



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 12 May 2010

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

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[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Reverend Michael Philip of Bainsford parish church in Falkirk.

Rev Michael R Philip (Bainsford Parish Church, Falkirk): Thank you for the invitation. I commented to the Presiding Officer just before we came in that it is just as well that Joanne Clinton asked me to send in a text of what I was going to say. Otherwise, I might have talked about loving your enemies, after what is happening down in the other Houses of Parliament.

I have in my hand a somewhat large screwdriver that I have never used. It was made some 50 years ago in the Carron Company when steam was still the king power. My father, who worked there, asked me to keep it in my toolbox as a reminder—but as a reminder of what? Well, he called the screwdriver his “Willie McGill” because that is the name of the person who made it.

As my father put it, Willie was not the most academic person. He would never have got a university degree. He might have scraped a couple of highers, but that is all. However, the Carron Company would have been much poorer without him. Why? Willie was a craftsman. You could describe to him a tool that you required. He would go over it with you and, once you were happy that he knew what he was doing, he would say, “Give me a couple of hours,” or however long he thought it would take, and he would go off to the workshop and produce it. He produced this screwdriver for my father. With no computer-aided design, Willie just changed the mental image that he had been given into something that was required in the foundry. He was not the brightest star in the sky by any stretch of the imagination, but he could certainly shine in some ways.

This raised questions in my mind. How do we value a person? Some people are obviously more gifted than others, be it in the fields of academic knowledge, sport or the like. Jesus told a story about that. We find it in the parable of the talents. I will give a brief précis of it and update it.

A manager had three folk of different abilities working under him. He knew that he was going off on a business trip, so he gave the three guys something to look after. One got £5,000, one got

£2,000 and the third got £1,000, because that was what the manager thought they were able to look after. On the manager’s return, the first guy reported that he had used his £5,000, invested it and made another £5,000. The £2,000 man said that he had used his £2,000 and got another £2,000. The third guy, realising that he had been given only £1,000, put it in a bag, dug a hole and buried it in the ground. He did not even trust the banks. He knew where it was and he knew that, when the manager came back, he could give it all back to him.

On the manager’s return, the first two got equal rewards for what they had done. They had started off with different amounts but they used them equally well and gained more. The third guy, who had been given the £1,000, lost the lot. It was taken from him and given to the guy who had got £10,000. Why? Because the first two used what they had to the best of their ability and they worked well with it. The third one just moaned about how unfair life was and did nothing.

That raises questions in my mind. How do we evaluate people? Do we look at them and say, “They’re not academic— they won’t get a university degree,” or, “They’re not worth while”? What do we see in people? Do we see potential in them or not? The final question that I put to us all is this: how are we using the talents that we have been given?

Thank you.

European Commission (Work Programme)

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-6228, in the name of Irene Oldfather, on the new European Commission's legislative work programme.

14:05

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): It is an immense privilege to open this debate on behalf of the European and External Relations Committee on the European Commission's work programme. I have to confess that, last week, when reflecting on how I would explain to the chamber why the committee felt it important to use its slot to discuss this important piece of work, I intended to say that we stood poised on the threshold of considerable change in Europe. I had no idea just how prophetic those words were to be.

I want to take a moment to consider the changes in Europe that form the backdrop to this debate. First, the European Commission has introduced a new-style work programme that, for the first time, spans the entire European Commission and European Parliament term to 2014. In moving away from an annual work programme, the Commission provides us with its thoughts on the cornerstone of its future agenda. It is therefore important that all members of the Scottish Parliament, not just the members of the European and External Relations Committee, are aware of the Commission's work programme and have an opportunity to frame their consideration of it.

Secondly, that activity will take place under a new European architecture that has been brought about by the introduction of the Treaty of Lisbon, which extends to the European Parliament the ordinary legislative procedure, or co-decision. It will be incumbent on members in the subject committees and across the chamber to work very closely with MEPs in all areas in which we wish to influence developments. To my mind, that means not only strengthening relations with our own Scottish MEPs but looking very closely at further developing relations with corresponding EP committee conveners and rapporteurs.

Thirdly, on a related point, the Lisbon treaty does three things that are important to our work in this chamber. By formally recognising for the first time the principle of territorial cohesion, introducing the principle of consultation with regional Parliaments and enhancing the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, it invites greater engagement from the regions of Europe. The test

for these changes is whether they will enable us in the Scottish Parliament to do our job better, and I believe that they have the potential to do so.

In giving us a four-year rather than an annual view of the Commission's legislative and non-legislative priorities, the work programme offers the opportunity for early horizon scanning of issues of importance and relevance to Scotland. In some cases, of course, preparatory work has already been carried out by the time a policy reaches the work programme. That is why it is important for the Parliament not only to have regular contact with EP and Commission officials but to maintain a close watch on the work of European networks of interest to us, many of which are at the forefront of this vital early-warning system.

I hope that the committee can further develop its "Brussels Bulletin" to progress some of that vital early intelligence. It was indeed a European and External Relations Committee report that led to the establishment of a Brussels officer, who provides the bulletin to the Parliament. I believe that Bruce Crawford was a member of the committee at the time and I am glad to say that, despite considerable dissent, we won the argument. It was certainly a big step for the Parliament; in the first few years, nobody wanted to do the job. Nevertheless, I think that we have won the argument and I know that members across the chamber will want to acknowledge Ian Duncan's work and the work of the Scottish Parliament information centre and the committee clerks in keeping the Parliament abreast of European issues.

In a previous report, the committee flagged up the importance of what I think of as upstream/downstream TIE, which is about influencing the process up stream and down stream and tracking the transposition, implementation and enforcement of European legislation. All those roles are legitimate for the Parliament but, as I have indicated, greater emphasis arguably needs to be placed on the upstream element of the work.

I hope that many members will discuss the detailed content of the Commission's work programme. The motion only scratches the surface. The committee highlighted issues that we thought were particularly relevant to Scotland. The committee has hit the ground running on Europe 2020, and our report on it is hot off the press. We took the opportunity to consult Scottish stakeholders, and our report has been sent to relevant decision makers in Scotland, the United Kingdom and the European Union. The European Council will discuss Europe 2020 in June. I hope that our work on it demonstrates that we are

attempting to contribute early to the discussion in the months to come.

With Europe 2020, the financial crisis and the budget review have been among the big challenges that the EU and Scotland have faced, and the committee has undertaken a considerable amount of work on both. It has taken evidence on the budget review over almost two years, and we will produce a report on it before the end of the session. I do not want to pre-empt the committee's conclusions but, from a personal perspective, it is evident from the work programme that activities and priorities have changed, not least because of global events. We must ensure that the budgets genuinely reflect policy priorities and not last-minute, late-night deals, as has happened too often in the past.

I am running short of time, so I will not speak about combating poverty or reform of the common fisheries policy and the common agricultural policy. Those matters are relevant, and I hope that colleagues will pick them up.

It is clear from the work programme that Europe is not about foreign affairs; it is about the things that matter in the lives of Europe's and Scotland's citizens. I trust that this debate will illustrate that parliamentary committees and MSPs do not wish to be mere observers in the new architecture. We want to be full participants, and we have the motivation and the will to move forward rather than simply to anchor in the past. Whether members like it or not, Europe is not a wish, a dream or perhaps even a nightmare, which it may be for Murdo Fraser; rather, it is a reality. We must move forward to create from that reality opportunities for our citizens.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the European Commission Work Programme, published by the European Commission on 31 March 2010; notes that it is likely to inform European Union policy for the next five years, and supports in particular the proposals for delivering a new economic strategy (Europe 2020) and allied platform to combat poverty, the commitment to further develop renewable energy and the energy grid, the recognition of the need to reform both the Common Fisheries Policy and the Common Agricultural Policy and the desire to restructure the European Union's budget.

14:13

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government also welcomes the Commission's work programme and supports the priorities that are contained in it. I would like to pick out a few key initiatives from the programme and talk about some areas in which Scotland is already forging ahead, in particular in leading the EU in areas such as renewable

energy, climate change and creating a sustainable fisheries industry.

The Scottish Government recognises that, although we have returned to growth in Scotland following a recession that has been shorter than that in the rest of the UK, maintaining that recovery is a priority. Our economic strategy is very much aligned with the EU 2020 strategy proposals, and we see Europe as a partner in building on our recovery. In partnership with Europe, Scotland is also well placed to perform against the targets on climate change, energy, labour market participation and education.

This year is the European year for combating poverty and social exclusion. The Scottish Government recognises that we need to break the cycles of poverty and deprivation that have become deeply embedded in society. We will set challenging targets in line with "Achieving our Potential: A Framework to tackle poverty and income inequality in Scotland", which sets out priorities for action. That is one of three interlinked policy frameworks that we have developed with our partners in local government, the national health service and the third sector to take priorities forward in a co-ordinated and unified way. In the longer term, that joined-up approach will deliver measures to tackle poverty and low income through providing children and young people with a better start in life; supporting the broader effort to deal with health inequalities in our society; promoting equality and tackling discrimination; delivering good-quality affordable housing; and regenerating disadvantaged communities.

I welcome in particular the commitment in the work programme to take forward work to develop renewable energy and the electricity grid. Scotland has won plaudits across Europe and the rest of the world for our work on climate change. We will continue to push for ambitious action at an international and European level. The Scottish Government wants Scotland to be at the heart of Europe's low-carbon energy revolution. We are working to forge European partnerships to do that through the work of the Scottish European Green Energy Centre to harness our massive potential in renewables and carbon capture and storage.

Scotland's fishing industry is a key priority for the Government. With 69 per cent of the share of UK quotas, Scotland should have a place at the top table in Brussels. Unfortunately, we have continually been refused. During the busy Westminster election campaign, we had the frankly incredible scenario in which my colleague Richard Lochhead was denied a seat at an important informal council on the future of EU fisheries policy. That meeting was critical to Scotland and Richard Lochhead could have made points on behalf of the whole of the UK fishing

industry far more convincingly than the unelected Lord Davies of Oldham, who had no specific responsibilities for fisheries issues, but apparently has responsibility for bees and plant health. That situation need not have arisen.

At the end of March, I led the UK delegation at an informal culture council meeting in Barcelona and, yesterday, Michael Russell spoke for the UK at the education council, using Gaelic for the first time at council. Such instances demonstrate the legitimacy and added value of Scotland playing a greater role than simply attending in silence. We intend to discuss an improved role for the Scottish Government in Europe with the new UK Government.

We continue to press for fundamental reform of Europe's fisheries regime. We intend to host a major ministerial workshop later this year marking the beginning of a new way to manage our fisheries that will consign the centralised bureaucratic CFP to the dustbin of history.

Irene Oldfather: Does the minister agree that Scottish National Party ministers' attendance at EU council meetings is not that different from Labour ministers' attendance and that more than 50 per cent of meetings are unattended? We have a long way to go on our attendance before we ask to be in certain chairs.

Fiona Hyslop: Despite the fact that we are a minority Government and are under increased pressure to vote in the chamber, the attendance of this Administration's ministers is better than that of the previous Administration. However, it is what we do when we are there that is important, rather than attending and just sitting in silence. I sincerely hope that we can pursue the agenda of having more participation as I did in Barcelona and as Mike Russell did only yesterday.

The single farm payment is the biggest element of the common agricultural policy and it is clear that the current historical basis of payments, which relates to average production in a reference period almost a decade ago, cannot be justified today. Scotland currently has the lowest single farm payment per hectare in the UK and one of the lowest in Europe. We also have the lowest rural development funding per hectare in Europe. If, however, a flatter rate system, paying the same rate per hectare of utilised agricultural land across all member states regardless of farming activity and intensity were introduced, Scotland would benefit. The outcome of the forthcoming CAP and CFP discussions is therefore crucial for Scotland, and we are well placed to identify a negotiating position that meets the needs of our diverse agricultural sector.

The Scottish Government continues to identify in our economic recovery plan key areas in which

we need to move forward. Irene Oldfather was correct to identify that our focus has to be on policy priorities, which we will support, but we need fundamental reform of the European budget.

We are already liaising with the UK Government, with which I have had discussions, and the EU institutions on how Scotland can apply influence. We need more resources to make the low-carbon economy a reality as well as fair support for farming in our most fragile areas. I do not deny that that tension will be one of the issues that the Parliament, the Government and our members of the European Parliament will need to discuss further.

