebank.

16:08

Pauline McNeill: As I said in my opening speech, I welcome this debate about St Andrew's day. In keeping with other chamber debates on cultural matters, it has not been a disappointment. We have heard a few good stories and there has been a robust exchange of history lessons from David Whitton, Christine Grahame and others, which I have found interesting. The importance in other countries of clog throwing to a young woman's married fate is something that one lives and learns about. I had absolutely no idea that it was Donald Gorrie's idea to have the homecoming. Whoever's idea it was, we are all behind it and we all want a homecoming event that reflects Scotland's diversity and its many talents. I am sure that, in the days to come, the minister will accept ideas from others who want to contribute to the success of the year of homecoming. As the minister said, the year of homecoming is an opportunity to promote the best of Scotland. We should always be doing that, of course, but the event allows us to focus on what we do best. That is why it will be such a huge success.

I have no objection to kilts and tartan, which Ted Brocklebank talked about, and I think that we should celebrate the traditional music of Scotland. However, I add that we live in a modern country and have diverse tastes. As she is a proponent of Scottish contemporary music, the minister will indulge me in a remark about the taste of Scots and the choices of Scots, who still buy more live concert tickets than anyone else in the UK. It always astonishes people to learn that, but that is the case because Scottish people are passionate about their music—whether that trend continues in the current climate remains to be seen. I would argue that T in the Park is as much a Scottish tradition as the Red Hot Chilli Pipers are.

Since we are talking about Scotland's history and culture, I must state that it is important that Scottish Opera's return to business seems to have been a success. Perhaps, in the days to come, we will have a chance to talk about the achievements of Scottish Opera.

As in all debates about culture, there are lots of points of common ground. However, it would not be a healthy political debate if there were not also points of difference. Aileen Campbell made a good speech, but I think that she talked about the referendum on negotiations for independence being this time next year, whereas the Government proposes to hold the referendum two years from now. I repeat what I said before: that is a matter that we will continue to debate. The SNP should not be tempted to put party before country. Whatever the Parliament decides, I think that it is wrong to try to conflate St Andrew's day with any decision about Scotland's future. Although it is important to debate Scotland's future on St Andrew's day, holding a vote on that day is not in the interests of the country.

Keith Brown: Leaving aside the issue of the date on which a referendum might be held, is Pauline McNeill saying that she is still in favour of a referendum? If so, will she vote for it when the matter comes before Parliament?

Pauline McNeill: We called on the SNP Government to bring it on and get the question out of the road, but it was too frightened to do that. The Labour Party and, I am sure, other parties that are committed to Scotland's future, will put Scotland's interests first, not our own. The case for independence is weaker than it has ever been, and the case for stronger home rule is a popular choice. It provides the most certainty. I am sure that we will debate that constitutional issue in the days and months to come.

As we did last year, we debated today the use of the saltire—Keith Brown addressed that issue. Just for the avoidance of doubt, I say that Labour members are proud to wear the Scotland badge. We are proud of the Scottish flag, but we are also

proud to be part of the UK and its successes. Whatever certain members might think of the UK Government, it has brought workers' rights to the table in a way that no previous Government in the UK has done. For example, it has dealt with maternity rights and the working time directive. Further, let us not forget that when employers tried to get around the working time directive by adding public holidays to the four weeks' leave entitlement, the Labour Government outlawed that. Surely that should be applauded.

Christine Grahame: It is strange that we have been accused of being party political during this debate about St Andrew's day. I shall reread Pauline McNeill's speech in the *Official Report*, but it seems to be making a lot of party political points. Perhaps it is acceptable to support the union but not to fight for independence.

Pauline McNeill: I will take no lessons from Christine Grahame, who made quite a political contribution. It is legitimate to talk about political issues on St Andrew's day. What I said is that it is quite wrong for the SNP to use St Andrew's day when it decides to put something to the vote. That is clearly wrong.

To me, there is no contradiction in using St Andrew's day to talk about the values to which we hold true, and workers' rights are values that we on this side of the chamber, and others, hold to be important.

We also talk about what type of Scotland we want. I agree with Keith Brown on that point, as there are things that hold us together.

I am an internationalist, as I know many members are, and it is important to talk about Scotland's role around the world. It is legitimate for Scotland to have a view on many aspects of international policy, such as what is happening in the middle east and what action is being taken in relation to natural disasters. Many Scots want to hold their heads up high and do what is right for countries that are in need.

There was an exchange at question time today on the Government's international development policy, which I hope that we will continue to discuss. It is going in the right direction and Scotland has a part to play in international development, although the role of the UK Government and what it has done should also be recognised. I am sure that none of us will forget that many Scots are proud to have played a part in the fall of the apartheid regime in South Africa—many of us in the chamber played our part in that.

David Whitton was right to talk about Donald Dewar, the first ever First Minister, and the many speeches that he made on the importance of devolution to Scots. For our part, we believe in devolution for Scotland and in strengthening the

settlement. I am sure that we will talk about that in the months to come.

As I said, we have differences about the future of Scotland, on issues such as local income tax or the Scottish Futures Trust. The Parliament exists so that we can have a robust exchange on such matters, but there is probably more that unites us than divides us when it comes to talking about Scotland's culture and history. Aileen Campbell rightly spoke about why we should encourage more Scots to holiday in Scotland rather than abroad, but if we are asking people to make that choice, a lot of work must be done to improve the standard of accommodation and so on throughout the country so that people will take that option not only because they believe in the future of Scotland, but because they believe that they will get a better holiday.

David Whitton: Given that Mr Mather is sitting on the front bench, it might be as well to remind him that we would like to see more training and modern apprenticeships in tourism and more investment in tourism. I hope that some workers who may face redundancy in other industries might be encouraged to consider tourism as a way forward, because it could be a growth industry for Scotland.

Pauline McNeill: I know that the minister was listening to the intervention and I am sure that he will take on board the point that if we believe in promoting Scotland and in VisitScotland's role, there must be investment in the skills to make tourism a growth industry for Scotland.

I support David Whitton's earlier suggestion that we have an annual state of the nation speech. Why should it not come from Linda Fabiani on St Andrew's day?

Ted Brocklebank *rose—*

Pauline McNeill: May I give way to Ted Brocklebank?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): No, you must finish.

Pauline McNeill: On that note, we will support the Government motion and the Conservative amendment.

16:19

Linda Fabiani: That was quite a note for Pauline McNeill to finish on—I thank her for that suggestion.

There has been some debate about whether it is appropriate to have a party-political debate about St Andrew's day, but, as a few members have said, as well as being a day of celebration it is a day to reflect on what it means to be Scottish and on how we see the future of Scotland. I reiterate

that our national conversation on Scotland's constitutional future allows everyone to debate and discuss the kind of Scotland that we want and how best to achieve it. St Andrew's day is the perfect time to celebrate and reflect.

I will make two comments at the outset. First, Dennis Canavan is in the public gallery, despite being noted in absentia by Christine Grahame. We all acknowledge the role that he played in relation to St Andrew's day. [*Applause.*] I still acknowledge that role, because I can sense him looking over my shoulder to ensure that I do not do anything terribly wrong.

