

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 30 September 2009

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 30 September 2009

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

Time for Reflection

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Good afternoon. The time for reflection leader today is Catherine Brown, the founder of Gatekeepers Global Ministries.

Catherine Brown (Gatekeepers Global Ministries): As a modern missionary, it is my privilege to travel to many parts of the world as an ambassador of Scotland and of my saviour, Jesus Christ. I have discovered that people have a warm affection in their hearts for the Scots, and a love of our nation that often surprises me and challenges me to look with a fresh perspective on this bonnie land that we call home.

We have been described as a land of poet warriors and brave hearts, and perhaps to the onlooker that would seem an incongruous analogy. However, to a Scot, it is one that potentially and succinctly embraces our national psyche. What, then, is our national identity?

We might be called a passionate people—passionate about patriotism, football and maybe even our pies. We are a complex combination of many individuals and tribes around whom, from ancient times up to the present day, streams have flowed from different sources to connect, cross over and create new cornucopias and caveats in culture, politics and religion.

We are a complex people with an ancient history that we cherish, and traditions that are rich in Celtic heritage. We are a creative people who are now, and always have been, entrepreneurial, innovative and inspirational. The testimony of history shows our propensity to philanthropy. However, at times, we have been a downtrodden people who think less of ourselves than perhaps we ought to. A dour people? A deep people? A land of missionaries and mavericks? We are a people of courage, indomitable in spirit and indestructible in hope.

Scotland, this is our time. I believe passionately that God has a plan for every person and people group. His plan is always to prosper us, not to harm us and to give us hope and a future, as we read in Jeremiah 29, verse 11. We stand on the threshold of divine opportunity and, potentially, national transformation. God is looking for a people who will love him with all their hearts. The

Scots have always been willing to give their lives for a cause in which they passionately believe and today we have an opportunity to bow our knees and turn our hearts in repentance back to God. Father, forgive us.

If we will pledge allegiance to the king of kings, Jesus Christ, and invite him to be the sovereign king of Scotland, he will usher in blessing and abundance upon our nation. Scotland, we have a destiny—Christ our holy passion. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen

Question Time

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY CORPORATE BODY

14:34

Parliament Building (Security)

1. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what changes it plans to make to the safety and security arrangements for the Parliament building. (S3O-8167)

Tom McCabe (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): In addition to the recently installed turnstiles at the Canongate and Queensberry House entrances, the SPCB will be undertaking additional perimeter security measures involving bollards and other concrete structures on the Canongate and Horse Wynd.

Patrick Harvie: Many users of the building, who may have been a bit surprised and puzzled by the installation of the turnstiles and the hassle that it takes to get in and out of the building, might wonder why the removal of the temporary barriers outside the front entrance has not been given a higher priority. That area is much more widely used by members of the public, yet it is still served by unsightly safety barriers. Will the member explain why the decision was made to prioritise the installation of turnstiles that some would regard as mere security theatre?

Tom McCabe: The SPCB receives regular security advice from national security agencies. As members would expect, we pay serious heed to that advice, and as such we proceeded with the security measures. I acknowledge the member's point about the barriers around the pond area on the perimeter of the building; the SPCB is aware of how unsightly those are, and we intend to take action in that area as soon as we possibly can.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Telepresence Systems (Committee Rooms)

3. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what progress has been made to equip all committee rooms with telepresence systems. (S3O-8164)

Alex Johnstone (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): A budget bid that covers the costs of purchasing new, high-definition videoconferencing equipment has been made as part of the SPCB budget process for the financial year 2010-11. There are, however, no plans to

equip all committee rooms with telepresence systems.

David Stewart: Yesterday I took part in a videoconference with Boston via telepresence. The technology is breathtaking—it is like watching a digital film in high definition—and it meets the three tests of high quality, ease of use and reliability. Will Mr Johnstone ask the SPCB to assess the technology in terms of the benefits to the public, the gains for our committees and the reduction in our carbon footprint, so that Parliament can join the new revolution in communications technology?

Alex Johnstone: It is believed that the current system is able to provide what members of the Parliament currently require. However, the SPCB is aware of the benefits that videoconferencing technology offers, and it encourages wider use of the technology where it is appropriate to minimise travel and increase engagement. The SPCB undertakes to continue to monitor the availability of new technologies, and it will consider those in future.

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): The SPCB generally accepts—if I heard the member correctly—that such technologies are a good thing. Does it support the ability of the cross-party group that I run, for example, to link to somewhere on the other side of the country?

Alex Johnstone: Videoconferencing facilities, like all other SPCB resources, are provided to facilitate and enable parliamentary business. As a result, they are not necessarily available for the use of cross-party groups.

Parliament Building (Security)

4. John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body how much the recent security improvements to the Parliament have cost in the current financial year. (S3O-8166)

Tom McCabe (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): The cost of works in the current financial year to the end of August is £178,000, and the total forecast expenditure to the end of the financial year, when the works are expected to be completed, is anticipated to be around £1.8 million.

John Wilson: Are there any expected future costs for security improvements to the Parliament building or its environs in the next financial year?

Tom McCabe: As I said in response to an earlier question, the SPCB receives regular security advice from national agencies, and we respond to that advice. It is not possible at present to adequately forecast the advice that we may

receive and the costs that may be associated with such advice.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): With regard to Tom McCabe's reply about the advice that the SPCB gets from consultants, does it receive any counter-advice, or go to other consultants to get different advice? It appears, to many of us, that a huge amount of money is being spent on security measures that not all of us think are essential. In view of the £300,000 for the turnstiles and the exorbitant figure of £375,000 a year for unplanned maintenance, might it be a good idea to have an ad hoc group of back benchers, elected through a free vote of their peers, to act as a sounding board for the corporate body? I am sure that we would be willing to do that, because more and more people are taking more and more of an interest in how the Parliament spends money and the impression that that creates with the people who pay for it.

Tom McCabe: First, the corporate body is a body of four back benchers who are elected by the entire Parliament. Secondly, we receive advice not from consultants but from national security agencies.

Local Offices (Information Technology)

5. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body when it plans to complete the IT refresh in MSPs' local offices. (S3O-8165)

Alex Johnstone (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): The local office technical refresh project has started and is anticipated to be completed in 2010. As part of the project, business information technology staff will begin to consult members and their staff in October.

Pauline McNeill: I put on record the good service that we get from our information technology office. However, the corporate body will be aware of members' frustration about the outdated technology in their constituency offices, where most of their staff are based. Can the SPCB tell the Parliament when members will be contacted and told when their refresh will take place? Will the member also give some indication of what improvements members can expect?

Alex Johnstone: Since 2008, broadband provision to local offices has been improved to the premium service that is available at individual locations. In addition, improvements have been made here at Holyrood—for example, upgrades to servers and other hardware, increased bandwidth provision and improved local office services. Through the provision of faster hardware, more up-to-date software applications and improved connectivity, the service that is provided is improving. It is intended that the service will

continue to improve with the upgrade that is about to take place.

I assure the member that all members will be contacted. If any individual has a specific problem, they should contact me or BIT to ensure that it is dealt with on a faster timescale.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am sure that all members will welcome the improvements as they are made, but when can we expect an IT refresh or an approach to providing IT that allows members to choose what kind of hardware they wish to use and what kind of operating systems and software they wish to run in their local offices? Given that anyone who runs any other small office has that freedom, it is hard to understand why it is not possible to achieve it in constituency or regional offices or, indeed, on the Holyrood campus.

Alex Johnstone: Needless to say, there are always questions that no one has thought in advance might be asked. However, I share some of the member's concerns about the way in which IT services can be provided in large-scale operations such as the Scottish Parliament. I encourage him to engage at every level with other members, and with those who are responsible in the Parliament, on those issues, which are largely philosophical and are not directly connected to the day-to-day provision of services that we are discussing. However, I am keen to explore the matter further with the member at some time in the future.

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): Members and their staff in local offices are frustrated by the speed and stability of connections to the internet and the Parliament's intranet. It is not uncommon for connections to fall down and for work to be lost. I take on board Alex Johnstone's remarks on the refresh programme, but will he make a commitment to discuss those issues with local offices and consider how we can build a more reliable connection that is not only more stable but faster? Such a connection would not only provide a better service to our offices but improve the service that we give to our constituents.

Alex Johnstone: As I said, it is believed that all services are of the best quality available in the area where individual offices are located. However, as broadband services throughout Scotland are improving, it might over time be possible to improve performance in a relatively short timescale. Again, I give an undertaking that BIT will speak to individuals on a one-to-one basis about specific problems, many of which can be dealt with by members explaining them and having BIT act directly on them.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Given the member's comment that members should engage with each other on the matter of IT upgrades, particularly in their offices, do I take it that the member agrees with and endorses my suggestion of establishing an ad hoc group to act as a sounding board for the SPCB?

Alex Johnstone: No, I do not, and I welcome this opportunity to clarify my answer to Patrick Harvie. My point was related not to the direct day-to-day provision of IT services, but to the nature of the software that is allocated to such services. As I said, that is a largely philosophical issue at the moment and I welcome the opportunity to discuss it with other members. I re-emphasise that that does not apply to the day-to-day provision of the Parliament's IT services.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That ends questions to the corporate body. As we have finished early, I suspend the meeting until 2.50 pm.

14:46

Meeting suspended.

14:50

On resuming—

“Determining and delivering on Scotland's energy future”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-4948, in the name of Iain Smith, on the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's report “Determining and delivering on Scotland's energy future”.

14:50

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): I am delighted to open the debate on behalf of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee. The committee's report “Determining and delivering on Scotland's energy future” is the result of an in-depth and detailed year-long inquiry. At the outset, I thank everyone who was involved. We received a large volume of written evidence, took oral evidence from 120 witnesses and undertook fact-finding visits around Scotland and in Germany, Denmark and even into Swedish territorial waters. We also drew on the evidence that we received in the course of our inquiries on the national planning framework and the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill. I thank everyone who assisted the committee by providing evidence, particularly those who facilitated our visits, which were invaluable. Our clerking team was magnificent in keeping the inquiry on track, providing us with the background information and support that we needed and helping to draft the comprehensive and, with only one exception, consensual report that we are debating. Finally, I thank my committee members, whose constructive approach and hard work throughout the inquiry enabled us to produce a report that I believe sets a clear and challenging agenda. That agenda requires urgent action to deliver a step change in how we produce and use energy in Scotland. It is an agenda that recognises that Scotland is not an island, but part of a wider United Kingdom and European energy market; that the energy debate is not just about electricity generation or even transport, but about how we produce heat, which accounts for 50 per cent of our total energy use; and that Scotland can be a world leader in renewable energy, particularly in marine renewables.

The genesis of the inquiry was in comments from various people, including Ian Marchant of Scottish and Southern Energy, that members of the Scottish Parliament should launch an inquiry into the how and not the what, and that we did not need another analysis of the problems; we needed a political action plan that spelled out the decisions

that the Parliament must make and what those decisions should be. We did not need to question the various targets on carbon reduction or renewable energy; we needed to consider how we would get there. The committee's report is just that—a vision for Scotland's energy future that was agreed unanimously in all but one area, and an action plan on how to realise that vision. I hope that the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism will say whether he shares that vision.

The key parts of our report are the chapters entitled "Scotland's Energy Future—Our Vision" and "Conclusions and Recommendations—The Political Action Plan". Those parts are on pages 25 to 36 of the report and members who are doing a bit of cramming should concentrate on them. Our vision identifies four interlinked goals for Scotland's energy future, which are efficiency, environmental sustainability, social justice and economic and employment opportunities. I will consider each of those in some detail.

We have said that it is no longer tolerable to waste energy, especially in a recession. Energy efficiency can no longer be seen as the Cinderella of energy policy. All eight members of the committee, across four parties, called for a radical shift in policy towards energy efficiency and for substantial investment of resources in initiatives that focus on maximising the efficiency of supply and reducing the consumption of energy.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I strongly commend the committee's clear recommendations on that. Does the member agree with the comments on the issue that Michael Levack made at the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee meeting this morning, as part of its budget scrutiny? He pointed out that there are opportunities to make progress in the short term to take the issue much higher up the agenda.

Iain Smith: I am sure that that will be reflected in our budget report that will be produced shortly, and in the remarks that I am about to make.

The committee believes that energy efficiency must come first in the hierarchy of priorities in Scottish energy policy. The committee recommends that the Scottish Government should consider increasing spending by something in the order of £100 million per year on an area-based and targeted energy efficiency programme that is designed to tackle fuel poverty and reduce energy demand. That was the point that Michael Levack emphasised during the committee's budget considerations today. We have seen this week that the current energy assistance programme is falling well short of what the committee is calling for. It is one area where the Scottish Government's written response falls short and the committee has agreed to look at it as part of its budget scrutiny.

It is not acceptable or sustainable for 65 per cent of the energy that we use in electricity generation simply to go up the chimney in waste heat. If we are to create an environmentally sustainable energy system, we must look critically at our centralised generation system that creates such waste. For example, much more needs to be done to encourage combined heat and power schemes, community generation, micro-generation and renewable heat. Although I welcome the Scottish Government's response as moving in the right direction, we need more action on heat mapping and to deliver more use of CHP and district heating schemes.

Our visit to Copenhagen showed what can be done if the Government takes the lead in that area. However, we also need action from the UK Government to change the ludicrous transmission charging regime, which actively discourages the development of decentralised generation and renewables. The committee was singularly unconvinced by the defence of the current regime by the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets. It is simply unacceptable for generators in the north of the UK to be charged £190 million to access the grid, while those in the south are actually paid £140 million to do so.

The vested interests of National Grid and the large generating companies who want to see the maintenance of a charging regime designed to support a centralised system of large thermal power stations, including nuclear, must be challenged. We heard evidence that renewable energy projects in the north of Scotland are being cancelled or not developed because those discriminatory charges make them unviable. Access to the grid and the cost of access to the grid are key issues in enabling community renewable schemes.

Finally on the environmental sustainability goal, we need clarity from the Scottish Government on just where it stands on new coal or gas-fired power stations. It is the unanimous view of the committee, expressed not just in our report but in our response to the national planning framework, that being carbon capture ready is not good enough. The committee agreed that we all support the idea of carbon capture and storage, provided that it can be brought on stream in the next decade and is affordable. New generating capacity, such as the proposed coal power station at Hunterston, must be fully carbon capture ready from day one if we are to have any chance of meeting our climate change targets. In the meantime, we all agreed that it might be necessary to extend the life of current nuclear power plants. However, by division, a majority of committee members agreed that new generation of nuclear power was not needed. That was the only paragraph in the report—all 586 of them—on

which there was a division. For the majority, a focus on energy efficiency, renewables, cleaner coal and a decentralised system with greater use of CHP and district heating for example, was seen as the future.

The third strand of our vision is for a socially just energy system and the committee supports the statutory target of eliminating fuel poverty by 2016. We are about to enter the winter period and we consider fuel poverty to be an unacceptable blight on our society. That is why I am disappointed that, in his response to the committee's report, the minister is now committing to eliminating fuel poverty only

"so far as is reasonably practicable".

I appreciate that he sent further clarification on that point to the committee today and I am sure that he will refer to it in his remarks, but the 2016 statutory target is either just that or it is not. The committee believes that more action is required if we are to deliver that target, which refers to earlier comments about fuel efficiency.

I think that everyone in the chamber shares the view that Scotland can become the renewables powerhouse of Europe. If we can get it right, the economic and employment opportunities for Scotland are enormous. However, if we are to achieve that prize we need to be more ambitious in our aspirations. I was a little surprised that, when challenged on where his estimate of the potential jobs in Scotland from renewables came from, the minister's ambition extended only to achieving 10 per cent of the UK Government's estimate for Britain as a whole. Surely, even if the Scottish Government has not made its own calculation of the potential, our ambition should be for far more than 10 per cent of the number of UK jobs in renewables, because far more of the potential for renewable energy is in Scotland.