Freedom, security and justice are a key area for us because of our distinct legal system. Our position is unique because we are also part of a larger member state. Family law and cross-border co-operation on crime fall within devolved competence, so securing recognition of Scottish interests is critical. However, I know of good work being done to ensure that our Scottish legal system is protected.

The Commission's work programme refers to the action plan for taking forward the Stockholm programme on FSJ to the end of 2014. We have a major interest in areas such as cross-border crime. We are engaging with the action plan.

I thank the committee for bringing forward the debate today. The EU has a huge impact on policy making in Scotland, as reflected in the debate. We have strengths. We want to work positively and constructively with the European Commission and partners to maximise the benefits of the European Union. I look forward to hearing the contributions from colleagues throughout the chamber.

The Presiding Officer: We are now down to four minutes for speeches, but I have a little flexibility so, if members want to take interventions, I will add on time.

14:20

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): The importance of the European Union is about much more than removing trade barriers and having freedom of movement. Being part of a larger economic and social entity is a necessity now more than ever.

We have an interesting backdrop to the debate after yesterday's formation of the Liberal Democrat-Tory coalition Government, given that those parties' views on Europe are about as opposing as they can be. I look forward to hearing Murdo Fraser and Jim Hume articulating their policy this afternoon.

The challenges that we face, such as our ageing population, cross-border criminality, organised

crime, the threat from terrorism and advances in media and technology, require Governments to work together. The structures and framework agreements are now set to move us towards a cohesive decision-making process to address the issues that I have mentioned, but the political will to take that forward is the key ingredient in making progress.

The European and External Relations Committee should be highly commended for bringing forward the debate and asking the Parliament for the time to examine the issues raised in detail this afternoon.

As the minister has said, Europe has a heavy impact on the Scottish Parliament's devolved powers. In some ways, I would like to see us go further in developing structures in the Parliament to ensure that we scrutinise and influence all the decisions that are taken in the European Union. I believe that we have a critical role to play in that. The Parliament's responsibility is to ensure that Europe does not appear remote to ordinary citizens. For that reason alone, we have to think further about how we develop those structures.

Although I recognise that things in Europe are often seen as slow moving, the committee identified a concern about the lack of time for consultation. Given the status of the Lisbon treaty, there must be time for consultation. I concur with the committee's call for a much greater role for the regions in implementing the strategy, greater involvement of civil society and full integration of the principles of a low-carbon economy.

Sometimes the challenge is the remoteness of Europe as an institution. Given the importance of the treaty, we have to ensure that every citizen throughout Europe has a chance to see what the decision-making process is. Closer working relationships between the European and External Relations Committee and the Government are justified for that reason alone.

I speak as the former convener of the Justice 1 Committee, which brought a subject debate to the Parliament on the reform of civil law in Europe. When we see the changes that we might have to discuss, such as reforms to our family law and consumer law, we realise the importance of having structures in this Parliament to scrutinise such decisions.

George Washington said that following the setting up of the United States of America, there would some day be a United States of Europe. Given that we are coming out of a global recession and are facing the challenges that we have talked about, governance within Europe will have to be more effective than ever and accountability will have to be even better if citizens are to trust in the treaties and institutions of Europe.

A number of key areas in Europe 2020 are worth discussing in some detail. Top of the agenda is returning public finances to a more sustainable path—in short, Europe taking the necessary steps to prevent a banking crisis from happening again in future.

The public must have confidence in the European Union as an institution. They will want to know what steps it is taking in relation to the worldwide discussions and agreements on banker bonuses and in responding to public concern.

The digital agenda for Europe is important for business and the committee has identified the need to address the requirements of small businesses in our economy. High-speed internet access will make a huge difference to how we apply technology and research and to how we tackle the global economies of China and India.

The Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Pauline McNeill: Much is to be gained from being part of the United States of Europe. Huge challenges are ahead and we in the Parliament must ensure that we have the structures to ensure effective decision making.

14:25

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I apologise on my colleague Ted Brocklebank's behalf. As a member of the European and External Relations Committee, he would have liked to be here, but he could not join us.

I welcome the opportunity to debate the European Commission's work programme. Any such debate must touch on the new UK Government's approach to Europe. If the Presiding Officer will forgive me, as the first Conservative to speak in the chamber after yesterday's momentous events, I would like to record my delight that we have a new Conservative Prime Minister and a new Conservative-led Government.

In that vein, I owe you, Presiding Officer, and the Parliament an apology. If members have listened to speeches by me and many of my Conservative colleagues in the past few years, they might have gained the impression that we had a negative view of our excellent friends in the Liberal Democrats. If I ever inadvertently gave that impression in my remarks, I can only humbly apologise. I confirm that my view all along has been that the Liberal Democrats are the finest collection of individuals ever to walk on God's earth.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): I note with interest what Mr Fraser says about his party's new partners. I have no doubt that we will hear many such sentiments, at least for a couple

of weeks. Given his new political coalition, would he like to express a revised view about the European Union?

Murdo Fraser: I will come to that point in a moment. It is clear that we have much to learn from the Labour Party's relationship with the Liberal Democrats. Perhaps Mr Macdonald will share some of that experience with us, from which I am sure we would all benefit.

The new UK Government will mean a new approach to Europe. We await exact details of that approach, but I am sure that we are in interesting times. In the meantime, it is vital that the Scottish Parliament is kept up to date with new legislation and policies from Europe. I welcome the minister's commitment to tracking EU legislation and alerting the relevant committees.

The Law Society of Scotland has warned that the protection that is afforded to the Parliament under subsidiarity will be difficult to use, as the extremely short timescales for consultation might lead to the Parliament being overlooked. It is therefore essential to establish a good working relationship with Westminster to ensure that we are consulted on relevant issues.

David Cameron has pledged to strengthen the working relationship between the UK and Scottish Governments and I am sure that the new Secretary of State for Scotland will play a role in that important task. I am therefore confident that an approach from the Scottish Government or the committee to work with the Foreign Office to design an early-warning system would be welcome.

I cannot but feel that the 2010 work programme is already out of date, as it refers repeatedly to the economic crisis in the past tense, whereas recent economic turmoil in Greece has proved that the crisis is anything but over, especially in the euro zone. Of course, if the Scottish Government had its way, Scotland would—as a new EU member—have to join the euro and would now suffer from the euro's destabilisation following the debt crisis rather than be part of an independent Great Britain that is in charge of its own currency.

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: No—I am sorry to say that I am in my last minute.

It is clear that repairing the damage to the euro and its partners will take up much of the EU's focus in the coming year, as it acts to prevent other countries from following Greece. I was pleased to hear that the Liberal Democrats seem to have put on hold their ambition to join the euro, at least for the duration of this UK Parliament.

Only last week, the EU's Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs called on the new British Government to take early measures to reduce the country's huge deficit and stabilise the debt. That is a huge priority for the new Government.

I will touch on justice issues, which are important. Europe will continue to have a heavy impact on Scotland's justice system. There are many positive advances, such as cross-border co-operation in criminal cases, but many challenges will face our justice system and individual freedom. I commend the Government's intention to send a Scottish minister or law officer to all justice and home affairs council meetings as part of the UK delegation.

The Law Society has highlighted several major concerns for Scotland about the Lisbon treaty. The first is about the creation of the European public prosecutor, which threatens to cut across the Lord Advocate's functions, and the second is about the impact of the European charter of fundamental rights. The Conservatives have said that they would halt the public prosecutor. I am sure that the committee will consider the charter in detail during its inquiry and I look forward to its report.

There is more to say, but I will deal with other points in my closing speech.

14:30

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): As the Liberal Democrat member of the European and External Relations Committee, I welcome the opportunity to debate the European legislative work programme.

The programme highlights many things and links in well with the report that the committee published last week. Our report highlighted the need for Scotland as a region to benchmark its performance against the EU 2020 targets and stressed the importance of working with the UK Government in relation to its European economic strategies and policies—policies that, I am sure, will all be recognised as coming from the Lib Dem manifesto.

The new work programme rightly highlights the importance of exiting the economic crisis. Finance and banking are at the top of the agenda; legislators have to agree on tackling those areas before the summer. That is, of course, of great importance to Scotland not only as a home for banks but in terms of our businesses, which require much better access to finance. I am sure that we are in good hands with Vince Cable.

Both the committee report and the work programme rightly highlight the importance of small businesses to Scotland. In his evidence to

the committee, John Swinney, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, stated the importance of support for SMEs. However, unlike other devolved Governments in the UK, the Scottish Government still does not have in place JEREMIE—joint European resources for micro to medium enterprises initiative—funding. As paragraph 48 of the committee's report clearly points out, the Scottish Government is not considering a transitional rate relief scheme for our small businesses, which need to be looked after better if they are to be competitive in Europe.

The motion mentions the need for reform of the common fisheries policy and the CAP—I declare a farming interest in that regard. I remind members of the importance of agriculture, food production and the CAP to Scotland. Fiona Hyslop mentioned that in her speech. Organisations such as RSPB Scotland and the Royal Society of Edinburgh have highlighted the importance of those areas in evidence to the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, including at its meeting this morning, and other organisations have also done so in their evidence to the European and External Relations Committee. I remind the chamber that the EU consultation on a future CAP is open. It is perhaps no surprise that the CAP budget is a large percentage of the EU budget, given that the common market was basically set up to address food security issues. The CAP is one of the few fully funded EU policies.

The work programme rightly states that there will be a focus on climate change. Thanks to the Lib Dems standing up for strong reduction targets, Scotland is leading the way in that respect. Of course, implementation is much more important than any target setting; after all, targets need to be attained. There is no room for complacency.

I welcome the work programme's focus on cross-border criminal activity. Agreements are in place between forces across some of the EU, but there remain too many loopholes, allowing organised crime to thrive.

Scotland has opportunities with green energy. I am thinking of the focus on interconnections and so-called smart grids. It is up to us to ensure that we can exploit the strong potential of new energies such as tidal.

A digital agenda for the EU is sorely needed in many rural areas of Scotland, which suffer from slow internet connections. We are, in effect, a digitally divided country.

Scotland is in a prime position to benefit from the EU plan for research and innovation, given our first-rate higher and further education institutions. The committee's report recognises the view that many more of our communities—and people in the

voluntary and business sectors in particular—need to be engaged in EU processes. The Government therefore has a duty to be inclusive in its involvement and in its implementation of any strategies.

I welcome the work programme. I note that the committee's most recent report highlights many of the issues that Scotland has to address if it is to be a working cog in the EU machine, working with the new Government.

14:34

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in the debate, not only to raise the profiles of the European and External Relations Committee and the European Commission but to highlight the workings of the EU, which not that many people outwith the Parliament know about. It is shameful that there are no media representatives in the press gallery. I had hoped that the debate would open the media's eyes to the fact that the EU is an extremely important part of the governance of not only Scotland but the UK and Europe. I had hoped that media reports on the debate would have gone some way towards giving people out there an understanding of what Europe is all about and how important it is to Scotland, the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government.

As Irene Oldfather pointed out, it is important that the Scottish Government engages with the European Parliament at all levels. It should engage with rapporteurs, commissioners and MEPs—and basically anyone else in Europe, particularly the Scottish Parliament's European officer. It is important to get in early and find out exactly what is coming out of Europe, and in her evidence to the committee, the minister has confirmed that that is basically what we do. It is important for us to keep an eye on what is happening in Europe. If the press is not going to tell everyone what is happening, it is up to individual MSPs and the Parliament to let folk know what is going on in Europe.

Does the minister have it in mind to hold a meeting with representatives of the new coalition Government at Westminster to discuss the importance of Europe for the Scottish Government and the Scottish people? Perhaps she can answer that in a letter.

I will concentrate on a couple of areas in the short time that I have left: combating poverty, and renewable energy and the energy grid. Reducing poverty is one of the EU 2020 targets, which I very much welcome. However, the European and External Relations Committee and the Scottish Government need to monitor closely what comes out of those targets. We need to do that not to ensure that poverty is eradicated—although I hope

that it will be eradicated throughout the European Union eventually—but to ensure that the developing European member states get as much from the targets as others member states do. We sometimes overlook the developing member states that have come in, which contribute a lot to the European budget although they do not always get a lot out of it. Many members of the public do not seem to realise that. I want to keep a special eye on the target of combating poverty, to ensure that people who are in real, severe poverty actually benefit from that target.