Secondly, I am glad that Pauline McNeill mentioned our great variety of music and culture, from our traditions to contemporary work. She also mentioned Scottish Opera. I am delighted to be going to see its latest production, "La Traviata", in Edinburgh's Festival theatre tonight. I suspect that other members are going to that, too.

The debate has been very good. We started with Ted Brocklebank congratulating the BBC on its new history series, which seems to be catching the popular imagination—I have heard many people speaking about it. That programme provides a really good backdrop to St Andrew's day and the BBC is to be congratulated on it.

Ted Brocklebank talked about how we link events such as the year of homecoming and winter festivals with tourism. I say to him and to others, including John Farquhar Munro, that the point is to link all that up. Members would be pleasantly surprised—although I would prefer them to know what is happening than to be surprised—if they logged on to the websites to see what is happening from St Andrew's day through to the winter white festival, which VisitScotland is running; the winter festivals; hogmanay and new year, which is a great festival for Scotland; and right through to Celtic Connections in Glasgow.

Throughout the country, events are happening—Inverness has also been mentioned. That will run through to Scotland week as part of the homecoming year. I have heard many times about Ted Brocklebank's aversion to bekkilt politicians. The First Minister did not wear a kilt in this year's tartan day parade, but Iain Smith looked charming in his kilt and I thought that the Red Hot Chili Pipers had good knees.

We are linking initiatives all the way through, because that is important. That ties in with the serious side—what the Government is already doing through its economic recovery programme, which Iain Smith mentioned. That is important, too. This year more than ever, we need to promote Scotland as a place to live, learn, work, do business and invest in and to visit. Yes—we can use St Andrew's day, the winter festivals and

homecoming as part of the economic recovery programme. We are intensifying our activity and support for homecoming 2009 because tourism is such an important sector.

Ted Brocklebank: I tried to intervene on David Whitton and Pauline McNeill to make this point, but it relates to Scotland's economic performance, too. David Whitton said that Donald Dewar made a state of the nation address 10 years ago. I was a member of the St Andrews festival committee that invited him to do that. Our idea was that successive First Ministers would use the occasion to make a state of the nation address annually from St Andrews. Does that proposal commend itself to the minister and to the First Minister as a useful tradition on or close to St Andrew's day?

Linda Fabiani: I am sure that our First Minister will be delighted to consider the potential of a state of the nation address on St Andrew's day every year. I am sure that the country would welcome that, too.

As for the St Andrews festival, Ted Brocklebank never misses a trick to promote St Andrews. Fife has a doughty breed of politicians, including Iain Smith and Tricia Marwick, who always push for St Andrews to be up front. They make a formidable front line for Fife.

I am happy to tell Ted Brocklebank that the St Andrews festival was paid on 21 November, but I take on board his point and I am happy to make the commitment to examine it. If the feeling is that funding agreements are made too late, we will look at that.

John Farquhar Munro asked how much funding has been earmarked for the winter festival. He also said that it was much less than that which we have put into the expo fund. When it comes to our culture and heritage and the promotion of our country, the important point is linking everything that we do. Nothing should be seen in isolation. What matters are the links between events that take place all through the year.

We have wonderful festivals, whether they are the St Andrew's day celebrations, the winter festival, Edinburgh's festivals—of which there are many, including the expo-funded work—the homecoming, Celtic Connections or T in the Park, which Pauline McNeill mentioned. All those festivals link into the whole that is the promotion of Scotland. We are doing all that to the best advantage of Scotland and to our best economic advantage.

I say to John Farquhar Munro that we expect to spend up to £434,000 on St Andrew's day and up to £200,000 on the winter festival. The Government is doing a lot. We have made the decision to use resources to drive increased tourism and add value to what is happening already.

I turn to Iain Smith's point on inviting bids for activities for the 2009 St Andrew's day at the end of the homecoming celebrations. A significant amount of funding has been awarded to event organisers, promoters and community groups for events throughout the duration of homecoming. We are continuing with that work.

Pauline McNeill said that St Andrew's day should not be only about fun. She is absolutely right. This is a time for reflection on how we can do our best for Scotland. We must use whatever platform we have to do that.

James Kelly's speech was interesting. At the outset, he made a good link between this morning's statement on science and this afternoon's debate on the St Andrew's day celebrations. Our engineering tradition is one of Scotland's wonderful traditions. That ties in closely with the homecoming theme of good Scottish minds and innovations and—indeed—Burns.

I disagree with the comments that James Kelly made on the arc of prosperity. We cannot continue to ignore the fact that a number of those countries continue to perform strongly and have a higher standard of living than Scotland has. For example, Finland and Norway continue to perform relatively strongly: their gross domestic product for 2009 is forecast to grow by 0.6 per cent and 1.3 per cent respectively.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Linda Fabiani: No, the member has just entered the chamber. He cannot just run into the chamber and expect to speak.

Members on the Opposition benches should accept the point that such small countries have a certain degree of insulation when it comes to dips in the economy. I refer them to my great friend Alex Neil's motion, in which he notes that the UK's credit rating has been severely downgraded. It is not always the case that big is beautiful.

John Farquhar Munro referred to the sites whose doors will be open free of charge as part of the St Andrew's day celebrations. Entry is free on 29 and 30 November to allow people to visit those places over the weekend. In that way, people can take part in Scotland's rich culture and heritage.

That leads me to points that were made about St Andrew's day as a public holiday. Leading by example, the Scottish Government has agreed to give its staff 1 December as an additional public holiday for St Andrew's day. I am delighted that 20 other public bodies and Scottish Borders Council have decided to follow our lead. Of course, I should mention again Angus Council, which has done that for many years.

Christine Grahame: Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The minister must close.

Linda Fabiani: Let us celebrate St Andrew's day, but let us also use it for serious reflection on how we all can work together to Scotland's advantage. That applies to everyone in the chamber, all those in council chambers, and everyone across the country. Again, I say to everyone: happy St Andrew's day.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-2958, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the draft Provision of School Lunches (Disapplication of the Requirement to Charge) (Scotland) Order 2008. Following Parliament's agreement yesterday to motion S3M-2961, standing orders will be suspended to allow members up to 30 minutes to debate motion S3M-2958. Members must ensure that their speeches are kept to the time that is allocated to them, as the debate must finish within 30 minutes. If they fail to do so, I will have no option but to cut off their microphones. I will give a one-minute warning, but members must finish on time. The suspension of standing orders will start at the moment the minister rises to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Provision of School Lunches (Disapplication of the Requirement to Charge) (Scotland) Order 2008 be approved.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

16:30

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram): As a nation, we must improve our diet. Providing free, nutritious school meals to pupils in primary 1 to primary 3 will get our children off to a solid start by establishing healthy eating habits at an early age. There is broad consensus that a healthier diet leads to longer-term health benefits. I quote the well-named Professor Mike Lean, the head of human nutrition at the University of Glasgow, who said:

"Children who have nutritionally balanced school meals will be in better health, will be able to grow and function and do a lot better."

That was the basis for hungry for success, which has brought significant benefits. However, if we are to achieve maximum impact, many more pupils need to access those benefits.