We all want an energy system that helps Scotland to maximise its jobs potential and contribution to economic growth. The committee agreed that we need to rethink skills support, fiscal regimes and Scottish Government policy in relation to the North Sea, green jobs and new coal technologies. We need co-ordinated investment in our port infrastructure to ensure that we can develop, construct and maintain offshore wind, wave and tidal devices. In marine renewables, where the potential might be greatest, the committee identified a clear gap in development finance that is needed to bring projects up to prototype scale.

Although we welcome the Saltire prize, the committee was of the unanimous view that it does not fill the gap left by the commitment of all the funds from the previous wave and tidal energy support scheme, and that a successor, or WATES

2, is required. I am pleased that ministers are now at least considering that, but the need is urgent if we are not to miss the boat or the tide. Time and tide wait for no man. I appreciate that the minister cannot comment on the Beaulieu to Denny transmission line, which ministers are considering, but the committee is unanimously of the view—it has expressed this view repeatedly—that an urgent decision is needed on the upgrade of that line if Scotland's full renewable potential is to be exploited.

In conclusion, I welcome some of the Scottish Government's response. I welcome its support for reform of the carbon emissions reduction target—CERT—scheme, for a roll-out of smart meters, and for a North Sea supergrid. However, the response on some of the big-ticket items leaves much to be desired. We need the minister to commit to energy efficiency through an improved and better-funded energy assistance programme, and we need a radical change in building standards, not just for new build, but for existing buildings. We need a commitment to solving the problems with heat in Scotland and a commitment to rapid growth in CHP, district heating and renewable heat. We need substantial investment in marine energy to get things into the marketplace rather than just relying on the Saltire prize, and we need an energy efficiency action plan in place, not just another draft produced in the next few days.

In short, we need a little less complacency from the Scottish Government, and fewer we-are-doing-it-all-already responses. If we believed that the Government was doing it all already, we would not have needed to make recommendations for change. If we are to make the step changes that we must make to meet our climate change objectives, address fuel poverty and exploit our full economic potential, we need a little more urgency from the Government and the delivery of the committee's action plan.

On behalf of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, I move,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's 7th Report, 2009 (Session 3): *Determining and delivering on Scotland's energy future* (SP Paper 313).

15:01

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): I strongly welcome the committee's report, but do not fully recognise the charge that there is a lack of urgency. The Government's focus on Scotland's energy future has been huge, and that focus stands audit against what has gone before. However, we are where we are.

The report contributes to the building and maintaining of a clear agenda for the delivery of Scotland's energy needs and potential. The data and opinions that have been collected and the recommendations are all valued as important contributions to the debate. The report has a healthy focus on delivery, which we think is right, and the committee and inquiry witnesses are now keen to see things happen. The report has consolidated the views of many people and many shades of opinion, and it reinforces many of the positive signals that we are giving to industry, generators, communities, regulators, grid operators, local government and the UK Government, Europe and others at home and abroad who see Scotland's potential.

There is a great deal of consensus in the report. The committee and the Government are not like-minded on all issues, but we are on the scale and vision for harnessing Scotland's energy potential. Areas that the Government is working on have been identified, and further specific action in a number of areas has been recommended. That shows a positive way forward. It shows that we are moving on with a more open debate, and not simply indulging in a collision of opposing ideas and opinions. We are reaching a previously unspoken conclusion that the optimal way forward can emerge and evolve from open-ended dialogue about Scotland's energy future. The report and the debate form important parts of that dialogue. The aim is to foster a high level of co-ordination and collaboration, investment, risk sharing, consistency and perseverance. I hope that we continue to produce more and more valid information to enable informed choices, and to create a climate in which we can monitor vigilantly the effectiveness of the actions that are taken.

There is already a great deal of consensus in Scotland. Many people are working with us to develop our energy sector. The Government has given a clear steer on that, and I welcome the clear steer that has come again from the committee.

Our consistent energy strategy is paying big dividends. Many other people and organisations are delivering an explosion of innovation and effort in Scotland, and it is becoming clear to me that the more motivated people there are out there actively involved, the more efficient and effective our energy sector will become.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Tidal energy developments in the far north are, of course, in the context of decommissioning and post-Dounreay regeneration. Will the minister assure me that, in his monitoring, he will look into the machinery that he has at hand, the personnel involved and the money stream to ensure that his objectives for my

part of Scotland are being met by those whom he has entrusted to meet them?

Jim Mather: I can give that commitment. I visited the member's constituency during the summer and met people who are working in common cause on the issue, which we will drive forward.

We see positive signals when we go to conferences, exhibitions, the European Marine Energy Centre and energy plants across Scotland. We are taking a systematic approach. The Scottish energy advisory board, chaired by the First Minister, is reported to by subsidiary boards on oil and gas, thermal energy and carbon capture, and renewables. The renewables subsidiary board is essentially the forum for renewable energy development in Scotland, which has sub-groups on marine energy, micro-hydro, hydrogen fuel cells, renewable heat and community energy.

Close engagement—bringing into play allies such as non-governmental organisations, communities, other sectors and the public sector—is a key part of the process. We are fostering a focus, with partners and allies, on the energy action plan, which will be published soon. Ministers for health and wellbeing, housing and communities and environment and climate change, as well as from my department, are coming together to support that process. The renewables action plan, which was published on 1 July, is on the table and is a working and evolving document. The marine energy road map was published in August, the renewable heat action plan is due and the carbon capture and storage road map is coming forward. Alongside all that, we have the guidance of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and our energy pledges, which I will discuss later.

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): As the minister knows, the Council of Economic Advisers suggested that an independent report on energy be produced. Has he had a chance to study that report?

Jim Mather: I have not yet studied it—it is in my in-tray.

I recognise and accept the key priorities that the committee sets: efficiency in energy use and system delivery, environmental sustainability, social justice, and maximising of economic and employment opportunities in the energy sector. It is important to have an open-ended goal for the maximisation of such opportunities in Scotland—there is a general appetite for that. Subsequent announcements will clarify the issue.

The Government is determined to act on the committee's recommendations, where it is not already doing so. Our intentions are set out in

detail in our full response to the report, dated 2 September, which has been followed up by a response today. Iain Smith made a point about fuel poverty. There is no departure from the target set by the previous Administration. Section 88 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires ministers to make a statement on fuel poverty

“so far as reasonably practicable”.

In the 2002 fuel poverty statement, the target was articulated as being to ensure

“so far as reasonably practicable, that people are not living in fuel poverty in Scotland by November 2016.”

There is total consistency.

Beyond that, we have a comprehensive programme around our 10 energy pledges, which were published in March; a progress report is due soon. The pledges set out a coherent approach to energy, covering many of the committee's recommendations, and a comprehensive programme of action, ranging from growing renewable energy and the oil and gas sector to supporting the development of a subsea offshore grid and action to improve energy efficiency. Because we see the energy sector for what it is—the key sector for growth, innovation and jobs—our efforts and those of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee and our enterprise agencies are focused on that sector.

We have an intense programme of activity on the key issues. We are making significant progress on streamlining and speeding up the planning and dissenting progress. I will say more about grid and transmission charging in my closing speech, but we are continuing to press for the equitable regime for which Iain Smith eloquently called. He termed the current system “ludicrous”, “discriminatory” and “unacceptable”, and argued that it “must be challenged”. We endorse all those comments, and a challenge to the charging regime is in progress.

We are progressing significant and complex developments such as the Beaulieu to Denny power line, which Iain Smith mentioned. It is an important decision, so we must ensure that all views are fully and properly taken into account and that the public inquiry report is considered carefully. A decision on the project will be taken as expeditiously as possible.

I note the committee's comments on the fossil fuel levy—the £150 million—and welcome its encouragement for greater engagement with the United Kingdom Government on finding a way to release those funds without impacting on the Scottish consolidated fund. There is also the need to challenge deflationary pressures and to focus Westminster's attention on the benefits that can accrue from bringing forward capital expenditure.

As I mentioned, we are using our action plans and road maps including the renewables action plan and infrastructure investment plan to drive forward our overall agenda with key stakeholders and allies. We are also using the moneys that we are spending with the Carbon Trust and Energy Savings Trust, and the review of our innovation and investment work, to bring forward funding streams under a more co-ordinated approach. Furthermore, there is our support for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise in looking into the need for greater investment in low-carbon technologies; our funding of marine and tidal development; investment in the Scottish European green energy centre; and our on-going engagement with Europe, which has seen considerable progress.

I welcome the report and the debate. This important work is already in hand and more of it is planned. I am pleased that we are working together with the shared aim of delivering Scotland's energy future.

15:11

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab):

Almost every witness who offered evidence to our inquiry said that energy policy should be about lower carbon emissions and higher energy security at the least cost to consumers and with the greatest benefit to the economy. The question was how to strike the right balance between what can be, at times, conflicting objectives.

I was impressed by the Royal Society of Edinburgh's concise formulation that public policy should give energy producers the freedom and support to use the widest range of generation technologies, maximise the connectivity of transmission and supply in Britain and Europe, and seek ways in which to reduce energy demand and increase energy efficiency.

If those are the right priorities, every policy proposition should be measured against them. Most of the propositions in the committee report pass those tests. The major exception—as the convener said, it was the one issue on which the committee divided—is the Scottish Government policy of ruling out new nuclear power. We divided equally on the issue and the convener's casting vote backed the Government position. If the Government gets those big choices wrong, we run the risk of having an energy policy that is unbalanced from the outset.

In the revised national planning framework, ministers recognise that

“There is a need for new baseload electricity generating capacity to replace that provided by the power stations programmed for closure over the next 20 years.”

If ministers rule out new nuclear in meeting that need, low-carbon baseload electricity can come from only one source: carbon capture and storage.

A number of us saw carbon capture in operation at CCS Schwarze Pumpe in Germany. We know that it can be done. The British Government and the European Union have committed billions to demonstrating that carbon capture can work. However, the carbon that is captured at Schwarze Pumpe is trucked across country to be stored in a coal mine. In Germany, carbon transport and storage raise similar concerns to those that are raised by the transport and storage of waste from nuclear power stations.

I believe that carbon capture can deliver. The saline aquifers that are readily accessible below the North Sea offer an answer to the storage question; the most recent study will no doubt confirm that. The expertise of our offshore oil and gas industry provides much of the answer to carbon transport. That said, no technology is certain until it is operating on a commercial scale and nowhere in the world is that the case thus far. Ministers need to bear that in mind when they consider proposals for new coal-fired power stations. Clearly, those proposals are posited on the assumption that carbon capture will be put in place at some point.

If carbon capture and storage does not deliver, we must not hear again the argument that we have heard in the chamber once or twice over the past couple of years that we need to produce only enough power to meet our own needs. Accepting the argument would, of course, involve us turning our backs on the existing strength of Scottish energy production as an export industry. It would be a big mistake for us to do that. For example, the Scottish oil and gas companies that operate in oil provinces around the world bring in export earnings in excess of £4 billion a year.

Scottish electricity production exceeds consumption most of the time. That is a good thing, given that it sustains jobs and economic activity in Scotland. Surplus power should not be used to justify cutting back generation; it would be far better for us to limit consumption and maximise export earnings while decarbonising as much as possible of our electricity output. It is in that context that Labour members of the committee believe that it would be a mistake to rule out any low-carbon source of electricity at this time.

There was broad agreement on the need to reduce demand where possible, while there was also recognition that reducing carbon emissions from heat and from transport may require the generation of more low-carbon electricity. Half of Scotland's energy consumption is of heat, so action on that offers some savings in emissions and in costs to consumers. As Iain Smith said, the

committee had the opportunity to see one of the best exemplars of district heating when we visited Denmark and there are clearly useful lessons to be learned. At a power station such as Longannet, more energy is released into the atmosphere than is turned into electricity. Capturing that heat would be a significant gain for energy efficiency.

I was pleased that ministers agreed at stage 3 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill to reduce the burden of business rates on combined heat and power schemes. Aberdeen boasts one of the best exemplars of CHP anywhere in Britain; it has reduced both carbon emissions and costs to consumers, many of whom previously lived in fuel poverty. I hope that ministers will back up that decision, which was made in June, when they bring forward their renewable heat proposals. Ministers have received approximately £2 million in consequential for money allocated in the last UK budget for district heating schemes elsewhere; it would show real commitment to this form of technology if that money were used to promote further CHP development in Aberdeen and Scotland's other cities.

Iain Smith mentioned the need for a new wave and tidal energy support scheme. That need was highlighted only last month by the Scottish Government's advisers in the marine energy group of FREDS. When the minister sums up, it would be useful to hear whether ministers will respond positively to the marine energy group's recommendation that there should be a replacement scheme for WATES and that it should have an increased budget for use year-on-year by developers.

Such commitments, whether they are in the single millions or the tens of millions, may not cost much compared with, for example, the multimillion pound commitments of the UK Government on carbon capture and storage or, indeed, the investments in grid infrastructure such as the Beaulieu to Denny power line, on which I hope we will very soon hear an announcement from the minister. However, they would be a positive signal of intent and I hope that ministers can respond positively on those matters today.

15:17

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): I thank the committee clerks for their very hard work in helping the committee to produce the report. I also thank the many dozens of witnesses who gave both oral and written testimony to allow us to reach the conclusions that we did.

After taking part in the inquiry, I am as convinced as ever that there are—as we have heard, but it is worth repeating—three fundamentals of energy policy: the price, security

of supply and emissions. All three are interlinked and they are all critical to policy. What is required more than ever is a balanced mix, so that we have a sensible and sustainable energy policy for the long term. In that vein, I agree with Lewis Macdonald that the Scottish Government's position in ruling out nuclear at this stage is a mistake; I hope that it will reverse that position over time. However, I do not intend to dwell on that, because it is better to talk about the report's other conclusions than to focus on the main one with which there was disagreement.

The best way of summing up the Government's response so far, in its written response to the report, is to pick a quotation from the minister's opening speech, in which he referred to

"an intense programme of activity".

It is important to note that there is a difference between activity and action. Although there has been an intense programme of activity, the firm thrust of the committee's report is that there needs to be greater action from the Government in respect of deliverables and measurables and that action needs to happen sooner rather than later because, on many of the issues, time is crucial.

At the top of the energy hierarchy, the report focuses heavily on the theme of energy efficiency, which members have talked about today. Energy efficiency is good for the environment, because it saves energy, but it is also good for household expenditure; it is what we might call an energy win-win.

Patrick Harvie: Is the member aware of the work that the Welsh Conservatives have been promoting in the National Assembly for Wales? His colleagues argue that reductions in carbon emissions, as well as the social and economic benefits of energy efficiency and reducing demand, can be achieved only if action is taken on a far more ambitious scale than has happened to date. Does he agree that this is the sort of issue that should acquire political support across the spectrum if we are to move things forward a great deal faster than we have done so far, and that it should be viewed as a matter of urgency?

Gavin Brown: I am delighted to learn that Patrick Harvie is a keen supporter of the Welsh Conservative party. With regard to his question, the committee report is clear and the committee did not divide on the matter—there was absolute agreement that energy efficiency needs to move up the agenda, and that that needs to happen quickly. In his earlier intervention, Patrick Harvie was right to mention the comments of Michael Levack of the Scottish Building Federation, who once again gave compelling testimony to the committee this morning.

I applaud the council tax rebate that the Government included in the climate change legislation—I was about to applaud it, anyway. It could have a positive role to play. However, as I said, energy efficiency needs to move further up the agenda. Last December's Audit Scotland report pointed out that central Government does not have a great track record on energy efficiency, and the hard work must begin there.

The energy efficiency action plan has moved at a very slow pace. When we scrutinised the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, we had to push the Government to accelerate putting the plan out to consultation. At the weekend, I read about the lack of success, so far, of the home insulation scheme, which was announced as part of the previous budget. The press described the scheme as being in meltdown, although I do not know the veracity of that. It was suggested that no insulation was expected to be provided under the scheme before December this year. Will the minister comment on that in pulling together his closing remarks?