On renewable energy and the energy grid, everyone knows that Scotland has a significant proportion of Europe's renewable energy in the form of wind and tidal power. Scotland is at the forefront of pushing through the energy agenda, and it can lead the rest of Europe, as has been said not just by me and other members but by eminent professors in Europe. Scotland had already reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 19.2 per cent in 2007; in 2008, the emissions reduction percentage across the whole of the UK was just over 19 per cent. Scotland carries the rest of Britain when it comes to climate change and renewable energy. We need to remind ourselves that we are world leaders, and European leaders in particular. The Scottish Government must work with the new Westminster Government—as it had to work with the previous one—on the subject of renewable energy and the energy grid.

I am concerned about transmission charges for the energy grid. Under current transmission charging systems, the remote areas of northern Scotland pay as much as £42.13 per kilowatt, whereas people in the south-west of England pay £6.98 per kilowatt. That is a direct disadvantage. I hope that we can get together with the new Westminster Government and the European Commission to iron that out.

I would have liked to speak about the national grid, but my time is running out and I need to finish. We need to consider poverty, transmission charges and the energy grid. Scotland is a world leader on renewable energy, and we do not want to be penalised because of high transmission charges.

14:38

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): A number of my colleagues in the chamber will be aware of my long-standing commitment to working with people from throughout Europe who share values and ideals, a desire to bring our nations closer together and a wish to remove barriers to co-operation and progress. I refer colleagues to my entry in the register of interests, with particular regard to my work for Bulgaria.

I am grateful to those colleagues who have given me opportunities over the years to contribute to our work in Europe. In particular, I highlight the work that I did with Ben Wallace, who went to another place—I do not know whether he was successful in being re-elected to Westminster. He and I were appointed as rapporteurs, and we produced a report to the Scottish Parliament that led to the establishment of the Parliament's own liaison officer in the centre of power in the EU. The view was that an early-warning system is key, as Irene Oldfather said, and we persuaded Ben Wallace and his colleagues of that when we served together on the European Committee in the first session of the Parliament.

I was grateful to be appointed by the Health and Sport Committee as its representative at meetings of the European elected members information liaison and exchange network. It is sad that since Linda Fabiani's departure from her role as Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture there has been little progress on the working of the group. There was only one meeting with Linda Fabiani's successor, Mike Russell, who subsequently changed post again. There has been no EMILE meeting since last year.

Fiona Hyslop: I am sorry to have to correct Helen Eadie. I have chaired an EMILE meeting in the Parliament in my capacity as Minister for Culture and External Affairs, and I was disappointed that she could not attend. Another meeting is planned, although there is a difficulty, because it might clash with the domestic and European joint ministerial committee meetings.

Helen Eadie: I might receive another letter of apology from the minister's department. I received a letter of apology for the failure to invite me to the charrette in Lochgelly; perhaps I will get one about the failure to invite me to the EMILE meeting. The matter is of some concern, because the Health and Sport Committee appointed me to my role. Moreover, although Government ministers with responsibility for fisheries and culture attend meetings, there is no report back to the Scottish Parliament on advances in the European Parliament in relation to health. It is clear to all members that cross-border health care has mammoth implications for the whole of the United Kingdom and, most of all, major financial implications for Scotland, particularly with regard to jobs.

The Commission's work programme sets the policy direction in response to the upcoming challenges and lays the groundwork in relation to the rest of the mandate. In the Scottish Parliament we have a cross-party group on industrial communities, whose work programme embraces what will happen to Scotland's European funding post 2013. The group agreed to make the issue a

priority and, with my assistance, formed a team to consider how we go forward. That sub-group has met three times and a further meeting will take place in June. We are concerned about the high levels of long-term joblessness, particularly in areas where Scotland's older industries were located, such as Glasgow and Inverclyde, where long-term joblessness is nearly double the average for Great Britain.

The big debates will centre around whether European funding will continue to be concentrated on eastern Europe or whether there will be a change in the policy direction that has been established over the years. Those are important matters to the people of Scotland, because for many years we enjoyed European funding. The matter is of continuing concern against a backdrop of the ending of a number of funding streams during the next year, including the town centre initiative, the vacant and derelict land fund, funding from the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, the future jobs fund and, in some areas, LEADER funding.

Funding streams will come to an end at a time of tight financial budgets in the public sector. That has the potential to create the perfect storm in relation to regeneration activity. The cross-party group has agreed that that is a serious matter for our industrial communities, and I hope that the Parliament will pay close attention to the matters that it has raised.

14:44

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): I apologise for not pressing my request-to-speak button and I thank the clerks for reminding me to do so. I appear to have forgotten what to do in the Scottish Parliament, after the campaigns of the past few weeks. I would have regretted not being able to participate in the debate—I am sure that members share that sentiment.

I am glad that our Parliament has an opportunity to debate the forthcoming work programme of the European Commission. The debate provides us with an opportunity to push forward Scotland's interests and ensure that we play a more active role in the Europe of the future. My party has long argued that the people of Scotland should have a stronger voice in Europe, and the next work programme provides another reminder that Scotland's interests need a Scottish voice to stand up for them in Europe and the world at large.

I take the opportunity to correct Murdo Fraser who, in a fit of excitement at recent events—it is clear that the excitement is palpably shared by his new-found colleagues Mr Smith and Mr Hume—got his facts wrong. Murdo Fraser argues that the SNP wants Scotland to be a new member of the European Union, but we want nothing of the sort.

Scotland is already a member of the European Union. I am sure that he appreciates my correcting his facts for him. *[Interruption.]*

The work that the European and External Relations Committee has carried out in examining the work programme has been productive and has emphasised the importance of the Scottish Government and our Parliament being more greatly involved in how the programme affects Scotland. Given our present status as a sub-state actor in the EU, we should welcome the suggestion for further involvement of sub-state entities in the 2020 strategy and the Commission blueprint for moving the EU forward more generally. However, we need to see further detail of what that will entail to ensure that mere rhetoric does not take the place of effective engagement with Scotland, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament. Most of all, we need the UK Government to ensure that the Scottish Government is permitted to engage fully in the decision-making processes of the EU, particularly now that we have a Conservative Administration south of the border, given that such Administrations have failed Scotland's interests in the past.

We should also welcome the fact that one of the work programme's main aims is to put

“people at the heart of European action”.

Given the vivid demonstration of the democratic deficit in Scotland by the result of last week's election—after which, with a solitary Scottish representative, the Tories find themselves in government—it is right to consider the empowerment of the people, whether in the business of the EU or elsewhere. We must welcome any moves to improve people's participation in the EU. In that regard, the European citizens initiative that will shortly be implemented is a useful model that we should encourage Scotland's citizens to take advantage of where appropriate.

The Commission also aims to modernise the way that the EU works. Our Parliament has been expressly geared up to fulfil the standards that a modern political system requires, with openness and transparency at the heart of our processes. With a direct line to the EU, we might be better placed to use our experience to influence the direction of the modernisation of the EU's procedures. Even within the confines of devolution, we should seek to do that anyway; of course, we should also be prepared to learn from our European neighbours about how any positive changes can be applied to our processes at home.

It is worth mentioning that this is the EU year of combating poverty and social exclusion, as my colleague Sandra White stated. We should

concentrate our efforts on ensuring that assisting the many people in Scotland, throughout Europe and beyond who experience poverty or exclusion is always at the top of the political agenda. It is unfortunate that, at a recent meeting of the European and External Relations Committee, we learned that some member states do not think that that should be a priority for the EU. Against the backdrop of the year of combating poverty and social exclusion, it is all the more important that we redouble our efforts and come together to seek solutions to the social and economic factors that often contribute to poverty and social exclusion.

With the EU 2020 strategy and the Commission's work programme having sustainable economic development and jobs growth at their heart, I hope that we can grasp the opportunity to eradicate poverty in the areas of Scotland and elsewhere in Europe that suffer from severe deprivation. Of course, we cannot rely on economic growth in and of itself. We must direct our efforts simultaneously at reducing inequality and seeking economic recovery. I hope that that will be at the heart of the EU 2020 strategy and the Commission's work programme.

I welcome the Commission's work programme for 2010 and I hope that Scotland is able to play a key, active part in the direction taken by the programme and EU policy making in the future. However, members do not need to be told that we can only ever reach our full potential when we have full independence and a direct line to Europe. I very much look forward to that day.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Hepburn. Perhaps you would be good enough to turn off your BlackBerry once Mr Matheson gives it back to you, as it is not meant to be on in the first place.

14:49

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): The European Commission's work programme on energy is focused on shared ambitions for a low-carbon economy throughout Europe and around the world. In that respect, it is very much to be welcomed. At the same time, it is vital that EU engagement plays to the strengths of different parts of Europe. In that respect, offshore energy is particularly important for Scotland. It includes, of course, oil and gas from the North Sea. Hydrocarbons from the UK continental shelf remain critical to our energy security.

The oil and gas sector remains the single largest employer in my constituency and in many parts of Scotland. Indeed, the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee will meet later this month in Aberdeen to hear evidence about Scotland's international trade, and I suspect that we will hear

a good deal of evidence about the importance to the whole country of large and rising export earnings from that home-grown sector.

However, the sector also matters because it provides skills and technologies for use in offshore renewable energies, which are rightly the focus of European interest. That interest can be hugely supportive of our shared ambitions for renewable energy from Scottish waters. The European Marine Energy Centre in Orkney, which is well known and well established, gives Scotland great opportunities for innovation in new technologies in wave and tidal power. Scotland is equally well placed to give a lead in offshore wind technologies. Offshore Aberdeen has already been identified as the best place in which to set up an equivalent centre to EMEC for the wind industry—an industry that is poised to invest billions of pounds in a new round of energy production from the UK's continental shelf.

A good deal of hard work has already been done to bring the European offshore wind deployment centre to fruition in Aberdeen. I commend the efforts of the Aberdeen Renewable Energy Group for coming up with the big idea and those of Vattenfall, and those who work with it, in taking the idea forward. The Scottish European Green Energy Centre, which is based in Aberdeen, also has a key role to play. I hope that Scottish ministers will be active in supporting the efforts of all concerned to reach a positive conclusion on the project. The European Union has offered €40 million for the Aberdeen project, if it can be delivered on time. That investment can turn the positive intentions of the Lisbon treaty into real technological advantage for Scotland and Europe in laying the foundations for a new green energy sector.

We should not be content simply with an injection of European Union taxpayers' money into proving new technologies, however welcome that injection may be. Turning the green economy into green jobs will also require private energy companies to invest in Scotland, which is another area in which opportunities exist and need to be taken.

Wave and tidal power is not quite at the stage of placing major manufacturing orders, although we have very innovative and enterprising companies in Aberdeen and, indeed, across Scotland. Offshore wind is with us now, and we need to ensure that the exploitation of Scotland's natural resource leads to the creation of Scottish manufacturing jobs. We know about the good work that is being done in the fabrication of offshore wind towers by, for example, BiFab in Fife and in Lewis, turning oil platform building skills to good use in the renewables sector. I hope ministers will agree that it is important to go further than the

tower sector and to use the opportunity that is offered by the offshore wind deployment centre in Aberdeen to identify opportunities for the manufacture of wind turbines on this side of the North Sea—in this country—which would bring even more added value to the Scottish economy.

European support is critical, too, for developing carbon capture and storage below the seabed of the North Sea. One of Gordon Brown's many achievements in government was to give a lead in that area. I hope that others will follow that lead. The carbon capture and storage levy in the UK and the revenues of the European emissions trading scheme, taken together, can give Scotland a head start in proving the new technologies. I hope that Scottish ministers will impress on their new UK counterparts the importance of continuing that investment from the UK Government and the European Union in order to realise that opportunity.

We have heard today about extending the single market of the British electricity trading and transmission arrangements across the North Sea to create a European grid, which is an important objective, too. However, we must ensure that that is done alongside the creation of jobs and business here in Scotland, which means building on our existing strengths to ensure that electricity continues to be an export industry for Scotland on a European scale in the years ahead.

The Presiding Officer: We come now to closing speeches. I call Iain Smith, who will be followed by Murdo Fraser. We are still on four minutes roughly for speeches.

14:53

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. As a former member of the European and External Relations Committee, it is nice occasionally to come back to and talk about this important subject. Clearly, the work programme of the European Commission is very important to Scotland's interests, so it is important that, as a Parliament, we take an interest in it.

One of the issues that has been raised is the implementation of the Lisbon treaty and the fact that devolved Parliaments such as the Scottish Parliament should now have more direct say in the implementation of European policies. Clearly, an important part of that is building up relationships with the Westminster Parliament. It is important that we bear in mind that that refers to the Parliament-to-Parliament relationship and not necessarily to the Government-to-Government relationship.