We want to offer healthy school lunches to our youngest pupils for free, so that they will benefit from the transformation in food quality that hungry for success has brought about. A universal approach is required, because obesity is a growing problem across the population. The policy needs to be inclusive; we need peer support and peer pressures to apply to bring about the culture change in eating habits that we seek. It is our duty to look after all children, regardless of their background or income. We know that not just children from the poorest families are nutritionally challenged.

During the past school year, we conducted a trial to see what impact the policy could have. I am

delighted to report that the trial was a great success. Uptake among P1 to P3 pupils increased dramatically. Teachers, council staff and catering staff were all positive about the trial. Importantly, there is encouraging evidence that pupils were trying and enjoying new foods, asking for healthier options at home and talking to their parents about food more often. The trial was extremely popular with parents, not just because it eased pressures on the family budget but because it made it easier for some parents to serve healthier food at home and gave them new ideas for healthy recipes.

Some members have queried whether there is enough evidence of the policy's long-term health benefits to justify it. However, if we wait any longer, we run the risk of doing nothing. I believe that the evidence from the trial is compelling. Rolling out the policy will mean that children throughout the country will reap the health benefits in the future. Although we will extend entitlement to free school meals to more families in need next August, the policy will also help to alleviate poverty. Often poverty is hidden from view—people are not eligible or have not registered for free school meals. The initiative will help to tackle that problem.

One of the main aims of the trial was to assess the practicalities of a national roll-out. I am pleased that the evaluation found that implementation was relatively straightforward. The trial councils had anticipated possible capacity and accommodation issues, but in reality those did not arise or were relatively easy to overcome. I ask members to trust—as we do—that councils will learn lessons from the trial, find solutions to the potential challenges and implement the policy successfully. The local government settlement provides sufficient funding for councils to fulfil this concordat commitment. The all-party Convention of Scottish Local Authorities leadership group has confirmed that the resources are available.

The trial of free school meals for primary 1 to 3 pupils was a great success. The order that is before Parliament will enable councils to use their power to advance wellbeing to roll out the policy. Conversely, failure to support the order will deny councils that opportunity. I urge Parliament to support the order.

16:35

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): In moving the reasoned amendment in my name, I wish to make it clear that Labour is not opposed to providing more free school meals for children in primary schools. Let us be clear about the draft order before us, however: it will not deliver a single extra meal, and it is incumbent on the Scottish National Party to say how the free school meals will be paid for. There is a fundamental dishonesty

in announcing a policy that is not adequately resourced, and today's vote in Parliament will give councils the power to provide free school meals, but not adequate resources to pay for them. My amendment seeks to ensure that funding will not be diverted from existing education services in order to implement the Scottish Government's free school meals policy.

As I said, Labour is not against providing more free school meals for children in primary schools, but we are against councils being forced to cut other education services to pay for those meals. The debate is not about ring fencing; we just want to know where the money will come from.

This morning, my colleague Karen Whitefield visited a well-established breakfast club at St Dominic's primary school in Airdrie, and she heard about the important contribution that breakfast clubs make to the learning experience of the children at that school. North Lanarkshire Council has stated:

"it is anticipated that the breakfast service currently provided in selected schools may be affected and perhaps reduced. This service is focussed on schools in the most deprived areas and aims to support children who may not have a breakfast at home."

I would be grateful if the minister could address that specific point in his closing remarks.

The concerns are not confined to North Lanarkshire. The minister says that the money is available, so why are councils throughout Scotland speaking about their concerns? Around the country, local authorities are speaking out, saying that they do not have the resources to deliver the policy. Glasgow City Council has said:

"concern does exist with regard to funding ... at this stage, under the current economic climate, Glasgow City Council cannot commit to implementation for the year 2010/11."

Falkirk Council has said:

"our calculations show that the level of funding currently provided is less than we would need to meet our ongoing additional day to day operational costs."

Midlothian Council, too, will have problems.

If the Scottish Government was to put its money where its mouth is on the issue, Fiona Hyslop would be telling us that she was funding a capital programme to upgrade dining halls around Scotland to cope with the increased demand. We will not hold our breath, however.

Today's vote will not be the end of the matter, because the SNP will have to come up with the money to pay for the policy eventually. In the interests of holding the SNP Government accountable, and requiring it to fund its policies adequately, I urge Parliament to vote for the amendment in my name.

I move amendment S3M-2958.2, to insert at end:

"but in doing so, recognises that this measure in itself will not deliver one free school meal and that it is the responsibility of the Scottish Government to fully fund the SNP's manifesto commitments; therefore calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that funding is not diverted from vulnerable groups or teaching provision in order to implement the policy of free school meals for all pupils in primaries 1 to 3, and further calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward to the Parliament early in the New Year detailed up-to-date costings for implementing its free school meals proposal."

16:38

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Throughout this entire debate, I have been persuaded of two compelling pieces of evidence. First, there is absolutely no doubt that a substantial number of children in Scotland receive neither regular nor sufficiently nourishing daily meals. For that group, where there is a clear link between poverty and unhealthy eating, it goes without saying that there should be proper financial help.

Secondly, despite the evidence that has been presented by local councils being very varied in its content, there was one common theme: councils want a pragmatic approach. They want to have the freedom to use their own limited resources as they deem appropriate in their own local areas. That is very much in keeping with allowing local authorities to decide on their own priorities.

At the same time, the Government is trumpeting a universal policy approach, because it says that there will be a level playing field approach to all pupils in primary 1 to 3. Let us pursue that theme. The Scottish Government assures us of three facts. It says that there is £40 million, signed, sealed and delivered, for the policy to be rolled out in Scotland; that there are 118,000 additional pupils who will be helped by the policy; and that a quarter of Scottish schoolchildren are in poverty. The minister did not seem to get his sums right, but even simple arithmetic—and perhaps even logic—tells us that the substantial proportion of those 118,000 additional pupils are not in poverty.

Is spending precious resources, perhaps up to £30 million, really the fairest and most efficient way forward? I think not, and I would not mind betting that parents across Scotland would rather see the money going to more deserving cases. For example, £4 million could be spent on building a new primary school, and there would not have to be any arguments about using private finance initiative, public-private partnership or Scottish Futures Trust funding sources. It would be an easy option.

Whether we like it or not, one of the given laws of economics is that choices must be made on how best to spend limited resources. The SNP proposal promised faithfully that it would deliver free school meals to all P1 to P3 pupils. Incidentally, that is despite much of the dietary evidence suggesting that the money would be better spent on the under-fives. The historic concordat clearly says:

"Assuming the legislation is passed, local authorities will provide free school meals to all P1 to P3 pupils".

The truth is that that promise is based on a false premise. In relation to the Scottish statutory instrument, we are debating councils being given powers, not an obligation, to provide free school meals across the board. If this is such a flagship policy, why was the Scottish Government not prepared to legislate? Is not the real truth that it knows that this policy, just like the policy on class sizes, cannot be delivered?

I move amendment S3M-2958.1, to insert at end:

"but in doing so, calls on the Scottish Government not to impose any financial penalty, directly or indirectly, on any local authority that exercises its discretion not to provide school meals free of charge to all pupils in primaries 1 to 3."