The committee heard about fuel poverty. I am grateful to the minister for clearing up the point about the target, but that must be set against the backdrop of where the statistics are going. In 2002, 13 per cent of households in Scotland were deemed to be fuel poor; in 2007, according to the most recent figures that I have been able to get hold of, 25 per cent of households were deemed to be fuel poor. It was clear to the committee that a sea change is required if we are to get anywhere near the 2016 target. In response, the minister said that the energy assistance package was that sea change. However, the evidence—and the reports that were around at the weekend—suggests that there has not yet been such a sea change. Indeed, it was indicated that only 173 installations have been carried out under the scheme in its first five months; I appreciate that installations will also be carried over from previous schemes. If installations continue at that rate, they will not represent the sea change that we hoped for.

We have the best potential marine energy resources in Europe, and possibly the second best in the world, but we are not the only ones in the game. We need only look across the water to Portugal to see that other countries are keen to get in on the action. Some fundamental points about that were put to us by industry representatives. What is being done to help prototype funding, which is where the blockage appears to occur? What support is there for the next 12 to 24 months? Industry feels that that period is critical. What is being done about infrastructure? The ports, harbours, manufacturing space and installation capacity are simply not there yet. We have great potential, but we need to

ensure that marine renewables can play their part and that we can get away from the stage of simply having potential.

15:23

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I welcome the debate and congratulate the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, its hard-working clerks and all the stakeholders who were involved in producing the report.

The committee's vision is that any future energy system should be based around four key characteristics: efficiency, maximisation, environmental sustainability, social justice and a maximisation of wealth and employment.

The report is an endorsement of what the Liberal Democrats have repeatedly called for in the energy sphere: no more new nuclear energy generation in Scotland; publication by the Government of the energy efficiency action plan; the introduction of a successor to the wave and tidal energy scheme—WATES, as it was known; an increase in attempts to tackle fuel poverty; the release of Scotland's entitlement to its share of the fossil fuel levy; and decentralisation of the supply network.

According to the Royal Society of Edinburgh, 53 per cent of energy use is for the generation of heat, as was indicated by Iain Smith, the committee convener. It is therefore wise to remember that investment in insulation and heat loss prevention makes good budgetary sense.

Efficiency maximisation is correctly highlighted in the report. The need for decentralisation of energy is key. The loss of electricity in power cables the further they travel, due to Ohm's law, suggests that in future local energy production will be helpful in the context of efficiency, as well as helping local economies.

Biomass cogeneration plants, or district heating plants, are a particular hobby-horse of mine. Such plants produce heat and electricity for communities and should be promoted. European examples in Austria and Scandinavia are worth exploring and demonstrate that Scotland is playing catch-up. We are not leading in the field. Biomass is a good use for the vast acres of forestry in Scotland, which are still in our ownership—I am thankful for that.

Biomass and other methods of renewable energy can go a long way towards addressing Scotland's energy efficiency needs. The committee is still waiting for the Government to publish its energy efficiency action plan and to launch its home insulation scheme. Both initiatives were negotiated during last year's budget

discussions, but there has been a resounding silence since then. Perhaps when the Government announces those plans it will also announce access to the fossil fuel levy account. The First Minister boasted that that would happen during the first 100 days of the Government, but it has still not happened, although the Government is in its third year of office. Perhaps the issue is still in the First Minister's in-tray.

A controversial issue for some committee members is that the report does not recommend a new wave of nuclear power stations. I support that approach. Conservative and Labour members support new nuclear power stations, as does the First Minister's Council of Economic Advisers, so the Liberal Democrats are the only main party to oppose new nuclear capacity. Apart from the obvious danger and sustainability issues that are associated with nuclear power, we think that there should be further investment in renewable energy production, so that we can meet the Liberal Democrat target of 100 per cent renewable electricity generation by 2050.

There is a need for clarity in the planning process. A balance must be struck between communities' wishes and needs, so that renewables projects have as their aim public and social goods and are not simply business opportunities for developers. Full community involvement at every stage is crucial.

The report strongly recommends the establishment of a successor scheme to the wave and tidal energy support scheme, which the Government cancelled.

Gavin Brown: The member mentioned a Liberal Democrat goal to produce 100 per cent renewable energy by 2050. Does that mean that Liberal Democrats do not support carbon capture and storage?

Jim Hume: The goal is for 100 per cent renewable electricity by 2050.

The Saltire prize does not go far enough to make a difference. We need many projects, not just one. The prize has been announced again and again but it is a one-winner-takes-all prize, which will not be won until six years from now. The Government's marine energy group and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers agree with us that what we need now is not grandstanding but investment. Liam McArthur has approached Mr Swinney on that issue. We look to the minister to turn the tide and introduce WATES 2.

Liberal Democrats are concerned that the Government is no longer on track to eradicate fuel poverty by 2016, as the report says. The problem will not be helped by the cutting of energy assistance packages. I hope that the minister will talk about how we can tackle fuel poverty effectively.

I congratulate the committee and clerks on the comprehensive and welcome report that they produced. The committee has a duty to hold the Government to account and did so by highlighting several issues on which the Government is falling short. We are 70 per cent reliant on fossil fuels in Scotland. The resource is finite and we must address the issue now. I have tried to cover areas of concern that are mentioned in the report. The Scottish Government needs to do much better and I hope that it will realise the urgency of the situation and act on the report. As the report hints, we can do better.

15:29

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I appreciate the opportunity to speak in the debate on the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's report.

I dissent from some of the recommendations in the report, for example the acceptance of

"the need to extend the operating lifetimes of the current generation of nuclear power stations."

I have seen those mausolea rise and fall. Terrorist attacks and the disposal of the nuclear waste that they produce will dog them for the 30,000 or so years that they will be with us. The compromise in the report would squander on an outdated energy source that is only 35 per cent efficient money that is urgently needed for research in, and the development of, renewable energy resources.

Scotland can, soon, become a major supplier of energy and a gravedigger for CO₂—the North Sea oil-bearing strata can accommodate 150 billion tonnes. We need to focus on those strengths and not cling to a nuclear past that is all too much tied up with the notion of nuclear deterrence. We must be prudent when it comes to planning and investing in energy and, before we replicate the expensive toxic ruins of our nuclear power, we must carefully consider and eliminate the potential health and landscape risks of waste incinerator plants or overhead power lines such as the one between Beaulieu and Denny.

I have news for Lewis Macdonald: an intermediate technology that can produce baseline power cheaply is to hand. It has just been launched—Mr Johnstone will doubtless be amused that it has been launched in Germany but, after all, they have industry there and we do not—and it showcases the need to be in the lead of renewable technology. It is called the *Zuhausekraftwerk* or the personal power station. People can have one in their cellar if they wish. It is manufactured by no less a company than Volkswagen, which adapted its Golf engine to use natural gas or biofuel and produced an engine and heating system that is 92 per cent efficient. Not

only that: the system can be strung together like Wikipedia or Google to produce a combined power output of about 2,000MW. Longannet produces 2,400MW and wastes an additional 64 per cent of its heat by blasting it into the air.

The system has just been launched and, already, about 50,000 people have signed up for the personal power stations. I am not making a plug for Volkswagen—as members know, I have not driven a car for 30-odd years—but the system provides a baseline power unit that can be shifted around. It can be installed in a house to supply much-needed heat to, for instance, old-age pensioners and, once the house has become a passive house—enjoying a normal European standard of insulation—removed and installed elsewhere. That seems to me an admirable method of using an intermediate technology. Not only that: if the units are to be manufactured in Scotland—there is the possibility of entering into some agreement with Volkswagen—we have companies such as Aggreko and the Wood Group that have plenty of experience in installing light, portable power units. The personal power station was a new technology to me when I saw it, but I have been through the printouts and downloads and it seems to me that it is the next great thing.

The committee's report sensibly emphasises energy efficiency, considering that 53 per cent of our energy demand goes on space heating. Among nearly 140,000 houses in Britain that were surveyed over a year, only four reached the European Union energy rating band A. Most of our stock struggles hard to reach band C, so we will not cure the problem with a bit of do-it-yourself. We have to redesign our housing stock and insulate it so well that it barely requires heat. It will resemble—alas—few houses so far built in the United Kingdom.

As with houses, so with shops. Should we succumb to every offer by a supermarket to create 200 jobs without querying the carbon footprint that it will leave—the buildings have to be heated and cooled; trucks bring in the goods and cars take them out—and the damage that it will inevitably do to the commercial fabric of the small-town communities that the Conservatives and I are pledged to retain?

I turn to transport. In time, there might be electric cars, but there are great problems with batteries and their recycling, with hybrid engines and with the absence of a second-hand market. Remember that, in Victoria's age, it took 40 years to make the transition from the three-master cargo sailing ship to the tramp steamer. I do not think that we will be any smarter by going down the way of electric cars. Rather, we must prioritise social solutions—walking, cycling and public transport—particularly in our central belt, which is 75 per cent urban. In

Copenhagen, cycles carry 36 per cent of commuters; in Edinburgh, they carry 2 per cent. On that score, our mark can only read: "Must do better in future."

15:35

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab):

Like others, I acknowledge that the work done by the committee—ably steered by its convener, Iain Smith, and its clerks—was made possible by the many people across Scotland who contributed to our findings. I will draw attention to two assessments of our report that have been made by that wider constituency in Scotland: RSPB Scotland has applauded the committee on producing a wide-ranging and strategic piece of work; Scottish and Southern Energy has said that the strength of the inquiry was that it focused on delivery and recognised the need for urgent action. That call for urgent action is what I will focus my remarks on today.

Today's debate takes place midway through the countdown to Copenhagen, which has been colloquially described by campaigners as "100 days to save the world". Whether or not members share that view, the countdown to Copenhagen should caution us all against complacency. Despite the visionary legislation that the Parliament passed before the summer recess, there should be no descent into mutual back-slapping, predictable positioning or a reliance on targets that only our grandchildren will be able to fulfil for us.

The issue for today, therefore, is Copenhagen. I fully understand why Scottish National Party ministers might wish to take part in the conference—it is human to want to be around when history is being made—but the wider countdown to Copenhagen campaign calls all of us to action now. Therefore, let me use my time to highlight just three things that the Scottish Government might do to demonstrate its Copenhagen commitment.

Action point 1 is that we need absolute clarity as soon as possible on new coal-fired power station consents in Scotland. If the Scottish Government decides, as it has committed to doing, to ignore nuclear power—a point on which I disagree with it—fossil fuels demand to be rapidly decarbonised. That is why the committee's report

"calls for the Scottish Government to conclude its consultation on section 36 ... consents as soon as possible".

The Scottish Government is delaying. I ask the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism to confirm whether new applications for unabated coal power stations—such as that for Hunterston, which is currently included within the national planning framework—will now be rejected.

A second action point on the countdown to Copenhagen, as my colleague Lewis Macdonald mentioned, is a decision on the Beaulieu to Denny power line. The decision should have been made during the past 100 days, never mind the next 100 days. The public inquiry report that was submitted to the Government 200 days ago called for the matter to be resolved. Scottish Renewables is clear that half of the renewable energy projects in the planning system in Scotland will be able to be plugged in only if the Beaulieu to Denny line goes ahead. We call on ministers to approve the upgrade of the Beaulieu transmission line without any conditions that could result in further delays. I say gently to the minister that if President Obama can get to grips with the entire international agenda on carbon reduction in less than 300 days, Jim Mather should be able to make a decision on the Beaulieu to Denny line in less than 300 days. We look for a decision on that before Copenhagen.

Action point 3 for the Government in the countdown to Copenhagen is to commit to the home insulation scheme that was first promoted by the Green party in last year's budget negotiations, and to make it big scale, with a big impact. It should adopt a street-by-street, house-by-house approach to improving energy efficiency. I predict that that is what will be done in a few years' time, so why do we not just get on with it now? That is what the committee wanted—an area-based, targeted energy efficiency programme

"in the order of £100-170 million per year over the next decade to come".

Currently, the home insulation scheme receives £15 million a year. The draft budget that has been published in the past month proposes a 17 per cent cut in capital budgets in Scotland next year, the value of which is hundreds of millions of pounds. Let us put £100 million back into an area-based targeted energy scheme.

Those are my three action points. Action should be taken on unabated coal-fired power station proposals, a decision should be made on the Beaulieu to Denny line, and the home insulation scheme should be improved. Those are the areas that should be on our agenda as part of the countdown to Copenhagen.

Time eludes me, so I will quickly add just a few additional action points. As others have said, energy efficiency is the key to reducing demand. There is no better way to reduce demand than to change behaviour. We have the evidence that council tax reductions are effective in changing behaviour on energy efficiency. Can we have a decision on that issue, too, by the time of the Copenhagen summit?

When we passed the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill last summer, the Opposition parties pressed the Government to end the planning restrictions on householders in Scotland who wanted to use mini wind turbines or air-source heat pumps for their homes. That is a fifth area on which action could easily be taken in the countdown to Copenhagen.

I hope that we can have our own countdown to Copenhagen in Scotland by not giving consent to unabated coal-fired power station applications, by consenting to the Beaulieu to Denny line, by extending the home insulation scheme, by publishing an energy efficiency action plan as opposed to another consultation, by introducing council tax rebates for energy efficiency and by removing the planning constraints on domestic wind turbines. I ask the minister to reflect on whether he anticipates being able to make a decision on any of those five areas in the part of the 100 days that remains before the Copenhagen summit.

15:42

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Like other members, I pay tribute to the members, clerking team and support staff of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, who worked so hard to produce a comprehensive report.

The Scottish Conservatives have consistently argued that, in future, Scotland's energy needs will be met by having a diverse and balanced range of energy sources. Much of the evidence that was submitted to the committee during its inquiry backed up that approach. The Scottish Chambers of Commerce hit the nail on the head when it said in its submission:

"there must be a recognition that our future energy needs will not be supplied by a single source rather by an energy mix".

I believe that wind and hydro should be looked at in tandem. Within that mix, my region of the Highlands and Islands is already playing a major role in the development of renewables—particularly in onshore wind—and can be expected to play an even greater role in future. Scotland has 25 per cent of Europe's offshore wind power and 25 per cent of Europe's tidal power potential. It is estimated that 21.5GW of commercial capacity is available from the waters around Scotland. There is particular potential around the northern isles and in the Pentland Firth.

In its useful briefing to members for today's debate, the Crown Estate says that the first stage of the Pentland Firth and Orkney waters wave and tidal leasing round should be completed by early next year. The Crown Estate received a total of 42

applications from 20 bidders for wave and tidal energy leases that will deliver at least 700MW of power by 2020. The Crown Estate is also doing good work in enabling the expansion of offshore wind energy and by investing in research and in carbon capture and storage.

As every MSP will know from their mailbag, onshore wind energy remains controversial. With every planning application, there are strongly held opinions on both sides. Now that some wind farms have been built, it might be interesting to conduct a survey of reactions to them.

Onshore wind farms are not appropriate for every site but are suitable for some and, in those instances, should be supported appropriately as one part of the diverse bag of energy sources. Ministers could help matters by providing the guidance on the siting of wind farms, for which we have called for a long time. That would offer clarity to local authorities, developers and communities.

On the issue of offshore wind, I recently met a businessman constituent of mine who is involved in the renewables sector and believes strongly that Scotland should establish an onshore test facility for the offshore turbines that are currently under development and which need to undergo testing before commercial deployment in the North Sea. There is an existing site at Bremerhaven in Germany, but having such a site in Scotland would keep us at the cutting edge of the expertise and support services that are emerging for offshore wind and would help to ensure that the assembly and manufacture of as many elements of the offshore turbines as possible could take place in Scotland. I hope that ministers and other agencies can take up this idea and work with the industry to make it a reality.

We must not forget that the construction of wind turbines in Scotland could be a good source of employment. It is currently a good source of employment in Machrihanish, and it could supply jobs in other areas as well.