With a new Parliament at Westminster and, perhaps, a reform agenda that is shared by all

parties—not just those that have formed a coalition—there may be an opportunity to obtain significantly improved procedures at Westminster that aid Scottish input into European legislation. I hope that discussions can start at an early stage with parliamentary as well as Government authorities.

I would like to correct Jamie Hepburn. Here in the Scottish Parliament, I am not a colleague of Murdo Fraser. Our parties have a coalition agreement at Westminster, but that does not mean that we have a coalition agreement that extends to Scotland, any more than it means that when we were in coalition with the Labour Party in the Scottish Parliament, we agreed with the Labour Party at Westminster. They are separate institutions, and the parties north and south of the border have separate priorities. We will continue to operate as an independent party in the Scottish Parliament that opposes the Conservative party every bit as much as it did in the past.

Jamie Hepburn: Does that mean that the member is rebuffing the friendly advances of Murdo Fraser and that he does not like him after all?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): I remind members that we are in Scotland, not England.

Iain Smith: All of us in the Parliament are friends once we get outside the chamber but, politically, Murdo Fraser and I are not partners in the Scottish Parliament, even if the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives are partners in an agreed programme at United Kingdom level.

Murdo Fraser raised a number of important points. He was right to mention subsidiarity. He also spoke about the euro and Greece. Some people argue that the situation in Greece has resulted in the destabilisation of the euro and that it calls into question the whole idea of the euro zone. A counter-argument is that if Greece and, indeed, Ireland had not been in the euro zone, those two economies might well have gone down the tubes; it was being part of the euro zone that allowed them to survive. That shows the strength of monetary union. We are not advocating that it would be in the UK's interest to be part of the euro zone at this point in time or in the foreseeable future, but being part of the euro zone probably saved Ireland and it has certainly saved Greece.

Murdo Fraser also mentioned the impact of Europe on the justice system. It is important to bear in mind that the Conservative party was opposed to the European arrest warrant. I hope that they will change that position, now that they realise that it allows cross-border co-operation to deal with, for example, paedophile rings and drug cartels.

Sandra White referred to Scotland being a world leader on climate change. We are a world leader in rhetoric, but we have yet to be a world leader in action. We must work with the rest of Europe if we are to be a world leader in action. We must ensure that Scotland not only has a target of reducing carbon emissions by 42 per cent by 2020, but that we are working to achieve that target. Unfortunately, there is still not sufficient evidence that we are doing that.

Lewis Macdonald was right to highlight the importance of the energy sector to Scotland. It is important that the Parliament engages with Europe on issues such as the supergrid, carbon capture and storage, and renewables.

Another issue of importance to Scotland that we must be conscious of is regulation of the financial sector. We must ensure that Europe does not impose a one-size-fits-all approach to regulating the financial sector so that we do not damage the good bits of the sector at the same time as controlling the bad bits, such as the multipurpose banks that have put us in so much trouble.

14:58

Murdo Fraser: This short debate has covered a range of subjects and has clearly demonstrated members' interest in our relationship with Europe.

I reassure Helen Eadie that her old friend Ben Wallace was re-elected to the House of Commons. Apparently, his majority was nearly 16,000, so she need have no concerns about Mr Wallace's parliamentary future in another place.

Iain Smith raised the issue of the euro. It is now highly unfashionable for Conservatives and Liberal Democrats to fall out over such matters, but the general view that is taken on the situation in Greece is that if Greece had not been in the euro zone and had had a free-floating currency, it would perhaps have been easier for it to absorb some of the pressures on its economy. In other words, it was Greece's membership of the euro that exacerbated the situation. However, that is a debate for another day.

Earlier, I mentioned issues to do with the economy and justice. I will now turn to two other issues, the first of which is reform of the CAP and the CFP, which is crucial to rural Scotland. Jim Hume focused on reform of the CAP. The Conservatives supported the Pack inquiry into the future of the CAP, and we believe that continuing support for agriculture is vital to food security and to our farmers, and to providing for a vibrant rural economy. However, as Brian Pack's interim report warns, tough times might be ahead because increasing economic pressures are certain to hit the CAP, given that it currently accounts for around 41 per cent of the total EU budget.

A number of members mentioned the common fisheries policy. We believe that it is now right to fight for wholesale reform in order to encourage sustainable practices, to give communities a greater say over the future of their fishing industries, and to bring an end to the scandal of fish discards.

Among the more welcome EC policies are modernisation, its proposal to go beyond the 2012 objective of reducing the administrative burden by 25 per cent, and its focus on fitness checks to reduce the bureaucratic burden. Anyone who speaks to businesspeople will be familiar with the business community's call to reduce the burden of red tape. At a time of economic recession, that is probably more relevant than ever, so I welcome what the EC has said about that. I do not expect it to change dramatically the overwhelming burden of European red tape, but it is a step in the right direction, and I encourage the Scottish Government to offer some input on that. I am sure that our farmers and the members of our business community could come up with plenty legislation that is coming through the pipeline that they would like to see fitness-checked.

Many of the concerns that have been raised about the European Commission's work programme will be addressed by the new approach to Europe that is being taken by my colleagues in the Government at Westminster. Crucially, as part of all that, there will be a new relationship between Westminster and Holyrood. I agree with Sandra White that the minister should seek a meeting with the UK Government to discuss the way forward. That call will be received warmly by the new Conservative-Liberal Government at Westminster, so I encourage the minister to go down that road.

We all have varying visions of Europe. I do not agree with Pauline McNeill when she calls for a United States of Europe but, as we celebrate a new Conservative Prime Minister, I remind her that it was a previous Conservative Prime Minister—Winston Churchill—who called for a United States of Europe, although he did not believe that Great Britain should be part of it. Nevertheless, there was a vision there that people might wish to follow. Whatever our view, the economic crisis in Europe will continue to have an impact, not least because Europe is our largest trading partner. European legislation will continue to affect businesses, the criminal justice system and government in Scotland. I therefore welcome the European and External Relations Committee's work in that area, and I look forward to its report on the impact of the Lisbon treaty later in the year.

15:02

Pauline McNeill: It was worth being here this afternoon just to hear the new Murdo Fraser rewrite the relationship with the Scottish Liberal Democrats. I note that Jim Hume did not attempt to reciprocate, and that Iain Smith took the opportunity to set out clearly what the relationship will be in this Parliament between the Scottish Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives. We shall watch with interest.

Our approach to Europe is significant, and we must make significant progress on the key issues that we have debated this afternoon. I wish the Liberal Democrats well in persuading new Prime Minister Cameron that we cannot be at the margins of Europe, and that we must play a leading role.

I believe that Scotland benefits from being a part of the United Kingdom, which is an influential member state. Although I do not object at all, where it is appropriate, to Richard Lochhead or any other Scottish minister leading the fisheries negotiations, I do not think that we should fixate on the notion. What matters is the outcome of the negotiations. It is not just our position that matters, but our participation in the negotiations and our ability to negotiate with other countries.

I would have missed Jamie Hepburn's speech had he not pressed his request-to-speak button. It gives me the opportunity to state that there is a strong body of opinion that, if Scotland were to leave the UK, we would have to make a fresh application for membership of the EU because our membership would not necessarily be automatic, as has been asserted. If that is the case, it is almost certain that Scotland would be required to join the euro.

Jamie Hepburn: Does Pauline McNeill not accept that there is equally a substantial body of opinion that counters that argument? Is the extension of her logic not that England and the rest of the United Kingdom would have to reapply?

Pauline McNeill: Mr Hepburn is wrong in his assertion. There may be one or two on his side who are of that view, but the body of opinion is that Scotland would have to make a fresh application. What is clear is that there is a great deal of uncertainty and that the SNP cannot provide certainty for Scotland.

Where I agree with Jamie Hepburn is on the necessity of engaging ordinary citizens in decision making, and on the implications of the Lisbon treaty and the huge powers that Europe holds. There is a need to set up structures to ensure not just that Parliament scrutinises the decisions of Europe but that we get out there to do our part in explaining to the general public the implications of the decisions.

I agree with Murdo Fraser when he says, on issues related to justice and civil law reform, which we have seen before in the Scottish Parliament, that there is a distinct element to our law in Scotland. There is therefore a case to be made that when we meet to reform civil law—family law, for example, although I know that there are current discussions about the law of succession—the distinctly Scottish position must be recognised. When I talk about a United States of Europe, I am also clear that the individual characteristics of the member states must be upheld. I, for one, have been vocal in Parliament in saying that when we choose to do things differently, such as on the law of succession or the family law that we have just reformed, Europe should not interfere.

Lewis Macdonald talked about the huge opportunities in the low-carbon economy. I see that my time is almost up, but I will conclude by saying that the green jobs agenda is critical. Collaboration on research and development and the willingness of other European countries to take a firm grip on the climate change agenda show what we can do with countries working together to ensure that we do better.

15:07

Fiona Hyslop: Today we have seen a snapshot of Scotland as it stands. We heard Murdo Fraser professing too much his love for the Liberal Democrats, and we heard Iain Smith perhaps professing too much his rejection of the Conservatives. I am sure that time will tell where they stand.

Pauline McNeill advocated the United States of Europe, which is an interesting position. I am not sure whether it is an expression of policy, but it is an interesting idea that will no doubt develop over time. Jim Hume considered Scotland as a region in his speech, but I agree with Pauline McNeill that it is really important that Scotland's national justice system be reflected in developments related to the work programme.

On behalf of the Scottish Government, I welcome the Commission's work programme. We support its priorities, and we are assured that it reflects our own approach. We are pleased that Europe gives us a greater opportunity to realise our objectives, and we will continue to press to play a full part in shaping European policies.

In answer to Sandra White and Murdo Fraser, I say that we aim to work constructively with the incoming UK Government. The earliest opportunity will be at the next JMC Europe meeting, which I hope will be in early June. We will also deal directly with the EU institutions to take forward Scotland's interests in Europe. The early-warning system which has, as Helen Eadie identified, been

advocated by the Parliament's committees, is part and parcel of what we have to do in ensuring that we are ahead of the game. Upstream influence is the reflection that Irene Oldfather gave.

We will press our case to lead for the UK on issues such as fisheries, in which Scotland has the weight of interest and expertise. We have a huge amount to offer the EU in capacity and knowledge in developing the marine renewable technologies that Lewis Macdonald referred to, and which will help us all to achieve a low-carbon economy.

The Scottish ministers have a strong record of attending meetings of the Council of Ministers. In 2009, we attended 17 meetings, which is the highest number for any devolved Administration in recent years. We will continue to make our case to attend and to have a meaningful role at Council of Ministers meetings. I can tell Helen Eadie that Shona Robison attended the health council meeting last summer. Our attendance is important, especially when the meetings impact on devolved responsibilities—a role that was recognised even in the Calman recommendations.

Helen Eadie: If that is the case, why are we not getting reports back from ministers? A range of topics that concern the Parliament are being discussed at Europe level. It is appropriate for ministers to report back or to make statements to the Parliament on those issues, as Richard Lochhead does.

Fiona Hyslop: I am more than happy to take forward the matter. Recently, I had a constructive evidence session with the European and External Relations Committee. It is important that we have such dialogue and that we report back, as appropriate.

The Government is proactive in its European engagement. We regularly take the opportunity to respond to Commission consultations. The Commission's consultation on developing an energy action plan for 2011-20, which was published last week, presents us with major opportunities. I encourage Lewis Macdonald and the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee to ensure that the committee has input to the process. We are engaging with the Commission and the UK Government to ensure that the plan allows Scotland and Europe to fulfil their potential on renewable energy, carbon capture and storage, and on the development of new grid infrastructures, to which Sandra White referred. Another good example of how we are working to influence EU developments is the Scottish Government's response to the Commission's consultations on Europe 2020. We are also looking at the newly published proposals for Europe's culture and creative industries.

The Government adapts to the new opportunities that the EU affords. Only this week, my officials attended a meeting of the newly formed sports council. I have shared with the European and External Relations Committee my ideas for ensuring that Parliament plays an effective role in the new subsidiarity arrangements under the Lisbon treaty. However, I echo Iain Smith's point that the arrangements involve Parliament-to-Parliament relationships. A leadership role for the Presiding Officer and the Parliament will be important in that regard.