16:40

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): We believe that there is merit in providing free school meals for the poorest of Scotland's children. We have supported that policy in the past, and we have made it clear that we support the roll-out of the policy next autumn to a further 44,000 children whose parents are in receipt of full tax credits. When in government, we supported a number of healthy eating initiatives in our schools to improve diet, including the hungry for success campaign and the introduction of new nutritional standards. However, the free school meals policy that is proposed has never been our policy either in government or in opposition. We have always had fundamental problems with the policy in relation to available research and whether it represents best value for money.

The Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee heard a mixed bag of evidence on the proposal. I find it concerning that so many councils raised the issue of their ability to deliver the policy, concordat or no concordat. Some have said that, in delivering the policy, they may have to cut back on services elsewhere, including breakfast clubs, as we have heard. However, despite the fact that the concordat allows for further discussions to take place and despite councils facing new financial pressures, we heard from the minister that no more money will be available.

Many councils will struggle to fund the policy, and many will do so only by cutting other services. The Labour amendment alludes to that. Ultimately, the only way to ensure that that does not happen is by voting against the SSI. The Tory amendment may give some comfort to councils, but we know from experience that the SNP Government does not always listen to the will of the Parliament. Again, the only way to stop the measure is by voting against the SSI.

We remain unconvinced that the policy will deliver the benefits that the Government believes that it will, and we are not alone in that. The Aberlour Child Care Trust told the committee that it was not sure whether the policy represented best value for money. It said:

"Whether the scheme is the best use of £30 million to £46 million is an issue on which the jury is still out".

The Government claims in justification of the policy that it takes a whole-population approach. However, the policy applies only to P1 to P3.

There was a 4 per cent increase in uptake among those who were previously eligible for free lunches, but those who are most likely to benefit are the children who were not entitled to free school meals before. Overwhelmingly, those are children of parents like me, who can afford to pay. Much of the talk about the value of the policy is focused on its long-term benefits, but that aspect was not part of the pilot or the evaluation. The Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland said:

"there was insufficient time to evaluate the long-term health impacts".

In addition, Barnardo's Scotland said:

"we need better evidence if the scheme is to be rolled out."—[*Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee*, 5 November 2008; c 1628, 1615 and 1627.]

Yesterday, the Minister for Finance and Sustainable Growth gave members dire warnings that he was about to run out of money. We do not believe that this is the time to pay out £30 million of taxpayers' money for the free school meals policy.

The extension of eligibility next year at a cost of £10 million will bring the poorest children into the scheme. Our policies on income tax cuts would give thousands more parents the chance to make their own decisions about their children's breakfasts, lunches and dinners. Income tax cuts would go further and directly stimulate the Scottish economy, which is just what is needed right now.

16:43

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): Last session, I was part of the committee that considered the Schools (Health Promotion and

Nutrition) (Scotland) Bill. We heard evidence on the need to improve the health of all our children and on how school meals are an essential part of that. We received evidence on the stigma that is attached to receiving free school meals, and we heard about the success of the three-year pilot project in Hull that provided free school meals. We also received evidence about the low uptake of school meals generally.

I tried in vain at stages 2 and 3 of that bill to convince the Lab-Lib Executive to support a pilot project for free school meals in Scotland. That is why I was delighted that the SNP Government decided to pilot free school meals. I was doubly delighted that the whole of Fife was chosen for the pilot—and what a success it has been. Throughout the trial period, the uptake of school meals rose from 50 to 77 per cent. From speaking to parents in Glenrothes and Levenmouth, I know of their support for the nutritious school lunches that their children are now provided with. I was lucky enough to be invited for lunch at Aberhill primary school in Methil—school dinners have certainly improved a lot since my school days.

The order allows local authorities to provide free school meals. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Government are clear that funding is in place for that as part of the local government settlement. I expect Fife Council to implement free school meals for all children in primary 1 to 3. We need to tackle poverty, obesity and the stigma that is attached to free school meals. Why has the pilot been such a success in Fife? Parents whose children were previously entitled to free school meals did not take them up because of the stigma that was attached to doing so, but they took up free school meals when they were free for all children. Many so-called middle-class parents are struggling to make ends meet. They cannot afford to pay for school meals but are not entitled to free school provision. It is the children in those families whom we need to look after.

Most children's organisations and practically every organisation that is concerned about nutrition and health hope that the order will be agreed to today. I urge members of all parties to agree to the motion. If they do, it will be one of the most important things that the Parliament has ever done for the children of Scotland.

16:46

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): The issue is inextricably linked to the so-called historic concordat between the Scottish Government and local authorities. It raises profound questions about that relationship and the commitments that are set out in that document.

For example, when is a ring fence not a ring fence, and when is a discretion not a discretion?

The terms of the concordat indicated that legislation would be introduced to allow the extension of free school meals to all pupils in primary 1 to 3, but it went on to say that, on the assumption that it is passed, local authorities will provide free school meals to such pupils from August 2010. As we know, the SSI does not create a positive requirement on councils to provide such meals but merely gives them a discretion to do so. However, the concordat that was signed by the COSLA leadership purports to commit all its member councils to providing such meals, although many have subsequently said that they do not have the resources to do so and/or that it is not a priority for them when they are faced with other demands on their education budget, such as the building of new schools, the employment of teachers and classroom assistants and the provision of teaching materials. In that, they are right. Why should we provide free meals for the benefit of parents who can well afford to feed their own children and are happy to do so?

It would be wrong for any financial penalty to be levied on a council that decides, as a matter of local priority, not to provide free school meals. At the Local Government and Communities Committee, we tried to obtain information from COSLA and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth on whether any such penalty would apply in the event that a council decided not to go down this road. To say that the responses to our questions lacked clarity would be an understatement. It is typical of the obfuscation that surrounds any questions that are put to COSLA about what the concordat means and what obligations it places on councils. It adds to the growing volume of evidence that the historic concordat is an historic con, and that the dupes in the leadership group of COSLA are well out of step with its members, who have now rudely awakened to the financial realities.

Be that as it may, today the Parliament can save COSLA from itself by insisting that councils be given the genuine freedom to exercise discretion on the issue and make decisions for themselves, free from the fear of financial sanctions imposed directly or indirectly by the Scottish Government. That is why members of all parties, including the Government party, should support the Conservatives' amendment, if they believe that they are genuinely conferring a discretion and not a mandatory requirement.

16:49

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): My colleagues and I welcome any steps to improve health or lift out of poverty any Scottish

child. These are serious issues, but the delivery of free school meals for children in primary 1 to 3 will, alone, not do that. We all know that the Government promised to provide free school meals for children in primary 1 to 3, but that will not be delivered tonight by the order. Let us be clear: the order will give councils the power not to charge for school lunches. It is all very well giving councils the power to provide free school meals, but it will be a meaningless gesture if the funds to provide the meals are not also provided. That is what lies at the heart of this debate.

The Government's report on the pilot says:

"The estimated costs of the trial varied widely from £1.79 per additional meal in Fife to £4.65 in Scottish Borders."

Given that variation in costs, how can the Government possibly know how much the roll-out of free school meals will cost? If it does not know the true cost, how can it possibly claim to have provided sufficient funding to Scottish councils? Can the minister assure us that the cost has been completely met within the local government settlement? Does he think that councils should have to axe breakfast clubs?