Although Glendoe, which I have visited—and which, as we all know, has been temporarily closed by an internal rock fall in the water tunnel, which I hope will soon be remedied—will probably be the last hydro power station of that scale, the Scottish Conservatives are positive about the role of small-scale hydro schemes. I am therefore encouraged that the Minister for Environment recently said that our publicly owned Scottish forests will be opened up to encourage small-scale hydro-electric developments. It has always surprised me that the Forestry Commission has not done that before, given the potential that exists in burns and river tributaries in its land.

As a Highlands and Islands MSP, I must also mention the Beaulieu to Denny transmission line.

Although we all recognise the need to put in place an infrastructure system that will allow us to get the power generated in the north of the country to the south, the construction of the overhead line remains a real concern for many of my constituents. I continue to take the position that the Government must consider all the latest evidence on the Beaulay to Denny power line that has arisen since the inquiry finished, including evidence on the possibility of alternative options to the pylons.

Why is it that the interconnector line from Ayrshire to Ireland does not have to carry the same spare capacity as the lines that are in central and northern Scotland? I would like an answer to that question, if the minister can give it to me.

Today's debate is important, as it concerns the putting in place of a framework that allows for a secure supply of energy for our people and our businesses, which is one of the key responsibilities of any Government. Scotland has massive potential as a provider of renewable energy, but no responsible Government would argue that renewables can provide all the answers. The committee's report contains many useful recommendations, and we look to ministers, working in partnership with the energy industry, to implement them as we deal with the challenges and grasp the opportunities that are presented by our low-carbon future.

15:48

Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): I am delighted to take part in this afternoon's debate as the newest member of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee. When I became a member of the committee earlier this year, much of the research had already been done and a great deal of the evidence had already been taken, but there were still some areas to cover, as well as three fact-finding visits to be made—to the north of Scotland, to Berlin and to Sweden and Denmark. I will speak about the Berlin visit later.

Before I continue, I would like to put on record my sincere thanks to the committee clerks for their support since I joined the committee, particularly during the energy inquiry. I remember thinking, when Stephen Imrie first gave me my folder of paperwork for the committee, "Well, that's my bedtime reading for the next seven months."

The most obvious issue that came out of the report was nuclear power, and it will come as no surprise that that issue went to the casting vote of the convener and that the votes were split down party lines. I am sure that members of all parties considered the evidence properly but, in the end, we did not deviate from our respective party

policies. I do not intend to rerun the debate, as I am sure that that will not progress today's debate any further. I will instead highlight other aspects of the report.

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Does the member believe that it is important that the independent study carried out on behalf of the Council of Economic Advisers comes back to Parliament after the Government has considered it so that we can discuss and debate its findings?

Stuart McMillan: I am sure that any report that the Council of Economic Advisers produces will be debated through the proper channels.

At one of the first evidence sessions that I attended as a committee member, we heard evidence from a representative of Community Energy Scotland. I was previously not too aware of what the organisation did, but I was impressed to learn of its activities. Only the week before, I had been contacted by a constituent who had a suggestion for a community energy scheme, and I was in the process of investigating the matter on his behalf. The committee meeting was timely to say the least, and the knowledge that such an organisation exists to assist local groups with energy proposals is vital, as it ensures that normal people can play their part in Scotland's renewable future.

Paragraph 128 of the committee's report concerns the fossil fuel levy. I whole-heartedly agree with our recommendation, which calls on the Scottish and UK Governments to work together to release the £164 million that is currently held with Ofgem. However, there really is no point in this Parliament getting all or even some of that money if the resultant knock-on effect is a reduction in the Scottish consolidated fund. The £164 million would be a massive injection in renewable projects, which would allow Scotland and the UK to go some way towards reaching renewable targets. I was content that the committee did not divide over that issue—I am sure we all agree that Scotland can provide so much more in the way of renewable projects and that, as such, the fossil fuel levy should not be used as a political football.

Paragraph 131 is an important section of the report, as it considers planning applications and the level of consent refusals. In two years, the Scottish Government has approved 26 applications, which are worth 1.8GW of capacity in total, and another 33 applications are being considered. Those figures are significant.

The Scottish Government response that it recognises the need for more renewables projects to be given consent is telling, but the point that stands out is that consent should not be at any price. Our local communities will not thank us, or

any elected representative, if projects go ahead on a whim while local concerns are disregarded, irrespective of what the project is. I echo the Scottish Government's response that

"the best applications are those that ... take care to resolve environmental and other concerns in advance."

As is the case with other issues that we consider in the chamber, prevention is always better than cure, and I do not see how any party can argue against that response.

I will touch on the carbon capture and storage section in paragraph 140. The committee is fully supportive of the concept of CCS technology, and our recommendation is self-explanatory. I look forward to reading the carbon capture and storage road map when it is published in the autumn.

As I mentioned earlier, a delegation from the committee went to Berlin towards the end of the series of evidence sessions. The primary aim of the visit was to look at the CCS demonstration plant at Schwarze Pumpe. The site visit was fascinating, and all the visits during the two days were extremely interesting and worth while. I came away with a better appreciation of CCS technology and a better understanding of how the authorities in Germany have been tackling and plan to tackle energy issues.

It is obvious that we can no longer allow carbon pollution to continue. All of us, irrespective of political party, must ensure that the legacy that we leave for future generations is far better than that which has been left to us. In effect, we are attempting to clean up the mess that we have inherited.

I commend the report to Parliament for several reasons. First, it is a massive piece of work that has involved pulling together a whole host of information and attempting to break it down for public consumption. Secondly, although I know that the report is not a blueprint for a 100 per cent renewable energy future, I hope that it can be considered to be a framework for what should be possible. Finally, the report has ensured clarity of purpose for the members of the committee and, as the committee's convener said in his opening remarks, it should provide a clear and challenging agenda for Scotland's energy future.

15:55

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): As someone who is not a member of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, I pay tribute to the committee members and the clerking team for putting together a comprehensive report. It comes at a good time, because it is important for us to consider energy policy and our strategy for it, and the report makes an important contribution to that debate.

I worked in the energy sector for a number of years. People who work in the sector sometimes get caught up in buzzwords, such as line loss factors and group correction factors, but looking from a bit more distance it strikes me that there are two key issues: we must produce a secure and efficient energy system that supports the economy, and we must ensure that we have policies that contribute to lower carbon emissions and lower bills, particularly for our pensioners. From that point of view, the report is crucial in that it highlights the importance of a political action plan in relation to energy. It strikes me that, although the minister may have a lot of initiatives and he obviously put a lot of work into the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, we need a bit more speed and urgency in several areas if we are to address concerns about energy in Scotland.

It is important to recognise the importance of energy to the economy. As Lewis Macdonald pointed out, Scotland is a net exporter of electricity via the interconnector to Northern Ireland and down to England. We want to ensure that our electricity system continues to produce surplus energy so that we can export it and, in the process, support the economy and Scottish workers' jobs. From that point of view, it is disappointing that the minister has yet to review the Council of Economic Advisers' report on energy, which can make an important contribution to the debate. I urge the minister to look at that promptly.

As others have said, it is important that we support renewables and get more on stream, but that must be tied to action on the Beaulieu to Denny line, which is an important part of the link. The Crown Estate has noted that its scheme to bring online 1000MW from the Pentland Firth depends on approval of the Beaulieu to Denny line. The minister needs to take a decision on that quickly.

There is clear support for new technologies, including carbon capture, but it is important that we have a diverse energy policy. It will be a long time before carbon capture comes fully on stream. On renewables, 60 per cent of the planning applications that have gone to public inquiries have been rejected, so there is concern that we are not getting the newer technologies on stream as quickly as we would like. From that point of view, it is short-sighted to rule out new nuclear. Nuclear provides stability and provides low-carbon energy at a low and competitive cost. It should not be ruled out.

Stuart McMillan: What would the member do with the waste that is generated from nuclear energy?

James Kelly: I do not think that we need to get caught up in that, as there are a number of good international examples that show how waste can

be treated. The point is that, if we are considering low-carbon solutions, nuclear power has to be on the table.

The other side of the equation is how we reduce consumption and bring down bills, particularly for pensioners. I was concerned to read in the report Wood Mackenzie's estimate that energy consumption might rise by 10 per cent over a number of years; that must be tackled, particularly given that public buildings account for 40 per cent of what we might call waste. We need to be more efficient and, in that respect, the minister has to give more of a priority to publishing the energy efficiency plan.

I can highlight a number of examples of efficiency in my own constituency. The Rutherglen and Cambuslang Housing Association's use of solar heating panels has been very effective in bringing down heating bills, particularly for pensioners and, with a grant from the climate challenge fund, the Lightburn Elderly Association Project is doing a lot of good work in advising older people on reducing their bills. We must also look at microgeneration and smart meters.

We need to get the policy right. It is important that we have a diverse energy policy and use every mechanism to drive down fuel bills. I urge the minister to hurry up and address some of the issues that have been highlighted in the debate because we need to keep the lights on and get energy bills down.

16:01

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): I want to develop a point that was raised by Iain Smith in his opening speech, and by Lewis Macdonald and Wendy Alexander. In paragraph 141 of its report, the committee

"calls for the Scottish Government to conclude its consultation on section 36 consents as soon as possible and to use this opportunity to drive the development of carbon capture and storage technology."

For the benefit of Gavin Brown, who is absent, I point out that the fact that the Liberal Democrats want to promote 100 per cent renewables does not mean that we turn a blind eye to new technological developments. We share the view that we should be driving the development of CCS. However, I am bound to tell the minister that we have grave reservations about the Government's apparent direction of travel.

We do not want to be luddite about this. In an effort to be constructive, I make it clear that we share the view of the leading environmental organisations in Scotland that the Government must draw a distinction between existing coal-fired and gas-fired stations and new coal-fired and gas-fired stations. For example, we believe that the

Longannet proposal is a step in the right direction. Because it is an existing station with an existing level of CO₂ emissions from its 2,400MW output, the promotion of CCS technology at that plant could, if it proved to be financially and technologically feasible, contribute substantially to reducing the CO₂ content of emissions, and help to prove the technology. It is a possible win-win situation. However, if I have understood the Government's pronouncements on this issue, that would not be the case with a new coal-fired power station. There are two issues to address, and the overarching question is this: given the Government's support for the huge potential for renewable energy, which has been backed by the recent "The Power of Scotland Renewed" report, what is the strategic need and case for a new coal-fired power station?

On a more detailed level, Jim Mather, in response to a parliamentary question that was lodged by Kenny Gibson, indicated that the Government is minded to follow the direction of travel that has been set out in the Department of Energy and Climate Change's consultation paper, which was issued on 17 June. There's the rub: the proposal in that paper was that to qualify as carbon capture ready, a new coal-fired power station would have to demonstrate at the outset that it had a CCS capacity of only 400MW gross. If we apply that thinking to the proposed 1,600MW coal-fired power station at Hunterston, 75 per cent of the CO₂ emissions will continue unabated until the technology is proven.

It is no exaggeration to say that the very useful and needed development of CCS technology is almost bound to take 15 to 20 years because, in addition to proving the carbon capture technology, we must prove that commercial-scale storage is possible, whether or not it is in North Sea aquifers. There is the equally challenging business of meeting the standards for storage and transportation of CO₂.

If new power stations are built, there will be new emissions. It is impossible to see how that level of unabated emissions can be squared with the targets in the Government's Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. There is a real danger that, if the low threshold that I mentioned is applied to new applications, developers will simply exploit that provision to promote new power stations with 75 per cent of their CO₂ emissions unabated.

The report contains many excellent suggestions and, as the minister said in his opening remarks, there is a great deal of consensus on many of them. However, as the minister has heard from the opening speakers and from Wendy Alexander and me, there is no consensus on carbon capture and storage, so we look to the minister for clarity on that important issue. I repeat: we are asking for a

clear strategic case from the Government on why Scotland needs new coal-fired stations, given all the evidence about our renewables potential. Crucially, we need to know whether, at a commercial scale, the Government will confine the technology to existing stations and therefore prevent unabated CO₂ emissions from being unleashed on Scotland. I say to the minister that that latter proposition is unacceptable.

16:07

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

As other members have done, I welcome the report. I do so as a non-member of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee. I particularly welcome the emphasis that Iain Smith placed on energy efficiency as a key part of the future strategy if we are to reduce consumption. However, I will focus on generation, and on renewables in particular, and the vital need to exploit more of our renewables potential. I emphasise that that potential provides particular opportunities for my region, the Highlands and Islands, which is blessed with an abundance of land and wind, as well as a coastline with lots of tidal movement and, especially on our west coast, lots of rain. The Highlands and Islands are well placed to make the biggest contribution in the UK to the overall renewables scene.

It is important that the Highlands and Islands plays its full part in contributing to meeting the national needs, as it has done before with hydro schemes in the 1950s and oil production support in the 1970s. Although the area is often characterised as being the beneficiary of national goods, it has an opportunity to make a positive contribution to the nation as a whole. That is not always possible in the wider economy of the Highlands and Islands, so we must take the opportunity with considerable courage and a great deal of commitment. As Wendy Alexander said when she talked about the Copenhagen summit and the days leading up to it, we need to see the big picture, which is that we must contribute as a nation to Europe's and the world's reduction of carbon emissions, and we must do so within our boundaries. We should not simply see in all circumstances the local picture and the local arguments about particular applications.

We must make more of a reality of some of the rhetoric that we hear from Government about renewables. The opportunities are clear, although there are challenges, many of which are technical. Some members have mentioned some of those challenges, such as grid connections and cables.

There are also wider challenges, because the environment that gives the Highlands and Islands the opportunities to contribute is an environment that people want to protect, which is why

controversy over particular proposals is so common, whether they involve pylons or onshore wind development, and whether the issue is about habitat or species protection, peatlands or scenic considerations. From a mountaineer's point of view, from that of someone who admires wild land and wants to preserve it, or even from that of the people who simply want to maintain the scenic quality of Scotland, it is nice to think of nothing further intervening in our landscape. The issue generates strong emotions in people. Of course, there are few parts of the Highlands and Islands landscape where humankind has not intervened—deforestation, management of grouse moors, hydro dams, pylons and cables, hill tracks and roads have all intervened in our environment.

In this debate about renewables, it is important to find a balance between the competing interests in our society, but far more renewables opportunities must be realised if we are to make our contribution to world issues, meet our climate-change targets and generate the economic opportunities to which everybody on the committee has pointed.

Wind farms are the most controversial aspect of renewables activity that affects my area, although they have a far bigger part to play than they have been allowed to play so far. In that respect, the siting of wind farms is crucial. It is proper that local councillors or ministers who have been democratically elected make the final decisions. We need to acknowledge that not everywhere is suitable for wind farms, but there must be many suitable potential sites in my area that can be exploited.

There is a disappointing predictability about how battle lines form around specific applications. We must realise potential and ensure that pre-planning application processes are more thorough than they have been thus far so that disagreements and concerns can be resolved before the formal planning stage. I am glad that the committee and the minister, in his response, have acknowledged that.

A big proposal in Lewis was turned down by the Government. It is a lost economic opportunity, not only for the local community but for the nation as a whole. There was also a lost carbon saving opportunity. We cannot keep turning down existing economic opportunities and big schemes such as those if we are to meet our targets.

Debate is currently raging in Shetland about the Viking Energy proposal. There is, in that proposal, huge potential that is of national significance. It would help not just Shetland, but the rest of the nation, become carbon neutral and would provide a long-term revenue stream to the islands, just as oil revenues—which are in danger of diminishing over time—have done in the past. Shetland has

taken advantage of oil to transform its economy. Viking Energy is its next big chance. It would be a joint venture, astutely negotiated as we would expect from Shetlanders, with a major electricity company—I see that the Orcadian member is shaking his head in marginal disagreement with that proposition, but that is always the case between Orkney and Shetland. Nonetheless, it would be an astutely negotiated opportunity for Shetland to share in the profits of what could be a major development.

It is a good thing that there is local debate in order to air concerns and to allow people to ask important questions. One's having legitimate questions and concerns, however, does not mean that one always has to oppose the principle of a development. Equally, supporting such a principle does not mean that there is no need to compromise in the proposals, to seek accommodations with objectors and to address legitimate concerns.