The Government has set itself challenging targets for combating poverty. A number of members, including Jamie Hepburn, referred to that. With our huge renewables resource, we have the most ambitious emissions reduction targets in Europe. We are now seeking the highest levels of ambition from other countries. In particular, we want the EU to increase the level of reductions to which it is committed from 20 per cent to 30 per cent by 2020. We must play an active role in the Commission's work programme because it has an impact on such issues.

The programme focuses on activities in which we have major interest and that are fundamental to the nation's wellbeing. We must continue to ensure that the UK Government takes Scottish interests into account and that our ministers are at the negotiating table when devolved interests are under discussion. The Scottish Government is determined to enhance Scotland's profile in Europe and to benefit from the opportunities that are available. All members who have spoken have identified key areas, and there is consensus on the areas on which we need to work. I look forward to a productive and constructive relationship with the Parliament, the UK Government, the European Commission and the European Parliament to take forward that agenda.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Michael Matheson to wind up the debate on behalf of the European and External Relations Committee. Mr Matheson, you have six minutes.

15:12

Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): For a minute, Presiding Officer, I thought that you were going to say that I had 18 minutes. Six minutes will suffice.

As a number of members have indicated, it can be difficult at times to get people to engage with the Europe debate. I agree with Sandra White that it can be difficult to engage the public on European issues, largely because of the complexity and lack of transparency that is often perceived to be associated with them. Engagement with members in this establishment is also an issue, as is

reflected by the rather sparse attendance at this debate—although I suspect that subscription to the debate on the zero waste plan will be no greater. The attendance at today's debate highlights the need for us to ensure that members are as engaged as possible with the EU process.

Helen Eadie: I agree with Michael Matheson, who makes an important point. However, as he knows, a report on European matters has been on the agenda of the Health and Sport Committee at three meetings and has been knocked off each time. That is a matter of concern. I hope that it is not a measure of the non-priority that is accorded to such issues by other committees. I regard cross-border health care as an important issue.

Michael Matheson: I will return to that issue later, when I discuss the role that the Parliament has to play.

As Irene Oldfather outlined in her opening remarks, the purpose of today's debate is to give members an opportunity to debate the EC's work programme and to express their views on issues to which it relates. Those include the CAP, the CFP, renewables, health and new competences for which the Lisbon treaty provides. There is a slight danger that it is always the same individuals in this Parliament who are involved in EU policy issues. We must try harder to engage other members to take a greater interest.

The new work programme, as outlined by the EC, will take us to 2014. It is helpful in that it covers a three to four-year period as opposed to being set annually, which will provide new opportunities for us to be more focused in our engagement with the EU. Opportunity is very important. Notwithstanding the complexities of the EU process—which several members and I have referred to—and the limitations that we have as a nation and as a non-member state of the EU, we must, with the extension of the EU's competences into a range of areas which are devolved responsibilities here in Scotland, be much more intelligent in how we engage in the process. That is not something that only applies to the Scottish and UK Governments; it also applies to this Parliament.

It is important that the Government of Scotland undertake the necessary tracking work to see what is happening in Europe at various times and that, where necessary, it works with the EU and co-operates with it where that is in Scotland's interests. It is also important for the UK Government, which is engaged as a member state, to flag up issues to the Scottish Government at a much earlier stage where it can, if it believes that there are issues that have to be addressed.

Although there are opportunities arising from the work programme, there is a need to be much more

engaged in it, and I recognise that there are limitations, which Murdo Fraser highlighted. One is the very limited consultation period that may be available in which to make known views. Irene Oldfather highlighted horizon scanning, which is an effective way to pick up on such issues much earlier in order to maximise our influence on policy development and to extract as much benefit as we can from any future policy direction at EU level.

At Parliament level—as was highlighted by Pauline McNeill, Helen Eadie and others—there is a much greater role for the subject committees to be interested in EU matters, in particular with the extended competences within the EU under the Lisbon treaty. I recall from my years on the Justice Committee that we expressed considered interest in issues relating to EU justice and home affairs matters. One of the real limitations on the committee's ability to engage was the volume of issues that came forward at EU level. I recall hearing evidence from Scottish Executive officials that so many EU justice and home affairs meetings were taking place that it was difficult for civil servants to cover all of them.

In her intervention, Helen Eadie raised the issues of health and sport, which are areas in which the EU now has some competence. She is quite correct: the EU issues that are meant to be considered by the Health and Sport Committee have had to be postponed for a few weeks. It is, however, fair to say that they have had to be postponed in order for the committee to deal with the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill because individuals such as herself have been seeking further evidence on the bill and we have had to put back EU matters that we should have considered much earlier.

This has been a wide-ranging debate: there are those who would like to see the Scottish Government being a member state within the EU and representing Scotland's interests by that means; there are supporters of a United States of Europe; and there are those who would like the Scottish Government simply to operate through the UK Government, as at present. Whatever members' views may be, this Parliament cannot avoid the fact that the role of the EU in our daily lives over the next couple of years and in the future, is likely to increase. Therefore, the Scottish Government and Parliament must do everything possible to ensure that we serve the Scottish nation's interests.

Zero Waste Plan

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-6275, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the forthcoming zero waste plan. I draw members' attention to the fact that a corrected version of Elaine Murray's amendment has been made available at the back of the chamber.

15:20

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): I am delighted to open this afternoon's debate on waste in Scotland, which I am sure all members will agree is an event of equal importance to anything else that might be happening in the United Kingdom at the current time.

Members will recall that we launched a major public consultation last summer on proposals for a zero waste plan for Scotland. I promised then to come back to Parliament after the consultation to give members a further opportunity to express their views on the key issues that they would like the plan to address. This afternoon's debate, albeit that it is a brief one, delivers on that promise.

The public consultation was a resounding success. It attracted nearly 250 responses from councils, businesses, third sector bodies, individuals and many others. It is clear that the people of Scotland really care about waste and want to make a difference. I am confident that, in developing our policy proposals, we will take into account many of the key points that were raised.

In addition to the public consultation, I was pleased recently to see the views of key stakeholders—which I am sure we have all received—including those of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and WWF Scotland. We broadly agree with the majority of the points that those organisations made. I am keen to hear members' views today, before we finalise our proposals for the zero waste plan. I am confident that there is a broad consensus on how we can move forward together to achieve our goal of a zero waste Scotland.

Waste is part of all our lives, and the figures are sobering. In 2008, we produced almost 20 million tonnes of waste from households, industry, business and all parts of society, and our councils spend about £400 million of public money each year on collecting and treating waste. As WWF Scotland states in its briefing for the debate, if we keep consuming the earth's resources at the current rate, we will need more than one planet to survive. Clearly, that is not sustainable.

The nation is beginning to get the message on waste and efficient use of resources. The amount of waste that is thrown out by households is falling steadily and the quantities that we recycle have risen dramatically. On average, councils are already recycling more than 35 per cent of the waste that they collect, and the best-performing councils recycle as much as 45 per cent. Some councils still have some way to go. However, the nation could be said to have picked the low-hanging fruit on recycling. We all have a growing recognition that, from now on, every step will be more and more challenging.

We have made encouraging progress since devolution, but it will be a lot tougher to make an equivalent leap forward in the next 10 or 15 years, and anyone who pretends that it will be easy is kidding themselves. However, we must continue to move towards a zero waste society, which is why we hope to publish within the next few weeks our zero waste plan for a Scotland where waste is reduced to a minimum and all resources are used as effectively and efficiently as possible.

We have already taken a number of important steps in recent years and months. We are working closely with local authorities to encourage them to continue to increase their recycling rates and we have set up a single co-ordinated zero waste Scotland programme to support businesses, local authorities and individuals more effectively. Up to now, the public and the business community have had to deal with too many public sector organisations—that point was well made by the Federation of Small Businesses only this week. We have also passed ground-breaking legislation to address the climate impacts of waste. However, we have more to do in order to understand better the carbon cost of Scotland's waste. Again, we will have to work on that in the years ahead.

Our proposals build directly on the responses to the consultation. I hope that we will reach agreement on the issues so we can map out a clear future for waste and the use of resources in Scotland, and unlock the big decisions and investments that will be needed in the times ahead.

Zero waste means thinking not simply about waste, but about resources. We need to recognise and preserve the economic and environmental value of all the resources that we use in this country by, for example, preventing waste in the first place, by reusing materials, by recycling resources or by recovering the value of these things in some other way. Disposal must be our last resort and should be used only if no other option is available.

Although previous waste policies have focused on the waste that is collected by councils from our doorsteps and local businesses, the fact is that

household waste represents less than one fifth of all the waste that is generated in Scotland each year. The construction and demolition industry produces over 40 per cent of all waste, while the rest of the commercial and industrial sector accounts for another 40 per cent. If we are serious about reducing waste and using resources better, we need to look at all of Scotland's waste. I know that that view is shared by many people in the chamber and beyond.

To achieve those goals, we need the right systems and infrastructure to collect, sort and treat all the resources that we currently treat as waste, and local authorities and the waste management sector need to invest in systems to separate materials and recover their value. Of course, that will provide many economic opportunities.

A top priority for any waste policy must be a reduction in the amount of valuable resources that are sent to landfill. The landfill tax is already making the option increasingly expensive and we believe that it is now time to consider legislation to ban certain materials altogether from being sent to landfill if they can be reused, recycled or recovered. Such an approach was widely supported in the consultation.

It would make sense, for instance, to ban landfill of biodegradable wastes such as food and garden waste. Although such waste is responsible for significant greenhouse gas emissions from landfill, it can be treated to recover its energy value. Again, that approach has a lot of support. Indeed, I note that the three main United Kingdom parties had similar commitments in their recent manifestos. In an effort to support that approach to landfill bans, we need to consider whether different materials should be separated as early as possible in the process to avoid cross-contamination and other problems.

Food waste is a major part of the equation. Scotland currently produces over 2 million tonnes of food waste a year, which is a waste not only of good precious food, but of money. Although, in tackling issues such as food waste, we should remember that the problem will always be with us to some extent, we nevertheless have to collect some of this waste separately to get back as much value as possible.

Zero waste means recovering the maximum value from resources that were previously treated as waste. Again, there will always be some waste that cannot be reused or recycled; in such cases, recovering its energy content will be the best option. As we will all accept, there are concerns about how energy from waste is used. Our present policy is based on capping at 25 per cent of all the waste that local authorities manage, the amount of waste that they can treat by energy from waste through incineration. However, we are considering

a new approach. After all, the cap applies only to 4 per cent of all waste in Scotland: if we are aiming to tackle all waste in Scotland, our energy-from-waste policy should have the same aim. As a result, we feel that legislating on the materials that can be used in energy-from-waste plants would be a much better way of regulating things and would allow us to emphasise that we are focusing on all waste in Scotland, and not just on the municipal waste that local authorities collect.

I could go on about all the—

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Richard Lochhead: I am in the hands of the Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must be very brief, Ms Smith.

Elaine Smith: I am simply keen to hear the cabinet secretary's comments about using energy from waste to benefit communities.

Richard Lochhead: Many members and organisations such as the Sustainable Development Commission and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency agree that energy from waste has a role in that respect. The approach has been adopted in other countries and, indeed, in the UK election campaign a number of parties were calling for a huge increase in the use of energy from waste in England and Wales. Of course, if any applications for such plants are submitted in any part of Scotland, the planning process will need to take into account local authorities' views.

I will conclude, because I am well over my time. We have moved a long way in Scotland on this issue, and we must pay tribute to the Scottish public for upping recycling rates since devolution. That said, there is still a long way to go. We as a society must continue to change our behaviour if we are to protect our environment and manage Scotland's waste more effectively. We must see waste not as a problem but as one of the planet's valuable resources. If we work together and build on the zero waste plan, which we will launch in the next couple of weeks, we can take Scotland down the road towards being a zero waste society.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the need for a coherent zero-waste policy approach to encourage waste prevention and efficient use of all resources; supports measures to increase recycling and deliver high-quality recycled materials, to ensure resources are recovered and treated in the most environmentally beneficial way and to minimise the disposal of resources into landfill, and looks to the forthcoming Zero Waste Plan for Scotland to provide clear long-term policy stability for the necessary investment to deliver a zero-waste Scotland.

15:29

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I am, of course, pleased to see progress being made towards a zero waste plan. The history of the development of the plan shows that the cabinet secretary announced a review of the national waste strategy in a statement to the chamber in January 2008. We had another debate on the national waste strategy on 11 June last year, before the consultation document was launched. During that debate, we were invited to present our views on what should be in the consultation document. Eleven months later, we are having another debate, which is our final opportunity to influence the plan that will be published in a few weeks' time. It has taken some time to be produced, so I hope that it will be of good quality.