As my colleague Rhona Brankin mentioned, I visited the breakfast club at St Dominic's primary school this morning. The breakfast club provides a healthy and nutritious start to the day for children from one of the poorest areas in my constituency. It ensures that children do not go into their classes hungry, and it helps them to learn. However, senior education officers in the council have told me that they simply do not have the money to pay for free school meals. They have said that they will be forced to consider closing the breakfast club. That would be a detrimental step. The Government should guarantee that it will not happen. Will the minister guarantee that no breakfast club in Scotland will close as a result of the introduction of this policy?

Today's debate is not about the policy of free school meals; it is about the affordability of free school meals for our councils. We all want the best for Scotland's children. We want them to eat healthily and to prosper at school. However, that cannot be at the expense of other aspects of their education. We cannot simply ignore the voices of local councils up and down the country. If the minister's claim is that the school meal policy is fully costed and fully funded, he should have no difficulty in providing assurances to the chamber and no problem in supporting both of the reasoned amendments to the motion.

16:52

Adam Ingram: Let me deal with the Labour and Conservative amendments. I dare say that the Government should be gratified that, through the

amendments, both those parties have found a way to support the order that the motion asks us to approve today.

The measure will help hard-pressed families during a time of economic recession and, over time, it will significantly improve the health of our children. We have an opportunity to enable our local authorities, many of which are enthusiastic supporters of free school meals for our youngest children, to get ahead and plan the implementation of the policy in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

Might I remind the chamber of the long list of supporters of the policy among civic Scotland? The list includes John Dickie and the Child Poverty Action Group; the Church of Scotland; the Educational Institute of Scotland; the Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland; One Parent Families Scotland; the Poverty Alliance; Children in Scotland; Barnardo's; Save the Children; Unison; Oxfam; and the Scottish Women's Convention. And let us not forget the admirers from beyond our borders, such as Jamie Oliver.

Let me welcome Labour and Conservative members to the fold. At the same time, let me make it clear that I find the terms of the amendments somewhat puzzling. To the Tories, I say that they misunderstand the nature of our historic concordat with local government. It is an agreement based on mutual trust and partnership. Sanctions are not the issue; improving the health of our youngest primary school children is.

The Labour amendment rather states the obvious when it says that the order does not deliver school meals. That is quite right; the order simply makes it legal for councils to deliver school meals. Might I also remind Labour members that COSLA agrees with us that the policy has been fully funded? [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Adam Ingram: The Government does not support the amendments. The Scottish Government recognises that we have a duty to put the interests of Scotland's children first. I appeal to members to do likewise this evening.

The Presiding Officer: I thank all members for the assiduous way in which they have ensured that we are not in danger of breaching the time that is available to us under the suspension of standing orders. So assiduous have they been that I must now suspend the meeting until 5 o'clock.

16:55

Meeting suspended.

17:00

On resuming—

Decision Time

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

There are nine questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S3M-2966.3, in the name of Sarah Boyack, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2966, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on sea fisheries, 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)
 Fergusson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (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)
 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)
 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)

Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 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)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (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)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (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)
 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 68, Against 0, Abstentions 47.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S3M-2966.1, in the name of John Scott, which also seeks to amend motion S3M-2966, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on sea fisheries, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S3M-2966.2, in the name of Liam McArthur, which also seeks to amend motion S3M-2966, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on sea fisheries, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

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)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 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)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 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)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 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)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (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)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (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)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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 53, Against 61, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-2966, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on sea fisheries, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament supports Team UK and in particular the positive approach taken by the new UK Fisheries Minister and the work of the Scottish Government in seeking to negotiate a deal that is fair and just for Scotland's fishing communities, and which will secure sustainable fisheries for Scotland; commends the Scottish Fishermen's Federation's recent environmental statement and for the leadership and innovation being shown by Scotland's fishermen, demonstrating the way forward for the rest of Europe; notes with concern the European Commission's proposals for west coast stocks that, if implemented, could especially damage the viability of the west coast langoustine sector, and therefore calls on the Scottish Government to work towards a settlement that successfully balances the need to conserve depleted west coast whitefish stocks with a thriving langoustine fishery.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that amendment S3M-2965.1, in the name of Ted Brocklebank, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2965, in the name of Linda Fabiani, on St Andrew's day, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-2965, in the name of Linda Fabiani, on St Andrew's day, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament believes in the importance of St Andrew's Day, Scotland's national day; recognises the opportunity that it presents for everyone in Scotland, and friends of Scotland around the world, to celebrate our history, culture and traditions as well as the vibrant, creative and dynamic nation that Scotland is today; notes the Scottish Government's support for a programme of events throughout Scotland as part of the Winter Festival; supports the opportunity that St Andrew's Day provides to prepare the way for the 2009 Year of Homecoming, which will give a much-needed boost to the Scottish tourism sector and to the economy generally, and welcomes the example set by the ancient burgh of St Andrews in organising its own programme of events for St Andrew's Day, which provides an appropriate focus for the nation's celebrations at this time of year.

The Presiding Officer: The seventh question is, that amendment S3M-2958.2, in the name of Rhona Brankin, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2958, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

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)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 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)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 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)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (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)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 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)
 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 divisions is: For 38, Against 77, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-2958.1, in the name of Elizabeth Smith, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2958, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the approval of an SSI, 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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (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)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (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)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 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)
 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 divisions is: For 53, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S3M-2958, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the approval of an SSI, 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)
 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)
 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)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (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)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 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)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, 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)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 87, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Provision of School Lunches (Disapplication of the Requirement to Charge) (Scotland) Order 2008 be approved.

World AIDS Day 2008

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-2817, in the name of Marlyn Glen, on world AIDS day 2008. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of World AIDS Day on 1 December 2008 and its aim of highlighting the challenges and consequences of the HIV epidemic around the world; acknowledges that there are 33 million people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide and that countries face a myriad challenges in halting the spread of the virus and improving the lives and experiences of people affected; recognises that HIV diagnoses in Scotland have been increasing in recent years with 2007 seeing the highest annual number on record; acknowledges that it is estimated that there are 5,500 people now living with HIV in Scotland; regrets that a recent poll found that people in Scotland had comparatively poorer rates of HIV knowledge than in other areas of the United Kingdom; considers that this lack of public understanding about the virus and how it is transmitted compounds and exacerbates the stigma and prejudice experienced by many people living with HIV in Scotland, and therefore supports this year's theme of Respect and Protect, which highlights the responsibility of everyone to transform attitudes to HIV and encourage actions that stop its spread.

17:07

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to open the debate to celebrate the 20th anniversary of world AIDS day. I thank all the members who have signed the motion, and members who have instigated similar debates in the past.

The red ribbon is a powerful symbol to challenge the stigma surrounding AIDS and HIV, so I encourage members to wear it with pride. I thank Catherine Murphy from the Terrence Higgins Trust, who sent out briefings and organised the stall in Parliament for today's debate.

The theme of this year's world AIDS day is "respect and protect". In addition to the essential protection messages, it highlights the responsibility that everyone has to transform attitudes to HIV. In particular, it aims to bring an end to HIV-related stigma and discrimination. A further aim is to highlight the promise of universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010.