Shetland has an enormous opportunity that I hope it can take. If it does not do that in partnership with Viking Energy, as is the current proposal, I predict confidently that the proposals will become a purely private project and the community might not have the same opportunity to access long-term revenue streams. I hope that the community can find a way forward to help itself, to help us as a nation to meet our targets, to be as bold as it was in the 1970s in grasping that opportunity and in seeking to address as many of the legitimate concerns as possible. Ultimately, it might well fall to the minister to make those difficult decisions. I hope that he does so while bearing in mind the importance of the big picture, as Wendy Alexander described, and our need, on the way to Copenhagen, to make a big contribution to dealing with the world's problems.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): We move to the wind-up speeches. Liam McArthur has up to eight minutes.

16:14

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): Thank you. That is very generous. I extend my apologies to you, Presiding Officer, to the minister and to Parliament for being absent from the beginning of the debate. I had to attend a meeting on urgent constituency business.

I congratulate the committee on its report. As other members have done, and although I am not a member of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, I recognise not only its excellent work but its commitment to gathering evidence as widely as possible from those who are interested and involved in delivering our energy future. I know that the committee's visit to my constituency

was very well received. It is acknowledged that the words "I'm from the Government and I'm here to help" can chill the blood of even the boldest of business leaders, but it appears that the words "I'm from the Parliament and I'm here to listen" can at times act like a healing balm.

Parliament's willingness to listen goes some way towards explaining the broad welcome that the report's recommendations have received. As Iain Smith suggested, the focus on delivery rather than on prognosis is refreshing, and it was absolutely right to highlight efficiency maximisation, environmental sustainability, social justice and wealth and employment.

It is also gratifying to note the committee's calls for a ban on new nuclear power in Scotland, the urgent publication of the Government's energy efficiency action plan, a dedicated research and development fund for wave and tidal energy research, scaled-up action on fuel poverty, and the decentralisation of the supply network. Those are all long-standing items on the Liberal Democrat agenda on energy. However, I heed the warning in SSE's briefing for this debate that delivery of energy objectives cannot be treated as a political football. Robust debate is certainly needed, but I know from talking to, for example, marine energy developers that agreement across the parties on the importance of the sector, and on renewables as a whole, is a valued asset. In effect, such agreement de-risks a process that already has its fair share of attached risks. In that regard, I welcome the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth's consistent acknowledgment of his predecessors' work on delivering the objective of creating a renewables powerhouse in Scotland. I will return to that shortly.

As Peter Peacock, Patrick Harvie and others did, I applaud the committee's decision to put energy efficiency at the centre of its vision for Scotland's energy future. The benefits of not only reducing harmful emissions but of cutting costs and tackling fuel poverty make that a win-win-win approach. As Iain Smith said, there is now broad agreement that reducing our energy demand is crucial to delivery of our energy objectives, and that reducing our energy demand can no longer be seen as the Cinderella of the energy debate.

In responding to the committee, ministers have claimed that those points will be addressed in an energy efficiency action plan. That is a sensible approach, but it begs the question why ministers still have to publish their plan at this stage, despite Mr Mather's claim back in March 2007 that it would be an early priority. Now that we have a reassurance in the Government's response to the committee, I hope that we can comfort ourselves as we brace ourselves for the early autumn with knowing that the plan will be with us very soon.

I hope that in the plan, as well as setting out how the public sector will take a more ambitious lead and how the significant emissions contribution of non-domestic buildings can be reined in, ministers will address failures in the home insulation programme. The committee called for a scaling up of that effort. The home insulation scheme has been described as having been set up to fail. The budget was slashed in half during a very public falling out between Mr Swinney and Mr Patrick Harvie, and it seems that match funding for the scheme has failed to materialise. That is a concern, but Wendy Alexander has made it clear that the task ahead is of an altogether greater magnitude.

The committee was right to place heavy emphasis on Scotland's renewables potential. Scotland is well placed in respect of its natural resources and expertise, but serious challenges remain. I have made it clear for a long time that we need to build on the success of the wave and tidal energy scheme, which my colleague Nicol Stephen introduced. The lack of access to a dedicated marine research and development scheme is acknowledged by the committee and the Government's advisers as being a serious inhibitor to development of the sector. In the past, ministers have claimed that WATES money is still available, but under cross-examination, they have been unable to quantify that money or explain how it can be accessed. The Government cannot ignore any longer the marine energy group's call for a flexible, use-it-or-lose-it fund. I hope that an early decision on that will be taken.

The grid remains a major concern for everyone who is involved in the sector. I echo the calls of Iain Smith, Wendy Alexander and others for an early positive decision on the Beaulieu to Denny line. I whole-heartedly endorse the committee's call for subsea cables to the islands. It has also called for extended bootstraps down the east and west coasts and the development of a North Sea supergrid. I acknowledge the Government's commitment to those objectives, but caution that we cannot wait until the electricity is ready to flow before we put those things in place. I am also happy to echo the calls of the committee, ministers, Scottish Power, SSE, local authorities such as Orkney Islands Council and many others relating to the iniquitous charging regime for transmission. That regime must be reformed if we are truly to unlock our renewables potential.

The report's focus on supply chain issues is also welcome, although ministers have rather belatedly turned their attention to that matter. There must be substantive work on that—there cannot be merely a desk-based exercise. In that context, I was concerned that, far from being invited to comment, some of the experts in my constituency were not even made aware of the exercise.

Iain Smith highlighted the need for a more decentralised model of generation that can empower individuals, businesses and communities to a far greater extent than is the case at present. Smart meters and smart grids have roles to play, as do feed-in tariffs. I was pleased to see that the UK Energy Act 2008 has given the green light to those.

However, more attention must be paid to how we capture the benefit of renewables developments, both onshore and offshore, for communities. I assure Peter Peacock that even we Orcadians acknowledge the wily negotiating skills of our colleagues up in Shetland. Planning needs to be made as efficient as possible, but where individuals and communities take decisions in their interests and for their long-term benefit, planning issues can be resolved more readily.

As Iain Smith suggested, a decentralised model would open up significant opportunities in relation to renewable heat. I welcome the Government's commitment to heat mapping, but the climate change delivery plan must take urgent steps to ensure that greater incentives are provided to develop community CHP schemes across the country. From the evidence that was taken by the committee, it is clear that we have much to learn from others—notably, the Danes. It is regrettable that earlier this year the Government chose to back Green Party calls to rule out for the future energy-from-waste plants.

It is unrealistic to expect a transition away from fossil fuels in the short term. Abatement and decarbonisation of existing energy sources will be necessary. CCS presents real opportunities, but it is not a "Get out of jail free" card; it must be applied robustly and demonstrated at scale. The points that Ross Finnie made in relation to Longannet and Hunterston were valid. In passing, I congratulate my colleague Chris Davies MEP on his efforts in securing funding at European Union level for demonstration roll-out.

This has been a good and constructive debate. On the whole, members have taken up the challenge from the committee and Ian Marchant to focus on how, rather than on what, we deliver. The minister has his work cut out in the months leading up to Copenhagen and beyond, but I hope that he feels assured that he has Parliament's support and can draw on the findings of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's report in that work.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I can offer all closing speakers nearly two minutes more than they were offered previously. They are welcome to take up that time, if possible.

16:22

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

That is one opportunity that I cannot resist, Presiding Officer. I hope that by the end of my speech you will not have to tell me to shut up and sit down.

Liam McArthur: It is inevitable.

Members: Hear, hear.

Alex Johnstone: I discover that that is a popular idea.

Today's debate affords us the chance to talk about energy issues. We used to discuss them a lot in the Parliament, but we have done so less in recent years. The committee's report gives us an opportunity to look at work that has been done in great depth.

As a substitute member of the committee, I have attended only one of its meetings—that which took place in the city chambers in Aberdeen. At the meeting, members were given the opportunity to talk to, question and consult representatives of the Aberdeen-based energy sector, and were reminded that energy is, and has been for many years, one of Scotland's strong suits. I left the discussion with the worry that our oil and gas industry may now be so specialised in its outlook that its appetite to expand into other areas of energy production is not as great as its appetite to expand into oil and gas production in other areas. The minister must face that challenge. There is an enormous amount of expertise here in Scotland. We must ensure that it is used not only to exploit the resources that we know we have but to exploit the resources that, technologically, we must yet find ways of exploiting. Nevertheless, the meeting was a good opportunity for me to see at first hand how the committee works. I commend it on the way in which it conducted its inquiry.

Today, we have an opportunity to discuss the detail of the report. There is a great deal of common ground on which we all agree. Right at the top of my list of priorities is energy efficiency. As we have heard, energy efficiency is, of course, the easiest way to cut emissions. As members have pointed out—and deservedly so—building standards are a key element in achieving energy efficiency over time.

The committee discussed a range of issues, many of which we agreed on, although the issue that I intend to finish on is one that we may not agree on. Government has admitted the need for baseload capacity in Scotland's electricity generation—a concession that set an argument running today—while pursuing carbon capture and storage as the solution. Wendy Alexander and Ross Finnie spoke eloquently on the need for the Government to clarify exactly how, given its

preferred solution, it expects to achieve its objectives.

I will embark on a more general tour of the debate. Members raised extremely important issues, including decentralisation of energy supply, the concept of which I fully support. However, some members confuse the idea: they think that a wind turbine development in the Western Isles or Pentland Firth amounts to decentralisation of energy production, but the two things are not the same. Closing a major power station in central Scotland and replacing it with 500 wind turbines in the north of Scotland is simply centralisation, albeit in another place. Decentralisation is much more than that: it is about placing energy production in the heart of communities. That will allow us to pursue developments such as combined heat and power, which is being done well in Aberdeen and could be done better and more efficiently in other areas of Scotland.

I was going to say what I am about to say even if Christopher Harvie was not present, but I am delighted that he has returned to the chamber to hear it. From his remarks, it was obvious that Christopher knows that I have noted his tendency to mention Germany. Indeed, in just about every contribution that he makes in the chamber, he mentions Germany. I do not have a problem with that. I simply remarked in a previous debate that I had noted that fact. Germany is a place where there has been great innovation and there have been courageous moves over many years. That has continued even into this very week with the return of a conservative Government. It cannot all be wrong.

Iain Smith: Does the member recognise that the Free Democratic Party, which is the sister party to the Liberal Democrats, made the biggest gain in the general election? Surely that suggests a return to Liberalism.

Alex Johnstone: A trend that I am sure will not continue in this country.

In closing, I turn to the issue that has provoked much debate: how to achieve baseload capacity without contributing to carbon dioxide emissions. Efficiency is the highest priority. That said, if we require baseload capacity in future—as the Government appears to concede in its national planning framework—we have to consider nuclear energy. Members will find nothing new in that statement; I have said it on many occasions. The irony is that members of some political parties will not consider replacing our nuclear power stations but they expect to extend the lifetimes of those stations as long as possible to take advantage of the cheap carbon-free electricity that they supply. That position is short-sighted and inappropriate. If we replaced our two existing nuclear power

stations the new stations would be cleaner, safer and more efficient than the current ones. Also, the new stations would have an up-front carbon emission load, and by 2050 would be producing safe, clean electricity with virtually zero carbon emissions.

Liam McArthur: Will the member give way?

Alex Johnstone: I am coming to my closing remarks.

I will deal once more with the issue of nuclear waste. We have a problem with historic nuclear waste, due to the early days of our energy programmes, but there is also a military component and even a medical component, because our health service produces nuclear waste. However, a new generation of nuclear power stations will add insignificantly to that problem of nuclear waste and make it no harder to solve than it is today. We should not and cannot afford to miss this opportunity. If we do so because of this Government's determination to pursue a dogmatic line, it will result in Scotland becoming a country that is hamstrung by its dependence on a single energy source.

16:30

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Like all members who have spoken in this debate, I congratulate the convener and committee members and I commend the clerks for their hard work in pulling together a very substantial report. I never fail to be impressed by the volume and quality of the work that comes into the chamber from the committees. When we consider the length of the inquiry—12 months—and the fact that evidence was taken from 120 witnesses, it is no surprise that we have such a substantial document in front of us.

My colleague Lewis Macdonald started his speech by saying that almost every witness who offered evidence to the inquiry said that the energy policy should be about lower carbon emissions and higher energy security, and the delivery of energy at the least cost to consumers with the greatest benefit to the economy. That sums up this afternoon's debate, which has been of high quality. It will be clear to those outside the Parliament that there is a lot of enthusiasm—even if there is not always 100 per cent agreement on how we get there—for ensuring that Scotland is a key player in the global energy industry and that security of energy supply is at the centre of our sustainable economic growth.

Iain Smith outlined the vision that has come out of the committee's report. It is an exciting vision, but also a challenging one. One of the key figures that Iain Smith mentioned, which I had not fully comprehended before, is the level of energy

waste—65 per cent of our heat generated by electricity is lost. That is one of the biggest challenges facing us.

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): I repeat the point that every chemical engineer has to repeat occasionally: when we run a thermal cycle power station, two thirds of the heat is not lost or wasted; it is simply a necessary by-product of that cycle, although we have to accept that it can be used in CHP processes.

John Park: My understanding of Iain Smith's point is that it is also about energy loss within the domestic market and from houses.

Energy efficiency is obviously central to addressing fuel poverty, and microgeneration is central to addressing energy efficiency. Wendy Alexander outlined the important role that microgeneration could play. Microgeneration is a key aspect of future energy use, but affordability is an issue, which is why the council tax rebate for microgeneration that Wendy Alexander spoke about deserves serious consideration.

I hope that the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 will address some of the serious planning issues that have impacted negatively on microgeneration projects. I was disturbed to discover recently some of the difficulties faced by families in gaining planning permission to install, for example, air-source heat pumps. There have been issues about noise and where pumps can be located. Many such practical difficulties prevent people from taking the first step into the realm of microgeneration. We must remember that although there are many microgeneration proposals and that the technologies are available, the costs are somewhat prohibitive. Individuals have big outlays, but the returns through lower energy costs and cheaper bills are much further into the future. It is difficult to manage when they have to pay out a lot of money initially.

Alex Johnstone addressed nuclear power when he summed up. He made some interesting points, but I point out that, as far as we have been led to believe, the issue is being addressed by the Council of Economic Advisers.

In response to a point that Gavin Brown made in an intervention during the minister's opening speech, Mr Mather indicated that the independent report commissioned by the Council of Economic Advisers is now with the Scottish Government. If that is the case, it would be useful if the minister, when summing up, provided a bit more detail on the timescales. When will the Scottish Government consider the report? When will the Council of Economic Advisers consider it? When will we in the Parliament get an opportunity—either in the chamber or in committee—to discuss its findings in more detail? I believe that the report

will make an important contribution to the energy policies that are developed in the future. The findings of that report are not just important for the Parliament; it is important that industry knows about them quickly. If industry understands what future energy priorities will be, it will be able to start making the investment decisions that are necessary for the longer term now.

I am a colleague of Christopher Harvie in the region of Mid Scotland and Fife, and I am familiar with his grasp of new technologies. I have listened to him intently on many occasions, and I have heard a lot of his ideas. I do not think that you heard his speech, Presiding Officer, but I am afraid that I will need a longer conversation with him outside the chamber about what he said. I certainly intend to follow that up at some point.

We have had a good discussion about carbon capture and storage and some of the ideological issues around it. It is not fully proven in practical terms, but there is much anticipation of what the technology could do. I have been fortunate to visit Longannet and to see at first hand what CCS would mean for the area and the work that Scottish Power is doing there. Developing a brownfield site and extending the lifespan of a station that is already in place is a preferable approach in terms of sustainability, existing resources, the existing workforce and local appreciation of the work that is carried out at Longannet.

I was initially a bit confused by Jim Hume's explanation of the Liberal Democrats' position on carbon capture, but Ross Finnie provided an explanation. There is a debate to be had about greenfield sites versus brownfield sites.