The European revised water framework directive must be transposed into Scots law by 12 December this year. It is regrettable that the development of the plan has taken so long. To be honest, I would have preferred to have seen the plan and debated how it will be implemented. I doubt that any radical changes will be made as a result of this debate, although I expect that there will be general agreement on the principles and the way forward.

To be positive, I welcome the creation of a single Scottish programme under zero waste Scotland to deliver the zero waste plan. A similar approach was taken by the previous United Kingdom Government, which gave the Waste and Resources Action Programme responsibility as the overarching delivery body for business and household waste management. There are many players in waste management, and the creation of a single programme is a sensible move that will foster the coherence to which the Government's motion refers.

The Labour Party's amendment refers to the concerns that were expressed in Audit Scotland's report, "Protecting and improving Scotland's environment", which was published in January this year. The report noted that, although Scotland was meeting the 2010 European targets for landfill and preventing an increase in the production of municipal waste, local authorities would struggle to meet targets beyond this year. SEPA has voiced similar concerns, which have been reported in the press today.

By 2025, councils will have to collect, recycle and compost 70 per cent of municipal waste. That will require additional waste management facilities. I understand that those facilities will be identified in the final plan, but wonder whether the means of funding the new facilities will also be identified. In particular, I would like to know what the role of the Scottish Futures Trust will be in funding them. Last week, the cabinet secretary advised me in an

answer to a written question on the role of the SFT in delivering the zero waste strategy that it is working with COSLA to collect data and supporting local authorities in securing value for money, and that it had initiated a waste procurement forum to disseminate best practice. That is all very laudable, but members should remember what happened on 20 May 2008, when the Scottish Government launched the business case for the SFT. The SFT was lauded as

"the way forward for infrastructure investment".

Ministers also promised a Scotland-wide municipal bond. The SFT was supposed to be about funding and investment as well as about advice, data collection and value for money. Perhaps the cabinet secretary can clarify whether he supports waste management facilities being funded in future under a non-profit-distributing public-private partnership model.

Ministers will no doubt wish to remind members of the zero waste fund of £152 million over three years, of which local authorities have received £80 million. That money is not ring fenced, but it is intended that it be used to deliver the waste management targets in councils' single outcome agreements. I will make two points about that. First, Audit Scotland has stated that those targets are unlikely to be sufficient to meet European targets for reducing biodegradable municipal waste that is sent to landfill beyond this year. Secondly, is the funding that has been made available enough?

Dumfries and Galloway Council, which is a fairly small local authority, secured funding from the former strategic waste fund for a private finance initiative agreement with Shanks to construct and operate an Ecodeco mechanical biological treatment plant for its municipal solid waste. The contract is worth £270 million over 25 years, which is more than £10 million a year. That has enabled Dumfries and Galloway Council to leap from the bottom of the recycling and recovery league tables to somewhere near the top. Irrespective of the pros and cons of the means of treatment—it does not, for example, separate different colours of glass and therefore glass cannot be recycled as glass; rather, it has to be used as a replacement for aggregate—or the method of financing, the project demonstrates the scale of investment that is needed in waste management. At the moment, I do not see where that investment will come from. I also wonder how local authorities are to be encouraged to work together on joint projects without the up-front carrot of levering in funding above and beyond their somewhat pressured council budgets.

There is a genuine issue here. We all aspire to zero waste and I am sure that we all want a long-term strategy that must be longer term than single

periods of government. We need to understand and tackle how the strategy will be funded and that means that we need to understand how we work with the private sector. There is difficulty with council budgets, so we need to consider how to lever in funding from elsewhere in order to fund some of the projects.

I was pleased to note the agreement last week between the cabinet secretary and the Labour Party's shadow cabinet secretary that there is a pressing need to tackle commercial and industrial waste in Scotland. The cabinet secretary reiterated that today. Household waste accounts for only 15 per cent of the waste produced in Scotland. The reduction of domestic and non-domestic waste needs to be considered jointly. I understand that that is also in the plan and I look forward to finding out more about it.

The amendments of Liam McArthur and John Scott—the new best friends—both express sentiments that we share. I understand that there is a problem with the wording of the Liberal Democrat motion in that it mentions the publication of the document rather than the process, but I look forward to Liam McArthur's explanation of that in his contribution.

I am pleased to move amendment S3M-6275.1, to insert at end:

"and to address the concerns raised in the Audit Scotland report, *Protecting and improving Scotland's environment*, that councils need additional waste management facilities to meet national landfill and recycling targets."

15:36

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I welcome this debate on how to further reduce waste in Scotland. It is important that we do that because recent volcanic events have emphasised how vulnerable we are as a society and, indeed, as a species to the smallest climatological change. Reducing waste directly reduces our carbon emissions. I know that we all agree that that must be our direction of travel even if, as Elaine Murray said, we do not know how to fund that goal.

It is worth noting that huge progress has already been made in the field of municipal waste reduction and I applaud South Ayrshire Council for having achieved among the highest recycling rates and acknowledge the efforts made by other high-achieving local authorities

Today's debate is about zero waste Scotland and the incorporation of seven former programmes into a single delivery mechanism, which I believe will be welcomed across Scotland. Scotland is a small country and the creation of a one-stop-shop Government agency that replaces seven previous programmes makes good sense,

notwithstanding Friends of the Earth's reasonable concerns about the loss of educational programmes targeted on waste prevention projects. I also welcome the further development of the concept of treating waste as a resource, rather than a management problem. In that context, huge potential exists for job creation in the area, given that we have 20 million tonnes of raw material to start with. The creation of 2,000 jobs is suggested in the Government's plan and a real opportunity exists for businesses large and small in the recycling business. Local and export markets for recyclable material and the uses that such material can be put to will grow again.

The minister said that the 25 per cent maximum figure of energy produced from waste would in future be from all waste. How does that differ from what it was before?

Richard Lochhead: I said that we are potentially moving away from having a cap—the current cap applies only to municipal waste—to regulating instead what can be put into energy-from-waste plants. The advice that we received through the consultation is that that is a better regulatory tool.

John Scott: I thank the minister for that clarification.

Reducing food waste, as highlighted in the Government's plan, is another area where much more can easily be achieved. Currently, around 30 per cent of food purchased in supermarkets is not consumed, but thrown out. With food security becoming an issue, household budgets under increasing pressure and greenhouse gas emissions increasing, the waste of 30 per cent of consumable food is almost criminal. I am certain that most people are not aware of how much food they leave on the side of their plate or throw out of their fridge and vegetable rack in the kitchen. That so much more could be done in our homes and kitchens to reduce waste, and therefore greenhouse gases, is a message that is not yet fully understood. In pursuing its zero waste policy, the Government should address food waste in future public education programmes.

The elephant in the room, to which my amendment refers, is non-municipal waste and what is to be done with it. As the Federation of Small Businesses asks in its briefing, what can be done to give small businesses greater access to kerbside recycling? I say to the minister that that is perhaps an easy win. Although we have made huge strides in reusing and recycling municipal waste, we have not as yet tackled head on the problem that 40 per cent of all our waste is industrial and commercial waste. Historically, we have had access to cheap landfill. Infrastructure has not been put in place and investment has not been made to deal with trade waste. That will be

the emerging problem of the next decade in waste management terms.

The problems of municipal waste are now largely being addressed. Although, of course, more must be done to reuse and recycle and to design out waste in packaging, the broad direction of travel in relation to the resolution of municipal waste issues has been established. However, that is not the case with non-municipal waste. There are those who argue that the huge effort put into resolving municipal waste issues has diverted attention and resources away from resolving the issue of commercial and industrial waste.

Perhaps the minister will tell us in his closing remarks how he hopes to address the problems of industrial and commercial waste. A new zero waste strategy is all very well, but if it does not help to put new infrastructure in place for non-municipal waste, our overall waste reduction strategy will be put at risk. The holistic approach that politicians of all parties so often espouse must be made real in Scotland if we are to be regarded as taking the issue seriously. I hope that the Government will tell us, if not today then soon, how it intends to address the issue.

In the spirit of moving the Government constructively towards its next goal, I commend the amendment in my name to the Parliament.

I move amendment S3M-6275.2, to insert at end:

“, and considers that greater encouragement to recycle and reuse must be given to the commercial and industrial sector and that a focus must be placed on ensuring that the necessary infrastructure is created and put in place in moving toward a zero-waste society.”

15:41

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): Back in March in this chamber, I had the opportunity to take a four-minute canter through the fundamentals of how we might deliver on our climate change objectives. Perhaps I should be grateful that only the Government's waste strategy has to be covered this afternoon.

I welcome the debate and the chance to focus on what is a key part of the challenge that we face in relation to climate change and in managing potentially valuable resources more efficiently in these difficult times.

I am happy to make it clear that the Scottish Liberal Democrats will support the Government's motion, along with the three amendments that have been lodged.

As the briefing that zero waste Scotland prepared for the debate makes clear, there has been real progress over recent years, which John Scott acknowledged. Under my colleague Ross

Finnie's stewardship, recycling rates in Scotland increased from an anaemic 7 per cent in 2001-02 to 25 per cent in 2005-06. Impressive though that rate of growth might be—further progress continues to be made—there is no escaping the fact that we started from an appallingly low base and that tougher, more complex and more costly challenges lie ahead, as the cabinet secretary acknowledged.

That is also reflected in Elaine Murray's amendment, which rightly highlights the warnings set out in the recent Audit Scotland report, "Protecting and improving Scotland's environment", which drew attention to the potential difficulties in incentivising and supporting collaborative action between local authorities as a result of reductions in the overall waste budgets. I know that ministers have rejected that argument in the past. Nevertheless, fears remain that to meet the challenges ahead, not only will additional waste management facilities be necessary but councils will increasingly require to act in a collaborative fashion, which, in turn, has resource implications.

John Scott's amendment identifies specific issues in relation to waste in the commercial and industrial sectors, which the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee discussed during its consideration of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill. There was clear evidence that much more attention needs to be focused on improving rates of recycling and reuse in those sectors—some options were set out this afternoon. The evidence sessions that the committee held at that time also flagged up the risks in adopting different and potentially conflicting approaches to reducing and managing waste. The Scottish Environmental Services Association expressed its concern about proposals for deposit and return schemes, which its members felt might undermine progress that had already been made on kerbside recycling initiatives. The fear seemed to be that, given the cost of putting in the necessary infrastructure and the difficulties in terms of messaging for the public and businesses, it is essential that the Government and the public sector more generally take decisions and stick to them.

The Government motion points to the need for clear, long-term stability for the necessary investment to deliver a zero waste Scotland. That very much speaks to the point that SESA and others made during our evidence sessions. Whatever is adopted this afternoon as a statement from the Parliament must reflect the urgency of the situation. That is why I hope that colleagues, including Elaine Murray, will be able to agree to back the amendment in my name.

I understand that the cabinet secretary disagrees but, as a zero waste strategy was

identified as an early priority in the SNP's 2007 manifesto, it is reasonable to have expected quicker progress—all the more so when the strategy appeared in the list of achievements of the Administration's first 100 days.

The urgency is brought home by the risks of not achieving the targets that have been set. The risks are that we will not meet our climate change objectives and that financial penalties will be imposed. COSLA's briefing estimates that fines for non-compliance with our EU obligations could be about €500 million per day. The briefing also says that the

“costs associated with underachievement in the medium to long term would be high and highly divisive ... the likelihood is that councils who have been successful in reaching their intended targets would not share the financial responsibility for any failure, although this can not be guaranteed.”

Unfortunately, time does not allow me to go into great detail about the potential benefits of waste-to-energy projects, on which the cabinet secretary touched. That means not just district heating systems, but innovative anaerobic digestion, such as the facility in Westray in my constituency. Such projects have developed successfully in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Through feed-in tariffs, we might be able to replicate that in Scotland. As the cabinet secretary conceded, sensitivities exist, but I trust that the Government's zero waste plan will address the issue, along with the other matters that have been mentioned in this brief debate.

I look forward finally to seeing the long-awaited plan and I encourage members to support not just the motion but each amendment at decision time.

I move amendment S3M-6275.3, to insert at end:

“; regrets the delay in the publication of the Zero Waste Plan, and recognises the necessity of meeting EU landfill diversion targets in order to avoid potentially punitive fines.”