In June this year, the United Kingdom Government launched its strategy for halting and reversing the spread of HIV in the developing world. It is an unprecedented long-term strategy that will help us to meet the global target on halting and reversing the spread of HIV. A lack of public understanding of HIV and how it is transmitted means that people often believe the

myths surrounding the illness, and misunderstand the ways in which the virus can be passed on. Sadly, a recent MORI poll found that people in Scotland are among the least knowledgeable about HIV in the UK.

World AIDS days can be a difficult and emotional time when people reflect on the damage that has been done by the epidemic and the lives that have been lost. However, it is also a valuable time to examine the progress that has been made and, more important, to focus on the work that is still to be done in halting the spread of the virus, improving the treatment and health of the people who are affected by it, and in eradicating the stigma and prejudice that are still too often associated with HIV.

Scotland has shown leadership on HIV and successes have been secured, such as the containment and reduction of HIV among injecting drug users. In Tayside, for example, the number of reported cases of HIV among drug users reduced from a high of 77 in 1986 to just one in 2007. We can be proud of the fact that everyone who lives with HIV in Scotland has access to life-saving antiretroviral treatment.

HIV featured in the earlier sexual health strategy document, "Respect and Responsibility: Strategy and Action Plan for Improving Sexual Health". Now, there has been another surge in HIV, with 453 cases in 2007, which is the highest annual figure recorded and which compares with an average of about 160 throughout the 1990s. That confirms that HIV is still relevant today. I therefore urge the Scottish Government to renew the focus on HIV prevention at national level. I look forward to comments from the minister on the plans that are being developed.

Late diagnosis can have serious implications and can result in increased risk of conditions such as tuberculosis, pneumonia and some cancers. It also limits treatment options and affects the overall prognosis. Given that treatments can now mean that a person who is diagnosed early with HIV can reasonably expect to live a long and healthy life, it is hugely important that people who may be at risk test early. Crucial to that is the need for people who work in the national health service to be able to recognise the risk factors and the symptoms of early HIV infection. The chief medical officer has outlined concerns about that. I ask the minister what else is planned to provide HIV testing in settings such as primary care.

I am looking forward to the world AIDS day event in Dundee on Monday, which has been organised by Youth End Poverty Dundee and which I believe the minister will address. That kind of local initiative should be encouraged throughout Scotland. I wish YEP Dundee luck with its event and I hope that its message reaches a wide public.

High-quality and inclusive education on sex and relationships is essential for our young people. It is completely unacceptable for there to be stigma attached to them as pupils in schools or elsewhere. It is also important to have qualified nurses available in schools to provide sexual health advice. There are many issues that we have little time to discuss in the debate, so perhaps the minister will in the near future initiate a full debate on the Government's actions and plans to develop a successor sexual health strategy.

Gay and bisexual men carry a disproportionate burden of HIV infection. They accounted for 87 per cent of the cases in Scotland last year. The worrying levels of undiagnosed HIV—it is estimated to be as high as 40 per cent nationally and 50 per cent in Glasgow—combined with evidence that unprotected sex is increasing among that group, show that gay men in Scotland are now more at risk of HIV infection than ever. We need to reinvigorate prevention and safer-sex messages. Valuable targeted work is being done with gay and bisexual men, but it should be given added impetus with additional backing and leadership from the Scottish Government. For instance, in Tayside, diagnoses among gay men jumped from three in 2006 to 14 in 2007. Projects are well established in the large cities but, with rises occurring in Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, the Forth valley and Grampian, we must do more to ensure that prevention messages and support are reaching all gay men, regardless of where they live.

I urge the minister to consider ways in which the Scottish Government can work to ensure that people in Scotland, particularly those who work in public services, have a better understanding of HIV issues beyond just the health and safety approach. In particular, I urge the Government to take positive steps to reduce the stigma of HIV and to encourage and facilitate early testing. I look forward to hearing other members' speeches.

17:14

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):

I congratulate Marlyn Glen on securing this important debate, particularly at this time. HIV is truly global in scale. About 25 million people have died of the appalling disease HIV/AIDS since it was first discovered about a quarter of a century ago. Despite the discovery of antiretroviral drugs, many people still die of it, throughout the world.

At the beginning of the epidemic, HIV was diagnosed in relatively few women and young girls. Today, more than a quarter of a century later, women account for more than half of all new HIV infections. Around the world, around 15.4 million women are living with HIV. The problem is

even more dire in sub-Saharan Africa, where nearly 60 per cent of people living with HIV are women. In some sub-Saharan countries, young women aged between 15 and 24 are more than three times as likely to be infected as young men of the same age. In many such cultures, women have no power to insist that their male partners use condoms during sex or remain sexually faithful. Abstinence is not a viable option for women who are married, who are at risk of sexual violence or who hope to become pregnant. As a result, a crucial strategy is the development of microbicides, which can prevent HIV transmission, but the terrible truth is that in the less developed parts of the globe being female and marrying poor are often the most significant risk factors in acquiring HIV.

In India, a mostly Hindu society that for thousands of years considered one fifth of its members to be untouchable, discrimination and ignorance have a particularly unpleasant significance. Of the country's estimated 2.5 million cases, many are women who belong to several hereditary prostitute castes. Although some of those women are apparently not unhappy with their lot, many are wretched sex slaves who are pimped by their neighbours. AIDS haunts them all.

In Karnataka there still exists the now illegal tradition of temple prostitution. In ancient times, its practitioners included the daughters of royalty, who were dedicated in childhood to service the devotees of the goddess Yellamma. The modern lot almost all belong to a single caste of illiterate dalits who are distinguishable from run-of-the-mill village prostitutes only by an early entry into their career and therefore a high probability that they will contract HIV. Nearly half of these so-called slaves of God are believed to be infected with the virus.

India's regulations against sodomy and soliciting are another ugly local feature. By criminalising gay sex and prostitution, they have blocked many sincere efforts to quell the virus. In Bangalore, for example, one in five gay men has HIV and many are male prostitutes who are perpetually terrorised—and periodically raped—by the police.

Of course, as Marlyn Glen said, many diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis are concomitant with HIV/AIDS. As TB is the most common serious opportunistic disease in people who live with HIV and remains a leading cause of death, including among those who have received antiretroviral treatment, an increasing awareness of TB/HIV is vital. We must support more evidence-based policies and activities to address such issues and address and increase understanding of barriers to implementing evidence-based policies, particularly in India and sub-Saharan Africa where, as I have mentioned, prejudice is very strong.

Back in the developed world, approximately 1 million people in the United States have HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, but 250,000 of them do not know that they are infected. In September, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention recommended that all Americans between 13 and 64 be routinely tested for HIV. Such tests would not be compulsory, but those who visited clinics would be tested if they did not refuse to be tested.

As Marlyn Glen said, Scotland has its own problems. Although they are not on the vast scale of those that I have outlined in other countries, they are still very significant, particularly to the families who are affected. Given that as many as 40 per cent of gay and bisexual men who are HIV positive are unaware that they are infected, the Scottish Government has a role in ensuring that HIV awareness is raised and testing is increased.

I have received the Scottish Government's report card from HIV Scotland—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member should conclude.

Kenneth Gibson: I will conclude very soon, Presiding Officer.

The report card shows that although the Government has done a lot of good public awareness work, a lot more needs to be done. It shines in its leadership—it gets an A-plus—but it gets a C-plus for education. We have much to do if we are to promote awareness in Scotland and do our bit in reducing HIV/AIDS across the globe.