I want to discuss what carbon capture and storage means for the workforce, and how it relates to skills, apprenticeships and the retraining of workers who are already in the sector, which is vital to ensuring that Scotland gets the full benefit from the industry. Supporting the energy industry is not just about security of supply; it is also about security of employment. We have some excellent employers in the energy industry in Scotland, and they should continue to play a positive role in developing skills across the industry. I recently met some new apprentices who had been taken on by Scottish and Southern Energy. After meeting them, I felt that they believed that they were on the cusp of embarking on an exciting career in the sector. We want to promote that here in the Parliament, with further support from the Scottish Government.

OPITO, the Oil and Gas Academy, provides a model that has been considered by other sectors, including the finance and information technology sectors. OPITO is currently developing standards across the oil and gas industry globally. There are

opportunities for Scotland to play a much more positive role in global terms.

For me, the debate is about security of energy supply and tackling fuel poverty, but it is also about ensuring that there is employment, that there are manufacturing spin-offs from the renewables sector, and that we, as a country, do not just use energy but continue to be a net exporter of energy in the future.

16:38

Jim Mather: The overall tone and content of the debate have been supportive of the general direction on which the Government and the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee are converging. That is appropriate, given that the matter at hand is of such huge importance to Scotland. We have the best possible motivations to continue in that spirit, and I will endeavour to do so.

It has been good to hear today from so many members who are actively engaged in and well informed about energy matters. Their hard work and commitment have been evident in the depth of their contributions. It is good to get all this on the record, as it gives my officials and me the opportunity to engage with the issues that have been raised and to get the benefit of committee members' thinking as it has developed from the generation of the report and the receipt of responses, the committee's further interactions and the reactions gleaned from other sources. We have a pretty substantial new to-do list of actions that require responses—I lost count after 60—which is proof that there is a rich flow of ideas on the subject.

Lewis Macdonald talked about CCS. The belief that we can deliver on CCS in the context of Scotland's geology, skills base and academic capability is important. We have people such as Stuart Hazeldine at the Scottish centre for carbon storage—that is all good stuff.

Members called for WATES 2. The issue is being considered, but members should remember that WATES 1 is still working through. We should also remember that we have EMEC, the Saltire prize, the co-ordination of the sector to produce the route map, the Carbon Trust's marine energy accelerator and the new DECC fund of £22 million. There are also the budget conversations that we can have going forward.

Liam McArthur: I appreciate what the minister said and echo Iain Smith's welcome of much of that activity. In the past, the minister referred to an underspend in the existing WATES programme but could not identify where it was and how it might be released and accessed. Can he shed more light on that?

Jim Mather: What I can say is that there is high-quality engagement between my officials and the marine energy group, which will continue and is being fed through, to answer questions not just from the committee but from the Scottish energy advisory board and FREDS.

Wendy Alexander and Ross Finnie also talked about carbon capture and storage. It is important to recognise that the technology exists and is getting strong market signals. There is strong competition, and companies such as Alstom, Aker and—here in Scotland—Doosan Babcock Energy are contributing materially, for example through oxyfuel burning, which takes 50 per cent of the gases out of the equation. China is also making strong declarations of intent.

I ask members to accept that we are very supportive of CCS technology. I take the point that Ross Finnie made about Longannet, but we must ensure that we support the UK Government in consulting on various aspects vis-à-vis standards and policy. It makes sense to ensure that the Scottish position is aligned with that of the UK before we issue thermal guidance, so that there can be clear paths for development.

Ross Finnie: I understand all that and I hope that I made clear that we are supportive of the technology. However, with all due respect, the direction of travel for the UK is for it to be acceptable that a 1,600MW station should have a CCS capacity of only 25 per cent. Is the minister suggesting that he will simply align himself with such a policy, irrespective of its implications in relation to the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009?

Jim Mather: That is indeed the current position, but we are giving serious consideration to the debate and to all the options. I will always want to optimise Scotland's position from an environmental and an energy perspective.

Tory members mentioned the nuclear issue. The key point is that when we consider the cost of building, managing, decommissioning and managing waste, we find that the state always ends up paying. A pound spent on nuclear is a pound that we cannot spend on renewables. We must look to the balance of Scottish payments and to the capturing of the 60GW or more of renewable energy that we have.

Mr Brown mentioned the slow pace on the energy efficiency action plan and I admit that the plan has taken slightly longer to prepare than we expected. The key factor in that regard is the late changes to interim targets on emissions that made the 2009 act significantly more ambitious. We have had to factor the issue into the process—and rightly so.

The fast-moving world that we are in is producing considerable developments. Nowhere was that more obvious than in Christopher Harvie's announcement of the intermediate technology from Volkswagen. I happen to think that that might have some merit. It is indicative of the revolution that is taking place. Any member who goes to the all-energy conference or even to a British Wave Energy Association event can see the momentous nature of the change. Lots of ideas and technologies are coming forward, but it begins to be extremely interesting when the technology comes from a prestigious stable such as Volkswagen and when the talk is of 92 per cent efficiency.

It is also extremely interesting for a refugee from the information technology world such as me when the talk is of a propensity to network the technology. I saw the same thing happen before in IT. There was not much macro planning but it happened because motivated people did their bit at different levels. That links to the comments that members such as James Kelly, Liam McArthur and Alex Johnstone made about community and constituency examples and even to Christopher Harvie talking about walking and bikes. The exciting thing for me is that, as the energy efficiency action plan kicks in and as more happens on microrenewables, the ingenuity and inventiveness of individual people, communities and small businesses could take us to a dramatically different place.

I will walk in the footsteps of some of the committee's visits and head for Bremerhaven in October. I will also meet German ministers when they are here in Scotland.

Stuart McMillan commented on the fossil fuel levy. That money has a material capacity to provide a major injection that supports UK, Scottish and European climate change and renewable energy targets. I have been told that the latest count is that the £150 million is now more than £170 million. The intention exists and I have given a clear understanding of the structure that we bring to the matter. We take a systematic approach to it and are engaging on the specific issues. We treat it as my department's absolute priority and regard energy as a key element in Scotland's economic recovery. We are playing to our strengths—strengths that are rooted here.

We are delighted that Ofgem has an increased presence in Scotland with its new offices in Glasgow and are keen to make more of that presence, especially on grid matters. We are keen to ensure that we get a better deal on grid.

Some forceful words were used about the transmission charges, mainly by our Liberal Democrat colleagues: "ludicrous", "discriminatory" and "unacceptable". Liam McArthur called them

“iniquitous”. I share that view and am pleased that we have had the chance to reiterate the point that Ofgem’s and National Grid’s current locational charging approach unfairly penalises energy generation from Scotland and renewable generation in particular. We have invited them to explain how their approach complies with the EU directive. I will put on the record what that directive says:

“Member States shall ensure that the charging of transmission and distribution fees does not discriminate against electricity from renewable energy sources, including in particular electricity from renewable energy sources produced in peripheral regions, such as island regions and regions of low population density.”

We need to reconcile that, although I acknowledge that there has been some movement by National Grid. We welcome its recognition that locational charges unfairly impact on wind energy and the fact that it has signalled a move towards a system that makes progress on the matter.

We are revamping our connection with DECC, Ofgem and National Grid and maintaining our connection with Europe. I am delighted that Andris Piebalgs—the continuity figure—is back as energy commissioner and that Georg Adamowitsch is the European grid co-ordinator. He is another continuity figure.

There is much more to do, but we have enormous comparative advantages in Scotland on energy. We are keen to ensure that it works and that we deliver to the full potential of Scotland’s energy future. The committee report has helped and I welcome the input of the debate, which we will study at length and in detail.

16:49

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):

The determination of the debate on Scotland’s energy future has been that there are choices to make. The committee has considered a variety of choices that Scotland can make and what needs to be done quickly. As the committee convener, Iain Smith, pointed out, we are part of a European energy market and it is important to see Scotland within that area of potential.

I argued in the committee that, in presenting the issue, we need to provide timelines for delivery that allow the public to understand what is possible within a given timescale. To take an obvious example, among marine renewables, offshore wind is the first technology that can be achieved within the next 10 years. Tidal energy and wave energy, which are being developed, will follow on from that. Therefore, it could be possible for us to have 180 offshore wind towers in the Moray Firth—and another group of a similar size off Inchcape—producing steady power for the grid in a shorter period of time than it would take to

build a new nuclear power station. Given that change in the scale of what can be produced, people need to understand those timelines when they discuss fuel security and the like. Therefore, the committee’s determination that Scotland’s renewable energy sources are the main routes to follow is the correct decision.

Many members have highlighted the need for incentives, but few—apart perhaps from Peter Peacock—have mentioned the issue of community benefit. I raised the matter in the committee. Paragraph 124 of the report calls on the minister to consider whether the oil funds of Shetland and Orkney could be replicated for renewable energy developments. Such benefit must be based on throughput. If a particular island or part of land hosts some form of energy production, the place should gain some benefit from doing so. We need to work out a better way of doing that than planning gain, which is what we have at present. Such a system has yet to be developed, so I look forward to hearing how the Government will address that issue in future.

Among the bodies that we need to work with, the Crown Estate is important because it can play a key role in the development of offshore schemes. The Crown Estate points out that it cannot make final decisions on offshore wind until the Government has carried out the strategic environmental assessments, which it is hoped will be available in early 2010; I hope that they arrive on time. The Crown Estate also says that it has been involved in detailed and confidential evaluations with the firms that will take forward tidal and wave projects in the Pentland Firth. To allow that infrastructure to be built and the machines that will capture wave and tidal power to be developed, it is essential that the Crown Estate comes to a decision quickly on which firms it will enter into an agreement with. We must know those before the end of the year. Any hints that progress could be slower will hold up the process of achieving our desired aim.

The subject of Ofgem’s approach to grid charges has been mentioned by many members. The committee believes that the Beaulieu to Denny line will play an important and central part in delivering much of the energy from the north of Scotland, so the decision on the line is awaited with great interest. On the issue of competition, it is important to reiterate the minister’s point that it is clear that European competition law should not give rise to any kind of infraction proceedings. Therefore, we must ask whether the Scottish Government will now press that issue and whether the British Government will respond as quickly as possible. Highlands and Islands Enterprise points out, in relation to the production of energy from renewables in the north, that

"Renewable electricity in Scotland accounts for around 2% of installed capacity in the UK but contributes 16% of transmission charges".

Indeed, HIE continues:

"GB's charging methodology does not sit well within the context of neighbouring Member State charging regimes. It is much more expensive to send power from Scotland to England than it is from France to England. This is counter to moves, of which the UK is supportive, of promoting interconnectedness and a single European energy market."

That is why we need to view the Scottish process in a European context and call Europe's competition law in our aid.

Members such as Wendy Alexander and Ross Finnie have explored carbon capture and storage, and the minister has responded. There is a general feeling that carbon capture and storage fits. The committee is in favour of it, and we look forward to the Government progressing what is a strong recommendation from across the Parliament.

Another area that we discussed was planning skills. We were appalled to find that too many councils were incapable of providing reasoned argument on how proposals for onshore wind farms, for example, would be dealt with when it came to the crunch. We believe that pre-planning processes must be instituted and that councils in Scotland must share skills. Means must be made available whereby the concerns that people have about public hearings rejecting proposals can be diminished as a result of a change in the process. The evidence that the committee heard shows that it is essential that action is taken on that.

Liam McArthur: We have heard about the Government's intention to consolidate the planning guidance. In principle, that is much to be welcomed, but does the member share the concern that if we simply strip away some of the detail from the existing guidance, we risk creating more uncertainty and more scope for dispute, both on renewables and more widely?

Rob Gibson: The Government will be able to give the member a direct answer to that. I believe that there is a desire for a streamlined process, as opposed to one that does not take into account communities' interests and the social justice issues that they embody.

A major part of the debate has been about energy efficiency, which must be to the fore. Our committee unanimously agreed to that. I am glad that the Government has responded, for example by carrying out a heat mapping exercise with Highland Council. Although most people in the Highlands live in towns, as I have pointed out on previous occasions, there is an element of countryside living as well. Such action shows the Government's intent to ensure that progress is made.

The fossil fuel levy is an issue on which we all agree. The £164 million that sits in Ofgem's account can be released by the Treasury only if it is offset against the block grant. We should campaign for that position to change. Just think what we could do with that money to invest in the energy efficiency that everyone wants. I believe that the committee's view on that is unanimous.

Jim Hume: Will the member give way?

Rob Gibson: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

I want to make some points in a more personal capacity. The opportunity that exists for the Highlands is encapsulated by the future availability of the Beaulieu to Denny line. Once it has been installed, the north of Scotland, which in the past has lost out because, as Peter Peacock said, it has been seen as an area that has been a recipient of funds, can be a huge contributor. The committee was extremely pleased to see that people in Orkney, Caithness and other parts of the Highlands were ready to take part in that process. Energy is being instilled in communities that might have been seen to be past their sell-by date but which are now seen to be at the cutting edge of Scottish society, in that they are able to take forward work that is of national and international importance.

The committee saw that if developments such as those in the Pentland Firth are to proceed, we must get the harbours and the other transport infrastructure in place in time. I believe that we can now argue in favour of getting such work done ahead of the curve, because that will determine what we put in the sea.

A wide-ranging debate has taken place. We have the clerks, the members of the committee, all the witnesses, the minister and the Government to thank for that. We all share a determination to ensure the delivery of the sustainable energy that we all support. Today's debate has played a major part in taking forward a united voice in that regard.

Business Motions

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-4950, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme and a question time deadline.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 7 October 2009

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Rural Affairs and the Environment
Committee Debate: 5th Report 2009:
Rural Housing

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 8 October 2009

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time
Finance and Sustainable Growth

2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate: Civil
Justice

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 28 October 2009

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 29 October 2009

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm

Themed Question Time
Education and Lifelong Learning;
Europe, External Affairs and Culture

2.55 pm

Scottish Government Business

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business

and (b) that the period for members to submit their names for selection for Question Times on 29 October 2009 ends at 12 noon on Wednesday 7 October 2009.—[Bruce Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-4951, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out an extension to the deadline for consideration of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be extended to 27 November 2009.—[Bruce Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Bruce Crawford to move motion S3M-4952, on the suspension of standing orders for First Minister's question time on 1 October, and motion S3M-4953, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purpose of question 1 at First Minister's Question Time on Thursday 1 October 2009, Rule 13.7.4 of Standing Orders be suspended.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Mutual Recognition of Criminal Financial Penalties in the European Union (Scotland) Order 2009 be approved.—[Bruce Crawford.]

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

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first is that motion S3M-4948, in the name of Iain Smith, on the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's report, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's 7th Report, 2009 (Session 3): *Determining and delivering on Scotland's energy future* (SP Paper 313).

The Presiding Officer: The second question is that motion S3M-4952, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the suspension of standing orders, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purpose of question 1 at First Minister's Question Time on Thursday 1 October 2009, Rule 13.7.4 of Standing Orders be suspended.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is that motion S3M-4953, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Mutual Recognition of Criminal Financial Penalties in the European Union (Scotland) Order 2009 be approved.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-4493, in the name of Rhona Brankin, on breast cancer awareness month.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes with concern the increasing incidence of breast cancer in the NHS Lothian area, with nearly 3,000 women diagnosed between 2002 and 2006; further notes that breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer for women in Scotland; recognises that women experiencing breast cancer deserve appropriate diagnosis, services, treatment and support; acknowledges the invaluable work of breast cancer organisations in Scotland in the funding of research, campaigning for service improvements and better treatments, promotion of breast awareness and provision of support services and literature, and welcomes the role of Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October in raising awareness of the impact of breast cancer in Scotland.

17:02

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): I thank the members who have taken the time to attend and to participate in this debate on a hugely important issue.

I begin by remembering Margaret Ewing, the former and much-loved MSP for Moray, who tragically lost her life to breast cancer in March 2006. I am sure that she will be in the thoughts of members across the chamber. Of course, each of us will have been touched by breast cancer in some way. I have had the illness, and everybody in this room has a wife, a mother, a granny, an auntie or a sister who has been touched by the illness over the years. I welcome the opportunity to debate the issue this month. Today's debate offers us a platform to discuss the most prevalent form of cancer that is diagnosed in Scottish women, and further raises the profile of a disease that kills 1,000 women in Scotland every year. I thank the members of all political parties who have signed the motion in my name.