15:46

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To achieve zero waste, as many people in the country as possible must be involved and must buy into the aim. That is probably the crunch. Through municipal waste initiatives, we have made good progress on the lamentably low base from which we started to measure. It is a credit to the people of Scotland that we have made such progress. In other countries, where such achievements have been attained over a longer period, greater progress has been made. We can expect to make more progress if we have the right attitude to involving people.

We must involve people through the debate about variable waste charging. WWF makes the important point that we must take into account the pay-as-you-throw approach to some kinds of

waste. People in cities have problems with waste collection. The outside bins in Edinburgh that we pass on our way to the Parliament are an example of that. If we had bins that sorted the waste, that would be much more helpful. My local council—Highland Council—has different collection processes in different parts of its area, but we nevertheless have separation at source. People will not buy into the aim until we can help with that.

We talk about the costs of such activities. Education costs will be involved and how the pay-as-you-throw approach is used must be examined carefully. A young family in which busy parents are bringing up children might have great problems in finding the time to deal with waste. We must find ways to help such people. The reason why schemes have succeeded in places such as Germany has been sorting at source.

Commercial waste is a much bigger subject. We are having an extension added to our house. The architects and builders are fairly eco-friendly, but a huge amount of unsorted waste has nevertheless been generated. It is unfortunate that that, too, adds to the problems of raising our targets. Having commercial people sort out the waste before they take it to landfill—or before it is recycled, as we move on to that—will be a central part of making progress. Having talked to many of the builders who have worked on our little project, I believe that commercial sites contain many skips that are full of indiscriminate waste. If all that were sorted, much of it could be used, which would help us enormously.

If we are to succeed, we must of course minimise waste in the first place. I am sure that we will have plenty of wood for our house's wood-fired stoves for many years to come from the excess of what was used to build the extension room that I mentioned. I do not expect everyone to be in that position, but that is the nature of the game. That practical example tells us that recycling is one of the most important things that we can do.

I am concerned about food waste. If the Scottish Retail Consortium is going to tell us how much people waste, it is time that it took hold of the BOGOF offers issue. Buy one, get one free encourages people to buy more and then throw it away. We have to try to get the supermarkets to buy into reduction at source so that people do not get to take home such offers.

15:50

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): Last week, at rural affairs and environment question time, I put a question on waste management to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment. I was pleased to hear Richard Lochhead outline the progress

that has been made since devolution in 1999. The cabinet secretary rightly highlighted the excellent contribution that local authorities have made thus far.

The purpose of my question last week was not to obtain a list of statistics about where we are at present in respect of waste management, but to highlight the concerns that companies that seek to be involved in waste management in the years ahead have put to me. Having identified the role that they can play in meeting the Scottish Government's waste management targets, the companies have set about proposing to councils how they can do so, only, in certain council areas, to be refused planning permission.

I am not asking the Scottish Government to take away planning powers from local authorities to ensure that such proposals are delivered—the companies I am talking about are not Donald Trump companies—but for the Government and our local authorities to take a joined-up approach. That would ensure that we not only reduced the amount of waste created by both the domestic and non-domestic sectors, but had the means to dispose of the waste and the funding to achieve the goals that we had set.

If we are to reduce further the amount of waste that is treated in Scotland, the Scottish Government will have to face up to its responsibilities to reduce the amount of waste that is created and secure the availability of appropriate waste management facilities. Some councils cannot be allowed to duck what is required; they are using the concordat to avoid taking their share of the responsibility. Our local authorities have rightly embraced zero waste strategies, with some already having made a good start at waste minimisation but, when it comes to waste disposal, many appear to want to leave it to other councils to do their dirty work for them.

Waste is a consequence and symptom of the type of lives that we live. The challenge is not only to come up with grand plans for living our lives in ways that do not contribute to resource depletion, but to find practical ways of addressing what we waste and dealing with waste where it happens. It is not enough to ask all the right questions and have good targets, we must also will the means to deliver on the strategy. We must go beyond doing the easy things. It may not be low-hanging fruit that we are after, perhaps it is low-lying waste, but we have to deal with the bigger issues and not just tackle the headline grabbers.

All local authorities must be made to address the planning permission problems that they are creating so that waste is processed throughout Scotland and not transported around the country for disposal. We must avoid the situation whereby some local authority areas become dumping

grounds at a time when others refuse to accept their responsibility to plan for waste management facilities in their areas.

The business of waste management has to be the business of both the Scottish Government and local authorities. The main requirement from both is commitment. That said, if we are genuinely committed to a sustainable future, we have to commit to the kind of planning decisions that are necessary to achieve that end. The word on the matter that we are hearing from the Scottish Government and our councils is unequivocal. That is to be welcomed. However, the evidence shows that their commitment is, at times, less than full.

15:54

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP):

From time to time, we have debates where there is little to choose between the parties. In the decade since devolution, successive Administrations have developed ideas and built upon them. Waste management is a policy area where the argument is often limited to the detail. Thus far in the debate, there has been consensus on the general direction of policy.

That there is a need for a zero waste strategy is common sense. It is important in our attempts to meet exacting climate change targets, given that the methane gas that is created by landfill is 20 times as damaging to our climate as carbon dioxide is. Such a strategy should bring about long-term improvements to the environment of our country. At the same time, it can encourage more efficient use of resources, boost sustainable growth and create jobs in new areas.

In 2003, the previous Administration introduced the national waste plan. In the interim, good progress has been made in several areas, but we all acknowledge that much more still needs to be done. I look forward to the Scottish Government's zero waste plan moving us forward again.

Tackling waste is a multifaceted problem, and it must be recognised as such. The action plan will require to cover many specific policy areas as we seek to prevent waste, reuse materials and recycle them. I can cover only a couple of policy areas in the limited time that is available to me.

It was encouraging to note that recycling rates had reached 39 per cent in the two most recent quarters for which we have statistics. We can be cautiously optimistic about reaching the 40 per cent target for 2010—although we will have to see whether we can reach future targets. The findings from the first national survey by Scottish councils on the subject of waste highlight major opportunities for households to recycle even more if they have the opportunity to do so. Two thirds of newspapers and magazines are being recycled,

but we are struggling with other materials. It was striking to note that, in comparison, only 19 per cent of plastic bottles are being recycled. There are undoubtedly a number of reasons for that, first and foremost the technical difficulties of recycling that material and the availability of facilities. We need to ensure that local authorities—in both rural and urban areas—are providing more facilities and easier collections for individuals. I hope that that sort of issue is detailed in the action plan.

It is our failure to deal with food, more than any other type of waste, that requires most work, as many members have already mentioned—particularly if we are to continue to meet our targets under European directives on landfill. I welcome the support that the Government is providing for anaerobic digestion plants and other facilities for dealing with food waste. I look forward, in particular, to seeing what lessons have been taken on board from the trials that have been taking place in several local authorities to collect food waste from households.

It is vital that we do not focus on municipal waste to the detriment of the bigger picture. As members have already mentioned, we must start to shift our attention to commercial waste, which fills five times as much space in our landfill sites as municipal waste. Work under the Waste and Resources Action Programme and voluntary agreements are welcome, but we need to do more.

It is worth noting, at this exciting time in UK politics, that the key policy lever of the landfill tax remains under Westminster control. The Calman commission recommended that that be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, and I certainly hope that that happens in the near future and is dealt with quickly by the new friends in the Tory and Liberal Democrat parties.

15:58

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Like other members, I welcome today's debate on this important environmental issue. It is unfortunate that, with less than a year to go until the Scottish National Party finishes its term of office, we are still waiting on the waste plan.

In any Government waste strategy, environmental justice must be paramount. Worryingly, research has shown that more deprived communities bear a disproportionate burden of negative environmental impacts, such as industrial pollution.

On 24 January 2008, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment told the Parliament:

“the Scottish people voted for a Parliament that would improve our environment”.—[*Official Report*, 24 January 2008; c 5491.]

I hope that the cabinet secretary will acknowledge that the idea of “environment” means more to people than simply a global view of carbon reduction targets. Under the Scottish Government's zero waste strategy, people's local environments and communities should not be sacrificed for the purposes of meeting global environmental targets. It is essential, in pursuance of perfectly laudable aims on waste reduction, that recycling centres and new waste disposal plants are not situated in built-up residential areas, where associated pollution could cause a disproportionate burden in the form of poor air quality, increased traffic and noise nuisance. That is particularly important in areas such as mine that have suffered from their industrial past.

The cabinet secretary will be aware that I wrote to him in September about the concerns of thousands of my constituents in relation to an application by Shore Energy to build a pyrolysis incinerator in Coatbridge. My constituents think that the construction and operation of that private business venture would have a negative impact on quality of life for the many families who live in the large residential areas that are adjacent to the proposed site—and for families throughout Coatbridge.

The Coatbridge area has sufficient waste reduction facilities, as Michael McMahon said, and has suffered from landfill sites over the years. I do not intend to stand by and allow my constituency to become the waste capital of Scotland. Coatbridge cannot be the dumping ground for everyone else's waste. Maggie Proctor, one of the protesters, said at a public meeting:

“We cannot, and will not, accept that this incinerator is necessary for Monklands.”

She went on to say of the company:

“Their only risk is financial, they are asking us to risk so much more.”

In response to a question that I asked in the Parliament, the cabinet secretary said that North Lanarkshire Council

“has already passed the 2010 recycling target and has achieved a commendable rate of 41 per cent. It is clear that the member's area is making substantial progress and we should pay tribute to it for doing so.”—[*Official Report*, 7 January 2010; c 22541.]

Particularly given that the council is meeting its targets, it would be unfair, environmentally unjust and completely unacceptable to impose a pyrolysis plant on my constituents.

I am happy to say that North Lanarkshire Council has rejected the planning application for the plant. It would be a bad day for democracy if

the clear wishes of thousands of my constituents and the considered opinion of the local authority were overturned following an appeal by a single private company.

I welcome the amendment in Elaine Murray's name. Local authorities need more assistance in meeting targets, and I am pleased that North Lanarkshire Council has surpassed its targets for this year. I understand that Government faces a major challenge in meeting the zero waste targets and I question whether meeting them can best be achieved by leaving waste management in the hands of private companies, whose overriding concern is the maximisation of profit and who depend on volumes of waste to make money—that is ironic.

If the Government is serious about improving the environment on a local as well as global scale, serious consideration must be given to the direct funding and building of recycling and waste facilities in a not-for-profit way. That is important in relation to an untested process such as pyrolysis, the pollutant effects of which are disputed. The process could be dangerous to health, to our environment and to our children's wellbeing.

I tried to make the point earlier that if we had not-for-profit arrangements the energy that was produced could be used for the benefit of communities rather than for the profit of privateers.

The Scottish Government must ensure that no single area is burdened with a disproportionate number of waste management facilities.

Concern for the planet, the local environment and our children's future should be the motivating factors for any Government in implementing the zero waste strategy. The issue should not be left to privateers in their pursuit of profit.

16:02

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): It is fair to say that progress has been made since the Greens first pushed the zero waste agenda in the Scottish Parliament and the issue was first debated here. There have been achievements that Scotland can celebrate, especially the work of our community businesses, which deliver the real gains in reuse.

As the cabinet secretary said, Scotland has also increased its household recycling and composting rates. However, more than half of our potential recyclates and raw materials are still being thrown away into landfill or making their way to incineration. We are not yet witnessing the transformative shift to waste reduction and minimisation that Scotland so urgently needs.

A zero waste Scotland is part of a green economy, in which waste is designed out of the

system, products are made to be easily reused and recycled, and resources are used as efficiently as possible. Waste is no longer seen as waste; it is viewed as a rich resource that can create wealth and jobs. I have often said in that context that we need to change our language. Perhaps we should try never to use the word "waste" until we are talking about something that has been thrown away—only at that point does something become waste.

It is helpful that we will soon have sight of a plan that will, I hope, set out how the Scottish Government intends to make the genuine shift that is needed. However, what will the plan contain? I have four questions for the cabinet secretary. First, will a target be set for overall waste reduction, which is the most radical and most urgent solution? Secondly, will a specific target for reuse be set? Thirdly, will the Scottish Government end its support for building a new generation of the incinerators that many councils in Scotland propose, despite repeated local rejections of those mass-burn plans? That relates to the issue that Elaine Smith raised.

Fourthly, I have been distressed by the fact that there has been little recognition in the debate so far of the huge contribution that community recycling has made over the past 10 or 12 years to motivating the people of Scotland to recycle. Groups such as the Golspie Recycling and Environmental Action Network, Colinton community recyclers and the Campbeltown recycling initiative have made a tremendous contribution. Will there be some recognition of that in the plan that the minister will show us at some time in the near future? If not, it would be wholly regrettable.