17:19

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I congratulate Marlyn Glen on securing this debate, which recognises the anniversary of world AIDS day. I also thank Kenny Gibson, particularly for raising the issue of infected women.

The aim of the day is to highlight the challenges posed by and the consequences of the HIV epidemic around the world. Although other countries are plagued by the disease and problems of treatment, we in Scotland have our own problems.

Figures released earlier this week show that, in 2007, 453 new cases of HIV were identified in Scotland. That is the highest number since recording began about 25 years ago. Since 2000, there has been a 194 per cent increase in new diagnoses. Between January and September this year, a further 298 people have been diagnosed with HIV. I am sorry about all the figures I am quoting. Of those who were diagnosed this year, 46 per cent are identified as heterosexual individuals and 75 per cent are known to have been infected outside Scotland. I welcome Marlyn Glen's point about gay and bisexual men, but we

should also be looking at the heterosexual community.

The figures are worrying, but possibly of greater concern is the number of people with HIV who do not know that they have the virus—a point that Kenny Gibson and Marlyn Glen raised. It is estimated that about 40 per cent of gay and bisexual men who are HIV positive do not know that they have the virus, which has consequences for the risk of the disease being spread. It is estimated that people who are unaware of their own HIV infection could account for between 53 and 70 per cent of all new sexually transmitted HIV infection. Health economists have estimated that one onward transmission of HIV has a value of between £0.5 million and £1 million in individual health benefits and treatment costs.

As Marlyn Glen said, late diagnosis also has implications for the individual's health. It can lead to pneumonia, TB, heart and liver disease and some cancers. The Terrence Higgins Trust states that nearly half of infected people who are diagnosed late show signs of an immune system that has already been compromised and around 7 per cent have an immune function that has been significantly damaged. Around a quarter of the HIV deaths that occur each year could be avoided through earlier access to diagnosis and treatment.

The stigma that world AIDS day seeks to remove is part of the problem of late diagnosis. People are unwilling to get tested because of the fear of others finding out or because of the stigma. The delay in diagnosis can have a devastating effect on their health and the health of others.

Today, I called some of the organisations that manufacture drugs that are used in the treatment of HIV. I can understand that people might not wish to get on to a regime of triple therapy, which can mean up to 30 or 40 tablets a day, but once the viral load is at a normal or acceptable level the drug intake can be as little as one tablet once a day. I also understand that there are now cases of people coming off treatment permanently. The message that I would like to get out today is to encourage people to come forward for testing; the fact that new drugs are being developed all the time will ensure that treatment is less complex.

17:23

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I join others in congratulating Marlyn Glen on securing the debate and on raising this important issue in the Parliament at this time. One of the most important things she said in her opening speech was that it is sometimes so difficult to get across, particularly to many young people, the message that HIV is still relevant.

In developed, rich countries with sophisticated health-care systems, HIV has changed into what is commonly termed a chronic manageable condition. That does not undermine in any way its importance, its seriousness and the impact it can have on someone's life, but it does make it difficult sometimes to get across the message that it is as important to combat HIV now as it always has been.

The global and domestic dimensions of HIV have already been mentioned. Those dimensions are sometimes so different that it almost seems as if we are talking about two different viruses rather than a single phenomenon. The situations that Kenny Gibson mentioned are very different from the situations that people in Scotland face. However, with migration, we can acknowledge that the connections between the global and domestic dimensions are deepening and becoming more complex.

We face a serious problem in Scotland. As other members have mentioned, we have rising infection rates while resources are dwindling and being less specifically allocated to HIV. We also have poor knowledge levels in comparison with the rest of the UK. There is a great deal more that we can do in that respect, but even that should not satisfy us. An increased level of knowledge and understanding is, in itself, no guarantee of prevention. Earlier this year, I spent some time in hospital with a close friend who had recently received his diagnosis. For many years he had been in contact with services, with youth work when he came out and with the available information. He was aware and had a high level of knowledge of HIV. In itself, such knowledge is no guarantee of prevention; it is necessary, but not sufficient.

It is important that we are bold and radical in our approach to school education and to out-of-school education for young people as well as for older people. That means that resources will be needed. It means that support and training will be required for teachers, youth workers and community workers. It also means that there must be political courage and a willingness on the part of Government—at national and local level—to challenge entrenched attitudes and not allow resistance to the taking forward of certain radical work on sexual and reproductive health. It certainly means taking on some of THT Scotland's proposals, for example for a national campaign on stigma and prejudice against those who have HIV, and for work to increase testing uptake, and a proper look at its proposals on home testing. Finally, it requires a strategic vision for the future, beyond the respect and responsibility strategy.

In closing, I will say something about the global picture. This is an important moment and we have

a great opportunity. President-elect Obama—even before he has taken up office—has thrown out the irrational approach of abstinence-based programmes and the Bush Administration's refusal to fund condom provision and sexual health awareness raising around the world. The Scottish Government has a long-standing commitment to international development. We must ensure that we, too, challenge those irrational approaches. There are still people in the world who would go through a country that has an HIV prevalence of 30 per cent or higher telling people that it is wrong to use condoms. Such an approach is not morally defensible and we should be willing to challenge it.

I join Marlyn Glen's call for a full debate on HIV in Scotland, not just in relation to public health, but in relation to education and international development. Ministers and those who are involved in those areas would be welcome to contribute to that debate as well.

17:27

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife (Lab)): I join other members in congratulating Marlyn Glen on securing a members' business debate on this important topic at this time. Others have referred to the fact that the number of new cases of HIV recorded for the past full year—more than 450—is the highest number since recording began in 1984. It behoves us all to take a fresh look at the situation and at HIV.

HIV is almost becoming a forgotten condition, which is unacceptable. The rises in the number of cases of HIV throughout Scotland, including in Forth Valley, which is one of the health board areas in my region, require every health board to look anew at addressing training for staff in awareness of the condition.

It is sad that, just this week, a potential vaccine that showed so much promise in animal testing has failed in tests on human subjects. That is regrettable. We must hope that the vaccine will continue to hold out promise. However, that should not prevent us from ensuring that the present situation is managed effectively.

Other members have referred to the worldwide nature of the problem, particularly in regard to the African continent. The rise in the number of cases globally from around 10 million in 1990 to 33 million now indicates that the problem is still significant. Furthermore, 2.7 million new cases have been reported worldwide in the past year. That has happened in areas where the health services are under enormous pressure and the systems are extremely weak. For example, the *British Medical Journal* this week describes the health service in Zimbabwe as being in total collapse, with those who have HIV in absolute

despair about the management and treatment of their condition.

In other countries, too, corruption has led to drugs not being dealt with in an appropriate way, even when they are available. As Patrick Harvie said, there are still people in the world who will speak out against the use of condoms. That is totally and utterly unacceptable. We need to send out a loud message, in the international field, that we will not support that sort of nonsense.

What about the situation in Scotland? As others have said, as many as a third of those with HIV might not know that they have HIV. We have opt-out testing systems in place, but we need to do more in terms of testing. Patrick Harvie referred to home testing kits, and that issue needs to be considered carefully.