I will begin on a challenging note by setting out the scale of the problem that continues to face Scottish women, our health service and the voluntary sector. It is a hugely disappointing statistic that one in six women cannot name any sign or symptom of breast cancer, and it is more disappointing still that nearly a quarter of women cannot name a breast lump as a sign of breast cancer and that only a third of women regularly check their breasts or are breast aware.

Further, two thirds of women are not aware of the increased risk that comes with age, and a quarter of women over the age of 65 never check their breasts, despite that increased risk.

Those statistics need not be disheartening; indeed, they can embolden us. It is a necessary evil in all walks of policy making that we must sometimes reduce complex issues, including those that often yield devastating and unquantifiable personal losses, to a numbers game. The grim statistics that I have outlined should not mask the encouragement that one can take from the numbers. It is encouraging that up to 40 per cent of breast cancer cases could be avoided each year by leading a healthier lifestyle, which includes maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly and reducing alcohol consumption. That effect equates to around 1,600 cases per year, which is 1,600 fewer cases on the books of the national health service and 1,600 fewer women—mothers, daughters and sisters—who have to sit their families down and explain that they have been diagnosed with cancer. Despite improvements in survival rates in recent years—there has been a 12 per cent drop in the mortality rate in 10 years—it is tragically inevitable that too many of those families will be left without a mother, a daughter or a sister.

Although, on the face of it, leading a healthier lifestyle may seem to be one of the simplest approaches to tackling breast cancer and ill health more widely, it presents perhaps one of the most significant challenges that policy makers and the charitable sector face: getting a deep culture shift through a coherent and concurrent approach that threads together many areas of public policy and responsibility.

That challenge is not insurmountable, and the work of Breakthrough Breast Cancer, Breast Cancer Care Scotland, the Scottish Breast Cancer Campaign and others has shown to great effect that working together to create a coherent strategy can make all the difference. Awareness of breast cancer now enjoys a prominent public profile, for which we have the tireless work of those organisations to thank. As I am sure that they would be the first to tell you, however, there is still much to be done.

As I said, statistics are a necessary evil in informing us how to target policies more effectively, but I will leave them behind for a moment. To contextualise the statistics and drive home the debate I will highlight the case of a woman in my constituency. That lady, having sadly lost her mother to breast cancer, had a heightened awareness of breast cancer and was in the habit of checking her breasts regularly for any lumps or signs of change. When she found a lesser-known symptom of breast cancer, she was unaware that it was one, put it to the back of her mind and forgot about it.

Later that year, when she was out shopping, she picked up a Breakthrough Breast Cancer

campaign leaflet. It listed the symptoms of breast cancer to look out for, some of which are commonly known, others less so. After finding listed the symptom—a wrinkling on her breast—that she had noticed in herself earlier that year, she resolved to get it checked, and she was diagnosed, as her mother had been, with breast cancer. Thanks to a relatively early diagnosis and treatment, that lady's long-term prognosis is now good. She admits:

"I was lucky because despite ignoring the first warning sign, when I did get diagnosed it was still early enough to remove the cancer before it could spread. Why I didn't get my first niggling doubt checked now seems unbelievable. I was someone who did all the checks. I am an intelligent person. Yet it was so small and I could not feel a lump. But now I know there are other signs and symptoms of breast cancer. It is not just about whether you can see or feel a lump. I strongly urge other women to regularly touch, look at and check their breasts and no matter how small or trivial their worry is to share it with their GP immediately."

That is good advice. All women—and indeed men—should be breast aware, and if they notice any change in their breasts, they should speak to their general practitioner.

I share with Breakthrough Breast Cancer the belief and aspiration that through research, campaigning and awareness, breast cancer can be beaten and the fear of the disease removed for good. That will be difficult, but it is not beyond our capacities. The Breakthrough Breast Cancer-funded research unit at the University of Edinburgh is the only unit in Scotland that is dedicated to researching breast cancer. It aims to improve breast cancer treatment and ensure that patients are treated in the most appropriate and effective way for their particular type of breast cancer.

The unit brings together some of the best Scotland-based scientists and doctors who are involved in treating breast cancer to develop a centre of excellence for world-class breast cancer research. It focuses on hormone-sensitive breast cancer, which is the most common form of the disease and affects tens of thousands of women—previously including me. Although there are some excellent treatments available for hormone-sensitive breast cancers, some forms become resistant to them. At Edinburgh, Breakthrough Breast Cancer scientists are looking for the causes of drug resistance and ways to overcome it.

Breakthrough Breast Cancer believes that the patient experience for breast cancer should be improved by NHS boards and hospitals, by listening and responding to the views of patients through models such as the Breakthrough service pledge. I am sure that all members are aware of instances in which people with breast cancer who have to attend clinics for difficult treatments have

had problems with transport or whatever. It is not an easy disease and the treatment is very difficult in many cases. I certainly support Breakthrough Breast Cancer's call on the Scottish Government, NHS Scotland, local authorities, health groups and individuals to take action to increase awareness among women of the signs, symptoms and risk factors associated with breast cancer and to increase the number of women who attend breast screening appointments.

There was an announcement yesterday by Gordon Brown about making moves to take on the challenge, and I would be grateful if the minister could indicate whether, given the successful evaluation of the breast cancer screening programme, she will give a commitment to do what Gordon Brown has committed to do and extend the range for automatic call up for breast cancer screening to 73 years at the top end and 47 years at the bottom. Following on from my own experience of breast cancer, can the minister also provide me with the up-to-date guidance that is provided to women on what to do about hormone replacement therapy and the links between HRT and breast cancer?

I conclude by extending my thanks to Breakthrough Breast Cancer, Breast Cancer Care Scotland and the Scottish Breast Cancer Campaign for their ceaseless efforts. I particularly thank Breakthrough Breast Cancer for asking me to host this evening's debate; I was delighted to agree to do so. Once again, I thank all those members who have taken the time to attend and to participate in the debate. *[Applause.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask visitors in the gallery not to applaud.

17:11

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Rhona Brankin on bringing the debate to the chamber and I echo her fond recollections of my colleague Margaret Ewing. I do not wish to embarrass Rhona, but her own experience, in which she was so very dignified some years ago, gives her authority and a commitment to discussing the cause that I cannot begin to match.

I note the improvement that Rhona Brankin mentioned, but I also note the continued incidence of breast cancer and the annual rate of deaths. Each individual case is a family tragedy, but high-profile cases, such as that of Gloria Hunniford's daughter Caron Keating, who died so young from breast cancer, bring that home to many people. Of course, her death also spurred on her mother to campaign so well and so vigorously on the search for a cure for the illness.

Not so long ago, a member of the Parliament's security staff told me that his wife had been for a breast scan and that a lump had been detected. I disclosed to him that I had not been for screening for many years because I am a coward and I like to bury my head in the sand. Members might not think that, but I did not want to go. However, the news from him made me realise that that is a stupid attitude to take, so I immediately took up an appointment and went for a screening. I am glad to say that his wife is doing well and that I was given the all-clear. I can tell members that I will not wait another seven years before I go back.

I note that 4,000 cases are diagnosed each year, most of which are in women, although about 20 are in men. Sadly, 1,100 people die each year from breast cancer. As I said, their deaths are an individual tragedies and tragedies for their families and friends.

Research is essential. I commend the Breast Cancer Campaign, which with £1.57 million funds 13 projects in Scotland.

Many women think that the incidence of breast cancer is higher than it is, but that is not to say that they should avoid screening. As we all know, early detection is essential, so it is good to go for screening. However, I would like those who operate the system to speed up the letter that is issued after screening—it can be 10 days to two weeks before it arrives. Women who are to be recalled are waiting for the letter to be delivered, and during that time are in a great state of anxiety. Often, it turns out simply that the image was not clear. I do not know whether it would be possible technically, but it would be good if the person could be told whether they have the all-clear on the spot, when they go for screening. At present, people can become anxious during the period between the screening and the arrival of the letter, and if there is a further period before they are recalled, their anxiety can grow.

Apart from that, I am glad that we are making progress. I urge women not to wait until somebody tells them to go for a screening but to take up the opportunity of regular screenings.

17:15

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Rhona Brankin on securing this important debate. Like her, I am fondly remembering Margaret Ewing on this occasion. First, I must apologise for having to leave after my speech, but I will be chairing a meeting of the cross-party group on cancer at 5.30 pm in TG.20. I invite members to come to the meeting after the debate, and to hear about the work of Macmillan Cancer Support. It is appropriate to mention that organisation, as the

motion refers to the importance of the voluntary sector, particularly in relation to breast cancer. I am sure that we will all want this evening to pay tribute to Breakthrough Breast Cancer, Breast Cancer Care Scotland, the Scottish Breast Cancer Campaign and other groups.

We should also acknowledge the great progress that has been made in the treatment of breast cancer in the past few years and under different Governments. As Rhona Brankin pointed out, a higher percentage of women are surviving the condition. We should certainly pay tribute to all national health service staff. As an Edinburgh MSP, I pay tribute to the breast unit staff at the Western general hospital.

That said, many women are still dying from breast cancer, so we clearly have a great deal to do and many improvements to make. Rhona Brankin referred to one of the mechanisms for improvement—the service pledge, which is being developed in Scotland by Breakthrough Breast Cancer. Central to the pledge is a partnership between clinicians and patients to identify areas for improvement. I am told that it is being developed through SCAN—the south east Scotland cancer network—and I look forward to hearing about the pledges that patients and clinicians develop with a view to improving the service.

A similar partnership between patients and clinicians was evidenced in the “Standards of Care for people with secondary breast cancer” document, which was launched at the Scottish Parliament in June. I was very pleased to host the launch meeting. I would be interested to find out whether the Scottish Government has looked at, or has any comment to make on, those standards. They are designed to raise awareness of the care, treatment and support that a person who is diagnosed with secondary breast cancer should receive, and they stress the importance of co-ordination of care, access to a clinical nurse specialist, access to information and good psychosocial support. I find it interesting that when patients are involved in development service improvements, they always emphasise that broad agenda. Another demand that was made at that meeting related to the fact that we do not have accurate data on the number of women who are living with secondary breast cancer.

An issue that I have recently been approached about at my surgeries is lymphoedema. I have written to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing on the matter on behalf of a constituent who wanted to access the liposuction service for the condition, which is available only in Dundee. It is not a national service, but clearly many women want to access it. I would welcome the minister's comments on what is certainly an area of concern.

I note that the Scottish Breast Cancer Campaign expressed in its submission general concern that services for lymphoedema are available in some parts of Scotland but not in others.

On research, Rhona Brankin mentioned the Breakthrough Breast Cancer research centre at the Western general hospital in Edinburgh. I was very pleased this summer to visit that outstanding facility, which opened about 18 months ago and is carrying out pioneering work, particularly on personalised care and on developing drugs to match patients' genetic profiles. We should welcome that and all the other contributions that Breakthrough Breast Cancer is making.

17:19

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I thank and commend Rhona Brankin for securing the debate. It has, after all, been six years since Parliament last debated the issue. I also join the tributes to Margaret Ewing, who is very fondly remembered not only here, but in Moray.

This year, with a number of colleagues I took part in the Edinburgh moonwalk, helping to raise funds for, and awareness of, breast cancer. The enthusiasm and dedication of the 10,000 walkers are testament to the commitment of Scottish women to combating breast cancer. I also commend the Maggie's centres. Rhona Brankin talked about how difficult it is to sit down with the family—sometimes it is easier to talk to strangers than to the family.

Breast cancer is the most prevalent cancer in women. In 2006, more than 4,000 women were diagnosed, which accounted for almost 30 per cent of all cancers affecting women in that year.

When we talk about referral to treatment, we should ensure that all women who request reconstructive surgery are given it. Referral to treatment must include all treatment, when requested and when appropriate.

Under a female Prime Minister, the United Kingdom was one of the first countries in the world to establish a national breast screening programme, with the first screening centres being operational in England and Scotland in 1988. Since national coverage was attained in 1991, there have been more than 2.1 million screening episodes and in excess of 15,000 breast cancers have been diagnosed. The national screening programme has been an invaluable tool in reducing the number of deaths from breast cancer. I am pleased that the Highland NHS Board mobile unit was in Inveraray car park on Friday, which shows that the programme goes to every town and village in Scotland.

As Rhona Brankin said, 39 per cent of the 4,079 women who were diagnosed with breast cancer in 2006 could have prevented the diagnosis if they had maintained healthy weight, increased their physical activity and limited their alcohol intake. Unfortunately, only between 5 and 9 per cent of women are aware of those preventive measures. As with breast screening, women must be encouraged to go to their general practitioner as a preventive measure. It is disconcerting that, in deprived areas, the presentation rates for breast screening are much lower than the average and women present later and with more advanced conditions, which helps to explain why survival rates are higher in more affluent areas. The Government must address that.

I turn to treatment. The latest figures on waiting times after urgent referral to treatment in NHS Highland range from a minimum of 22 days—they can be long days, as Christine Grahame said—to a maximum of 92 days. The maximum wait in Lothian NHS Board is 101 days. In NHS Highland, there has been a 70 per cent increase in treatment for breast cancer in the past six years, so there is no doubt that staff are working hard to meet the targets. I welcome the review of staffing groups in the north of Scotland, which is addressing the resource and staffing needs for breast cancer patients. At present, only four health boards in Scotland exceed the maximum wait of 62 days. However, all health boards currently exceed the new target of 31 days that the Government has set for 2011. That highlights that many more resources are needed urgently.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member should wind up.

Mary Scanlon: Scotland does not fare well on survival rates for breast cancer. We have lower rates than England, Wales, Northern Ireland and almost every other country that is mentioned in "Better Cancer Care, An Action Plan", apart from Slovenia.

17:24

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I welcome the opportunity to speak, and I thank Rhona Brankin for securing the debate. Given her experience of breast cancer, there is no more inspirational speaker on the issue in the Parliament.

Each year, about 4,000 women in Scotland are diagnosed with breast cancer. Throughout the UK, a diagnosis is made about every 11 minutes. Behind those figures and the other figures that we will hear about, we know that there are real women and families. There probably is not a family in the country that has not been affected by breast cancer. There certainly is not a workplace

that has not been affected—I echo Rhona Brankin's comments about her former colleague, Margaret Ewing.

Screening, increased awareness and improved treatments are helping more people than ever to beat the disease. Advances in medical research continue to give hope that developments in understanding, prevention and cures will see that every person who is diagnosed makes a full recovery. However, as we have heard, we are not there yet. More than 1,000 women die from breast cancer every year in Scotland.

I pay tribute to the people who work in the health service and deal with breast cancer all the time. However, I echo Mary Scanlon's comments on the waiting times, which remain too long for women and their families to live with the worry of potential breast cancer.

I echo the comments of other members about the importance of the voluntary sector. Breast cancer organisations and charities in Scotland and throughout the UK do much to tackle the disease, raising the necessary funds for research, raising awareness and working with women who are affected by breast cancer and with their families. We owe them a great deal.

I also thank the many members who took part in the Scottish Breast Cancer Campaign's recent "wear it pink" photo call, which I sponsored. It was good to see so many colleagues there, supporting the campaign and looking particularly fetching in pink—I am not sure how many of them picked up the feather boa or how many played it safe with some of the other pink articles. It is important that we do all that we can to raise the profile of the illness.

We must also recognise our health care professionals, who provide treatment and support for people who are affected with breast cancer, and those who work in research labs. Over the summer recess, I too visited the Breakthrough Breast Cancer research unit, which is based at the Edinburgh breast unit at the Western general hospital in my constituency. It is a busy place. Researchers at the unit are currently working on the main challenges in breast cancer therapy and the causes of drug resistance. Its location in Edinburgh is a reflection of Scotland's excellent reputation in the field of scientific research, and it is a unique unit in Scotland, bringing together research scientists and clinicians. Although I can honestly say that, without a degree in chemistry, physics or the biological sciences, I was perplexed at times by some of the science involved, I was at all times absolutely inspired by the people who work in the unit.