I am concerned about the question of school nurses. They are under enormous pressure to deliver the human papilloma virus vaccination programme. That programme is extremely welcome but, unless they receive additional resources, it is difficult to see how they will be able to continue to provide vital sex educational input and support to young people—particularly young gay men coming out. I ask the minister to consider the issue carefully. I am also concerned about the HPV vaccine in relation to general practitioners as well, but this is not the time for that.

We need a new campaign—not the old tombstone campaign—that will raise awareness and increase the level of information that people can access. Scotland is extremely poor in that respect.

We need to readdress and reinvest in the mental health aspects of the management of HIV. It is now a chronic condition with which people live, and the Government has given particular attention to that. However, we need to examine the mental health aspects of the situation, because it is difficult for people with HIV, who are still subject to discrimination, to live comfortably with the condition.

17:32

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I congratulate everyone who has spoken, and I particularly congratulate Marlyn Glen on securing the debate.

I want to deal with education, the importance of which has been mentioned by several speakers. In the 1980s and early 1990s, full-time and part-time guidance teachers were a common feature of Scottish secondary schools, and I was one. We were professionally trained, especially in sex education and relationships education. In the school at which I taught, we had a large box with

every contraceptive device that you could possibly think of. It was passed around for demonstration lessons in order to familiarise pupils with the devices. We did not just talk about condoms; using a model, we showed pupils—boys and girls—how to put on a condom. We did that so that condoms would not become something that would cause the pupils to blush or make them giggle, and would instead become something that could be openly discussed in class.

However, because of the pressures of the curriculum, many schools have moved away from that approach and are returning to placing those responsibilities on the shoulders of the classroom teachers, who do not have the training that is required if teachers—especially young teachers—are to address the subjects without embarrassment and with absolute confidence.

I appeal to the minister to work closely with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning to see what can be done, as a matter of urgency, to address the drift away from having a small cadre of full-time, professionally trained guidance teachers in every secondary school and towards the cheaper option of giving a small amount of training to the classroom teachers and expecting them to be able adequately to do the extremely responsible job of imparting sexual health and relationships education to the young children in their care.

17:35

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): The motion highlights vividly the enormity of the worldwide HIV/AIDS epidemic and of the issues that we face here in Scotland. As the Minister for Public Health, I welcome the opportunity to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Government.

I thank Marlyn Glen for bringing forward an important debate. It is clear from the many and varied speeches that her motion has struck a chord with a great many members. It is important that, in addition to our work throughout the year, we take time on world AIDS day to recognise its importance and to highlight the challenges that we face.

As has been stated, more than 33 million people worldwide are living with HIV. In 2007, there were 453 new diagnoses of HIV in Scotland, which is the largest annual figure since records began in 1981. Although some of the increase reflects an increase in testing, and recent figures show a reduction in the number of undiagnosed cases, there is evidence of transmission occurring among certain at-risk populations in Scotland. Specifically, in Scotland, men who have sex with men and people from sub-Saharan Africa are more likely

than anyone else to be affected by HIV. These stark figures not only set us a global challenge to work together internationally to reduce the spread of HIV, but set the Scottish Government, health boards, local authorities and voluntary organisations a challenge to reduce transmission of HIV in Scotland.

One of the overarching aims of respect and responsibility, our national strategy, is to tackle the rising incidence of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. As members may know, the strategy is supported by additional funding of £5.18 million per annum until 2010-11. We are also investing £9.5 million each year to prevent the spread of blood-borne viruses in Scotland. The majority of that funding goes directly to NHS boards and is used to improve and support access to clinical service and for local targeted prevention work. That support is, of course, vital for health boards to continue their work. However, following a stocktaking review of the strategy, we are refocusing our efforts in order also to address the culture and attitudes that are associated with sexual health and HIV in Scotland. I have directly reflected that change in focus in the membership and work of the national sexual health and HIV advisory committee, which I chair, and in the new outcomes for sexual health, which were issued widely in September.

I accept that changing some of the long-standing attitudes and values of the Scottish population is a real challenge and that it will not happen overnight, but it is a challenge from which we must not shy away. Change cannot be achieved by any one body or organisation alone. It is important for each of us to recognise our own role in providing leadership, delivering change and working together to achieve change in an often sensitive area.

I will now discuss the work that is taking place on the wider social and cultural factors. I am pleased to be supporting the work of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender hearts and minds agenda group. The group is made up of representatives of the Scottish LGBT community and has been working over the past two years to examine in more depth negative attitudes towards that community. In February, the group published its report, which contains recommendations for the Government and others on how we can make progress in tackling some of the negative attitudes and prejudice to which Patrick Harvie referred. The report is aptly called "Challenging Prejudice" and it has the potential to be a significant step in changing attitudes and reducing discrimination. Although the Government has not yet responded to the recommendations in the report, we will do so shortly. I believe that the report can act as a catalyst for change and as a tool for making

policies and services more inclusive and more relevant to the LGBT community.

I have already spoken of my concern about the rising incidence of HIV infection in Scotland and the need for action. One area of work in which members will be particularly interested is the development, in partnership with key stakeholders, of an HIV action plan for Scotland. The plan, which will be published early next year, will be overarching and will encompass not only HIV prevention but actions for care and treatment of people who are living with HIV. Its actions will aim to reduce HIV transmission, to reduce the number of undiagnosed cases of HIV, and to reduce stigma and discrimination. It will also aim to ensure effective co-ordination of prevention, care and treatment.

I want to reassure members who raised issues about testing in primary care. The professional associations that work on sexual health and HIV recently produced the UK guidelines on HIV testing, which cover testing in primary care and other national health service community settings. We will take that forward.

It is worth noting that, despite the availability throughout Scotland of a comprehensive range of antiretroviral therapies to prevent HIV disease progression, the disease still has no cure.

Marlyn Glen noted the lack of awareness and of public understanding about HIV in Scotland. I agree that, in recent years, HIV has not been as high on the public agenda as it should be. That is why the Scottish Government has allocated funding to the first national sexual health social marketing campaign since the tombstone campaign of the 1980s. It is in the developmental stages, but the campaign will focus in its first stage—from spring next year—on encouraging the public to talk about relationships and sexual health in general. Our aim is to create a more positive culture in which a more targeted approach can be used. As part of those social marketing efforts, we will undertake targeted work that is aimed at men who have sex with men, and at HIV. That work will use the important learning that has emerged from the successful HIV comeback tour and the equal campaign to develop materials for use throughout Scotland. That approach will be delivered locally through a range of community settings, to ensure effective targeting.

I have mentioned the importance of working closely with key stakeholders to deliver change. The Scottish Government funds Oxfam Scotland to work with communities in Malawi to assist the most vulnerable people who are affected by HIV. We also provide funding of more than £350,000 a year to several voluntary organisations, including the National AIDS Trust, to undertake not only general HIV prevention activities, but specific work

with African people and men who have sex with men. I cannot overestimate the value and importance of the work of the voluntary sector, which has expertise in campaigns and in supporting individuals who need that support most. The voluntary sector also makes efforts to make a much wider impact on society, for the benefit of all.

I am happy to consider the calls that have been made for a full debate on sexual health. I will look at opportunities for that.

Meeting closed at 17:42.

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