I am also well aware of the excellent work that is done locally in my constituency, and I pay tribute

to all the staff in the breast unit at the Western general hospital as well as the staff and volunteers at the Maggie's centre, which has been mentioned. Cancer is not just a physical illness, and the support that has been given by the Maggie's centre over the years has been crucial to many women and their families.

Despite better mortality figures, the incidence of breast cancer continues to increase year on year. Increases in the number of individuals who are diagnosed are always concerning, but those increases must be set against a background of better diagnostic techniques and understanding. Early screening programmes for women who have a history of breast cancer in their family afford the opportunity to catch the disease at the earliest possible moment. Catching the disease early is critical, in which context I echo the comments that have been made about our more deprived communities. It is important that the Government pursues the issue of there being a lower number of presentations and at a later stage in those communities, meaning that the women's mortality rate is higher.

It is particularly worrying that messages about the long-term impacts of lifestyle choices—the risks related to smoking, being overweight, not getting enough exercise and drinking too much—seem still not to be getting through. The figures that we have heard, relating to the number of women who do not know the signs of breast cancer, continue to be worrying. That is an issue that we require the Scottish Government to take on.

17:28

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I, too, thank Rhona Brankin for bringing the issue to the Parliament for debate.

I state an interest as the patron of the Scottish Breast Cancer Campaign for about eight years—it just seems like 80. Some of its members are in the public gallery tonight. I was attracted to the SBCC because it is not just a shake-your-can voluntary organisation; it tries to shake the establishment and shake up the policies that affect breast cancer services. Partly because of its questionnaire 2000, which was a record that the SBCC compiled of the treatment and experience of every woman in Scotland who had been diagnosed with breast cancer over the previous two years, we were able to contribute to the improvement of services. However, as Christine Grahame pointed out, the letter still takes far too long to get to the women concerned—the letter that every woman dreads. Whether it takes a weekend or two weeks, it takes a horrendous time to arrive. Surely that could be bettered with today's instant communications.

Services have improved in other areas. Treatments have certainly improved—the better survival rates prove that—and the SBCC's focus has therefore moved to prevention. I take a bit of an issue with people who say, "If you just take your fruit and vegetables, exercise and lose weight"—that would be difficult for some of us—"you'll go a long way towards preventing breast cancer." People might go a bit of the way to doing that, as they will help their general health and be in a better position to resist breast cancer if they develop it, but I am interested in the possible connection between breast cancer and the chemical imbalances in our lifestyles nowadays. The SBCC is particularly interested in endocrine-disrupting chemicals that are found in plastics, cosmetics, body care products and cleaning products. We do not yet know whether there is a direct connection between environmental factors and the development of different cancers. We strongly suspect that there is such a connection, but we need much more research on that.

Rhona Brankin: Does the member agree that we also need to look at the link between breast cancer and commonly used drugs in hormone replacement therapy?

Margo MacDonald: I could not agree more, having had my own wee lump after trying HRT. However, that is another story. Some ladies in the chamber will probably know aspects of the problem from their experience.

Prevention is the big thing that we should be thinking about, and we could also think about lymphoedema services. There is now a lymphoedema nurse and, unfortunately, I have to use the service in Lothian, but I cannot speak too highly of it. There could be many more pilot schemes, and much more research could be done to discover the benefits of manual drainage. I am talking about the sort of thing that can be done by a helping carer or partner. Self-management would be involved, and people who have had cancer know that being on top of it and helping to manage it for themselves helps their general health and wellbeing. I urge the Government to consider more research on chemical imbalances and the environmental factors that may affect breast cancer, and to extend further the lymphoedema nurse service.

I again thank Rhona Brankin for lodging the motion.

17:32

Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP): I, too, commend Rhona Brankin for and congratulate her on securing the debate.

It appears to me that campaigns to raise awareness of breast cancer or to improve services

for women are often led and championed by women. That is how things should be, of course, although the support of our male counterparts, whether they are doctors, researchers, campaigners or loved ones, is no less valuable. We must not forget that, although the number is comparatively small, men suffer from breast cancer too, as Christine Grahame intimated.

I welcome the high visibility and profile of the women's health campaign that we are discussing, but it leads me to reflect that there is perhaps more need for more men's health campaigns to be led by men in a way that has resonance for them. Many people enjoy the fun in the breast cancer wear it pink campaign, but different approaches may be needed for prostate or testicular cancer. I should not generalise too much about men and women: I mistakenly read "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus" and found that, with my tendency to offer solutions at the expense of really listening to the problem, I am more akin to a man.

A constituent asked me to participate in this debate. She wrote to me to describe the tragic loss of her mother, who was only 56 when she died as a result of secondary cancer, after developing breast cancer for the second time. In her letter, she said that she has a teenage daughter and two young nieces, and that she wants them to have a future

"without the curse of breast cancer".

My constituent wants to know from the Government what it is doing to increase awareness of breast cancer, especially given the findings of the recent survey by Breakthrough Breast Cancer indicating that awareness is alarmingly low. We have already heard about some of the survey's alarming findings—one in six women are unable to name one sign or symptom of breast cancer. My constituent would also like to know what plan the Government has to ensure that more women participate in the breast screening programme. Around 30 per cent of women in Scotland do not attend screening, which is vital if they are to get the early diagnosis that will improve treatment outcomes. My constituent spoke of the importance of screening for her mother. I would be interested to know how the Government intends to reach harder-to-reach groups.

I thank Breakthrough Breast Cancer and the Scottish Breast Cancer Campaign for their briefings. I am sure that the authors of both documents will understand when I say that my copies are now looking a wee bit worse for wear, as my two-year-old son was also keenly reading them last night. Thankfully, he did not scribble over them—he usually saves that for correspondence from a cabinet secretary. Both briefings were not only informative but focused on

how we can best prevent and, most important, beat breast cancer. Ultimately, the message was one of hope and aspiration.

17:36

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I join other members in thanking Rhona Brankin for securing this important debate, in the 21st year of the NHS breast screening service. I remember Professor Forrest presenting the findings of research when screening was introduced. It is good that early doubts about it have been put to rest and that screening is now used by so many.

As other members have said, there are groups who do not take up the opportunity of screening. There needs to be retargeting, refocusing and outreach by the health service, so that screening reaches more deprived groups—to which Mary Scanlon and Margaret Smith referred—and black and minority ethnic groups, among which uptake is low at present. There is also some indication that uptake is dropping, which is slightly worrying. There needs to be a degree of renewal.

Members have mentioned research, which is important. Recently the *British Medical Journal* suggested that some early interventions after screening may not be appropriate. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, I was part of a research group, led by Dr Ian McIntosh, that carried out research into the psychological impact of screening. One concern was the time it took to get test results back. Margo MacDonald and Rhona Brankin have raised that issue—almost 20 years on, the concern is still the same. Anything that we can do to speed up the process would be welcome. That should surely be possible with the technology that we now have.

Misdiagnosis is a problem. One difficulty is that not all general practitioners emphasise the fact that an appointment is urgent, which would allow patients to benefit from rapid referral to the assessment that should take place. That can lead to delays. Recently a constituent wrote to my colleague Anne McGuire and me about her experience of misdiagnosis. During self-examination at the age of 40, she found a lump. The GP told her that it was a milk gland and nothing to worry about. Five months later, the lump was still there. She asked for a second opinion and was referred to Stirling royal infirmary, where she insisted on being given a mammogram. The single-view mammogram that she received was reported as negative, but she was offered a six-month review, at which the consultant undertook fine needle aspiration. She was informed that she had more than one malignant tumour and had a mastectomy, chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

The time from the original presentation to completion was one year. My constituent followed up the matter and took legal action. It was found that there had been negligence in her case—something that we would not wish.

Scottish intercollegiate guidelines network guideline 29 is clear: a woman with a lump should be assessed and, in almost every case, offered the triple assessment of clinical examination, imaging from mammography—preferably more than one view—and ultrasound or ultrasound and histology, where the lumps are taken by fine needle aspiration or core biopsy. If that does not happen, the result can be legal action. Between 2002 and 2008, legal action was taken in 30 cases. It is important to follow through in this regard; survival rates have improved, but we are still behind.

Further to my parliamentary questions of 11 December last year, I ask the minister for a response on the national advisory group's plans for digital mammography and the sentinel node biopsy programme. Like other members, I look for answers to the issues of retargeting outreach to BME groups, lymphoedema, reconstructive surgery and secondary cancer. All indicate that we still have some way to go, albeit that the situation is undoubtedly improving.

17:41

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): I welcome the debate and thank Rhona Brankin for bringing it to the chamber. I thank the member and others for their kind comments about Margaret Ewing. We remember her at this time.

Breast cancer awareness month gives us a real opportunity to highlight the actions that the Scottish Government and others are taking to raise awareness of breast cancer and improve cancer care across Scotland. As many members said, breast cancer is the most common cancer among women. Its incidence continues to rise—it is up 9 per cent over the last decade. In part, this is due to increased detection through the breast screening programme, but it may also be because of a higher prevalence of known risk factors and Scotland's ageing population. I will come on to say something on the known risk factors. On a positive note, breast cancer survival rates are improving, with five-year survival now standing at more than 84 per cent. That said, it remains important that we empower women with the knowledge to mitigate the risks of breast cancer while continuing to support innovation in treatment.

I turn to Mary Scanlon's comments on survival rates. We have to be cautious when comparing the figures for Scotland with those of other

countries. As she will appreciate, the statistics that we gather, including on cancer survival rates, are accurate and good. I cast no aspersions on the statistics gathering of other countries, but making comparisons between countries as she did can be akin to comparing apples and pears. That is not to say that those statistics are not of relevance, but they should come with a bit of a health warning.

Mary Scanlon also raised the issue of waiting times. Obviously, much progress has been made around the 62-day target—performance was over 98 per cent in the last four reported quarters—but, as she rightly said, more work has to be done on the 31-day target. That said, performance in the last quarter was 87.6 per cent. More has to be done, but it is important to recognise that we are going in the right direction.

As Rhona Brankin said, men, too, need to be aware of the signs to look out for. There are around 20 new cases of male breast cancer in Scotland each year. The figure for men is significantly lower than for women, but it is equally important to ensure that men recognise the symptoms and that they are not overlooked in discussions about this disease.

Mary Scanlon: I take the point that the minister made on waiting times. We are talking about the waiting time from referral to treatment. Will she confirm that treatment will include reconstructive surgery when the patient requests that and the clinician deems it to be appropriate?

Shona Robison: As Richard Simpson said, the SIGN guidelines for breast cancer recommend the immediate offer of breast reconstruction to all appropriate patients, but we are aware of the variability in the situation. That is being addressed as part of the capacity-building work in implementing the new cancer access targets—indeed, it is very much an element of that work. I am happy to keep Mary Scanlon briefed on the matter as we take it forward.

Breast cancer awareness month is an opportunity for people to talk about breast cancer, to share their experiences and concerns, to find out about services on offer, to learn what steps to take to protect against the disease and, importantly, to learn how to recognise symptoms. I am pleased to state the Government's support for the initiative, and I encourage everyone here today to ensure that we make the most of the awareness month.

It is now nearly a year since the launch of "Better Cancer Care", our cancer action plan. In that year we have already made significant progress against many of the tough commitments that we set, but there is still more to do.

Prevention is an important issue. We have noted that breast cancer incidence is increasing, but a

breast cancer diagnosis is, of course, not always inevitable; there is mounting evidence to suggest that women can help protect themselves in all sorts of ways. "Better Cancer Care" outlines lifestyle choices that can help reduce people's risk of cancer. It is not only about raising awareness of the known risk factors; it is now about targeting the risk factors for many cancers—including breast cancer—such as alcohol, diet, physical activity and smoking. Having said that, I recognise Margo MacDonald's point that there are complexities around causal links, whether it be hormonal links or the environmental issues that she mentioned.

I will talk about research shortly, but I want to mention the increasing awareness of the links between breast cancer and alcohol. The risk of breast cancer increases as a result of drinking as little as one to two units of alcohol per day. More than one in 10 breast cancer deaths are estimated to be attributable to alcohol consumption, which is a very high figure. That is one reason why we have launched a three-year alcohol health behaviour change campaign, which this year is focusing on women and is trying to get the message across about the links to breast cancer.

We are also aware that more needs to be done on raising awareness of cancer symptoms and preventive measures. The Scottish cancer task force, established to oversee the commitments made in "Better Cancer Care", has consulted the three regional cancer networks in Scotland and the Scottish cancer coalition, which includes representatives from Breakthrough Breast Cancer—I pay tribute to the important work that it carries out—Breast Cancer Care and the Scottish Breast Cancer Campaign, to see how we can work in partnership with the voluntary sector to improve awareness raising of preventive measures in the future. I hope that that, in part, answers Angela Constance's question on the issue.

Although prevention is the first step to reducing the incidence of breast cancer, screening for early signs of the disease is equally important. As part of our breast screening programme, we are now screening more women and detecting more cancers earlier than ever before, which will save even more lives.

In response to Rhona Brankin's question about automatic call-up, we obviously take our advice from the United Kingdom screening advisory group, which considers the best evidence, but we will ask the Scottish national advisory group to consider the announcements made down south and what they mean for Scotland. The Scottish national advisory group is also undertaking a scoping exercise about lymphoedema services in Scotland, and I am happy to keep members informed about that.

Supported by £11 million of additional funding, two-view mammography is being rolled out nationally, and NHS boards are preparing to treat the additional breast cancer patients that will be diagnosed as a result of the programme. That partly answers Richard Simpson's point about accurate diagnosis.

I am sure that everyone in the chamber agrees that women with breast cancer deserve the highest standard of care. That is why we have committed to ensure that patients have access to the most up-to-date treatments and technology, no matter where they live in Scotland.

We have invested £4.1 million to support vital cancer research projects, some of which have a specific focus on breast cancer. There are currently 15 multicentre clinical trials on breast cancer, including the post-operative radiotherapy in minimum-risk elderly trial—PRIME II—which aims to assess clinically the role of post-operative breast radiotherapy. In Scotland, the PRIME II study is located in Edinburgh and supported by £145,000 of funding from the chief scientist office.

I will speak now about living with cancer. The increase in the five-year survival rate is excellent news, but it means that more and more women are living with, and beyond, a breast cancer diagnosis, which presents new challenges for patients, carers and families. We are working with health care providers in both the statutory and voluntary sectors to find ways of empowering and supporting patients, giving them the confidence and tools to maintain the level of independence that they desire.

In August, we hosted the big cancer conversation, an event for patients to tell us about issues that they are facing or have faced as a result of a cancer diagnosis. The outcomes from the event are being used to develop the work plan of the living with cancer group, which aims to address patients' physical, emotional, practical and financial needs post treatment.

At the launch of "Better Cancer Care", we announced the Scottish Government's investment of £500,000 to extend Macmillan Cancer Support's work, including its network of benefits advice services and its trialling an employability programme to support people with cancer in returning to work when appropriate.

Better treatment options, early detection and a successful breast cancer screening programme are reflected in Scotland's improving breast cancer survival rates. I am pleased to note that we are already exceeding our target to reduce overall cancer mortality by 20 per cent by 2010, and we are confident that the steps that we are taking will help us to aim even higher.

Despite the early successes, we are by no means complacent. We are working to raise awareness of the small changes that can be made in everyday life to reduce the risk of developing breast cancer. We very much recognise that there is work to do to target some harder-to-reach communities—and we are working on that.

Of course, we would not be taking any of that action had it not been for the effort and contributions from patients, carers, voluntary groups, professional organisations and—importantly—NHS staff. I am very grateful for all their contributions, both in breast cancer awareness month and during the rest of the year.

Meeting closed at 17:52.

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