Elaine Smith: Does Robin Harper share my concern that such projects might suffer from the underfunded council tax freeze?

Robin Harper: That is a sensible concern to raise, and I thank Elaine Smith for it.

Becoming a zero waste Scotland requires leadership and commitment from the Scottish ministers, who need to demonstrate how we can transform Scotland's attitude to resource use, otherwise any zero waste plan will simply become a waste of paper in itself. It might say the right things, but if ministers and councils do not do the right things we will not achieve the transformation that we need to benefit our economy, reduce climate change emissions and benefit people's health.

How will the zero waste plan—this is another question, sorry; it is number 5—cut across other ministerial portfolios? Will the cabinet secretary join forces with the energy and climate change ministers to ensure that recycled materials can

end up becoming insulation to warm people's homes, thereby saving money, improving health and cutting carbon emissions? Will there be a joined-up plan?

I hope that it will be made clear in the forthcoming zero waste plan that zero waste is not only about reducing waste as rubbish but about reducing wasted energy through poorly insulated houses. That is the kind of understanding of zero waste and commitment that we need from ministers if the plan is to be taken seriously.

16:07

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): The Scottish Government's proposals for a simplified and coherent zero waste policy are essential. The goal should be twofold: first, to increase recycling and composting so that we reduce the waste that goes to landfill; secondly, to make recycling straightforward and easy. A Scandinavian friend who knows about such things told me that he had counted 76 types of recycling system available in today's Scotland. With his background, he is probably correct.

As any archaeologist will say, there is nothing so informative as a midden. From the rubbish of the castle of Dunadd, we know that in the middle of the dark ages the Celtic kings drank wine from Bordeaux and imported herbs from the eastern Mediterranean. We have enough sense to be historians ourselves and to note and understand how changes in our way of life have influenced the increase in waste and its control and handling. For instance, we should consider the impact of central heating. Those of us of a certain age remember how much was burned in the grate of the home fire. So many ways of recycling things—such as briquettes made out of newspapers—were devised and used to handle waste at home.

We must consider matters such as heating, large supermarkets, excessive packaging and the use of bottled instead of tap water. At any point along a Scottish road, it is possible to see a lorry running from Scotland to England carrying Highland Spring water passing a lorry loaded with Perrier water travelling to Scotland, which makes one wonder a bit about the progress of today's civilisation. Can such patterns be reversed?

How does the waste output change from the young to mature families, single people and the elderly? I recollect, as a young father in Germany, having huge quantities of waste to deal with because of used nappies. For the elderly, sadly, the same process tends to repeat itself. What are their requirements when it comes to recycling, and does landfill actually work? In a famous landfill case in Germany, a thoughtful council dug up its landfill site and discovered that, 20 years on, most

newspapers, far from decaying, were still quite legible and that nappies were still intact.

There are different strategies for dealing with domestic waste, one of which is simply to avoid producing it. We have already heard about the amount of food that is thrown out—£1 billion-worth in Scotland alone, which amounts to an estimated £430 per household. People could be discouraged from two-for-one offers by having to think about whether they will use all the food, which might be beneficial in targeting avoidable food waste. Production should be shifted towards biodegradable and recyclable products—for example, biodegradable paper nappies would be as effective as nappies made out of cellulose, and we could ensure that all food containers are fully recyclable.

We could have deposit systems for glass, plastic and metal drinking containers, which are very successful in Europe and increase recycling of some materials to more than 90 per cent. Consumers could be given cash penalties for not returning items, which would allow producers to curb wasteful packaging. Sellers could provide intake points for bottles.

We could also simplify matters by co-ordinating recycling across Scotland to prevent confusion among users and recycling companies and to reduce overall costs. As other EU countries have shown, it is more efficient and easier to collect in wide categories, such as paper and cardboard, organic waste, plastic and synthetic materials, and some metals. It can be difficult to separate manually different types of waste, but up-to-date recycling technologies can separate it automatically. After a certain time, the technologies pay for themselves.

Getting energy from waste raises the problems that Robin Harper pointed out, but burning need not necessarily be involved, because there are other methods of getting energy from waste, for example using forms of organic destruction that can yield useful by-products and energy.

All that is useful, but let us remember, once we have dealt with our waste and rubbish, that the great power station of Longannet shoots 7 million tonnes of carbon dioxide into the air every year and is only 36 per cent efficient.

16:12

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): A commitment to zero waste is a fine thing that we can all agree on—indeed, we can do so this afternoon. However, I am concerned about the termination of waste prevention projects. Friends of the Earth Scotland ran a project called communities reducing excess waste, which was funded by the investment in community recycling

and social enterprise III programme, with a focus on waste prevention as opposed to recycling. The CREW project involved training days throughout Scotland, providing community volunteers with the training, skills, resources and motivation to run their own events, projects and workshops within their local communities. However, after a year and a half, funding for the final year of the project was terminated. Now, that was a waste, especially since losing funding in the final year did not allow for proper evaluation.

Community development takes time. It is not enough to recruit volunteers then not give them the tools, not the least of which is paid workers to support them. Communities need support and time to put resources in place to allow projects to flourish. They need support in project planning, staff recruitment, training volunteers and so on. That can take time, but the CREW project was cut before it had time to build up a head of steam.

I am also concerned about the impact that such cuts have on volunteer numbers. Such abrupt termination of funding discourages community participation and undermines public confidence in programmes. Why is the Scottish Government pursuing a policy of public disengagement in that regard? Doing so is contrary to the aims of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. Waste prevention projects should be given priority to enable public engagement and awareness raising, and reduce the need for landfill diversion and recycling.

The lack of monitoring and evaluation is disappointing. There are always lessons to be learned. Ignoring those lessons wastes taxpayers' money. Evaluation should be integral to the Scottish Government programme, not something that can be abandoned on a whim. I have written to the cabinet secretary on that issue, but many questions remain unanswered. On that basis, I am not sure how well he would be evaluated.

There are a number of questions that he may wish to take the opportunity to answer. What percentage of waste prevention projects have been cut? How many projects are ending due to Scottish Government budget cuts? What percentage of waste prevention projects that are funded by the INCREASE III programme will be terminated in 2010?

We need a more ambitious and more joined-up approach to climate change and environmental issues. It is simply not good enough that the climate change programme, including the commitment to public engagement, is not mainstreamed across all Scottish Government departments.

The zero waste plan will be welcome, but Government rhetoric needs to be reflected in

practice. If communities are to participate in waste management, they need the resources and tools that will allow them to do so. As ever, actions speak louder than words.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): We move to the winding up speeches.

16:16

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): It goes without saying that I welcome the chance to sum up the debate. Of course, Liberal Democrats support the idea of zero waste and waste prevention and, by extension, any initiative that is aimed at achieving it. This has been a fairly convivial debate, in that that view is shared across the parties. I am glad that my new friend John Scott agrees with it, just as David agrees with Nick.

My only disappointment—which is a significant one—is that we have been here before, as other members have said. Little progress seems to have been made since January 2008 on producing a defined zero waste strategy. That is especially disappointing given the good start that the Liberal Democrats made in 2003, under Ross Finnie's stewardship, with the launch of the national waste strategy, as Liam McArthur and Shirley-Anne Somerville recognised.

Christopher Harvie highlighted the problem of nappies in German landfill sites. Although Scotland has met some landfill targets a year early, levels of recycling in some areas of Scotland remain unacceptably low. According to SEPA, Scotland recycled or composted only 34.25 per cent of its municipal waste in 2008-09. The target is to recycle or compost 40 per cent of municipal waste by 2010, but the rate in some local authority areas is as low as 18.5 per cent. Although the upward trend in recycling rates is welcome, organisations such as SEPA and the FSB continue to believe that a lack of suitable infrastructure and facilities is having an impact on that trend.

According to a report in 2007 by Audit Scotland, there is no guarantee that Scotland is on track to meet its 2013 landfill directive targets. Only 26 per cent of all councils are confident that they will meet those objectives. The process will be made harder by the removal of £26 million from the zero waste fund, which is especially worrying from the point of view of fines. Audit Scotland's 2007 report concluded that three councils—Aberdeenshire, Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway, which Elaine Murray mentioned—had been penalised for exceeding their landfill allowances. The fines that were imposed were recognised to be relatively small at the time, but the report went on to say that future penalties would be more

severe and could pose a risk to many councils. Information from SEPA suggests that as the Scottish Government has allocated annual landfill allowances to each Scottish local authority until the 2009-10 financial year, it remains unclear where local authorities stand.

In October 2008, Richard Lochhead indicated that fines that were associated with the landfill allowance scheme had been temporarily suspended because COSLA and the Scottish Government had entered into discussions to determine how best to ensure that waste management targets would be achieved in the longer term, but in an answer to a parliamentary question in 2007 he stated that if the UK failed to meet landfill directive targets in 2010, 2013 and 2020, the regulations provided for supplementary penalties for those authorities that exceeded their allowances. However, in the zero waste plan consultation, it was revealed that the landfill allowance scheme has been suspended in principle until May 2011, which is quite an interesting date, and I fear that we might be building up problems for the future.

Also worrying is the issue of targets, to which Robin Harper alluded. The Audit Scotland report identified that many councils might have difficulties in meeting their 2013 landfill directive targets and, according to an Audit Scotland survey, only 26 per cent of local authorities were confident or very confident of meeting their 2013 objectives, while 74 per cent were either unsure or not very confident, and 23 per cent were not confident at all. As the report said, with the combination of tight timescales and the volume of waste that current schemes can treat, Scotland will not be able to treat enough residual waste to meet our 2013 landfill directive targets.

There is much work to be done. In its fourth year of power, the Government disappoints us by not having made quicker progress on waste. The Liberal Democrat amendment highlights the threat of fines if we do not meet our landfill directive targets, and I fear that the Government will try to pass responsibility for those fines to local authorities.

16:21

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): Today's short debate has shown that all sides in the chamber agree on the need for a coherent waste policy to encourage the prevention of waste and the efficient use of resources. We also agree that investment in waste recycling infrastructure will be essential if we are to have any hope of delivering a zero waste Scotland: Elaine Murray made some interesting points about resourcing that. I therefore hope that the forthcoming zero waste plan will pave the way for reducing the

amount of waste that we produce, for the reuse of resources, and for increasing recycling levels. The cabinet secretary has shared some of his thoughts on waste reduction this afternoon, and we await the plan with interest.

If we accept that a zero waste Scotland is our aspiration, everyone needs to consider how to contribute to that, whether we are householders, in business or involved in the public or voluntary sectors. If we succeed, the benefits will be considerable in environmental, social and economic terms, will help in the fight against climate change, and will afford significant business opportunities.

A number of speakers focused on food and commercial waste, which clearly contribute enormously to the total amount of waste that we generate. Any zero waste plan must target the 0.5 million tonnes of packaging and the 650,000 tonnes of food waste that are thrown out each year by Scottish households. With 75 per cent of all Scotland's waste coming from commercial organisations, that must also be targeted.

Although I personally try to be careful when I am buying food, I am as guilty as anyone of generating food waste, which I am now trying to save for composting as far as possible. However, it is quite difficult for a housewife nowadays to stick to buying the foods that she needs with every supermarket pushing multiple packs of produce at her, as Rob Gibson highlighted. Just yesterday, I went to purchase a pack of yoghurt drinks to find that one pack cost £2.56, but I could get two packs for £4: a temptation that I could not resist. I will use what I bought, but similar offers apply to much more perishable foods like soft fruit and vegetables, which are then wasted. Indeed, it is sometimes hard to see the unit price in some supermarkets because the two-for-one offer, or whatever the offer is, is far more prominently displayed. We need co-operation from the supermarkets if we are to be encouraged to change our buying habits to avoid food waste.

Other members have dealt with large-scale commercial waste in detail this afternoon. Councils must get together with local businesses to identify their recycling needs and put in place the necessary infrastructure and the incentives to use it. I have a great deal of sympathy with the FSB, members of which are frustrated in their efforts to recycle waste by the current lack of kerbside recycling facilities and centres that are accessible to small businesses.

Zero waste Scotland is a welcome development. As the FSB pointed out in its briefing for this debate, until now at least seven different bodies delivered national business waste and environmental advice, on top of a lot of other local projects and organisations. That overlap of

publicly funded organisations was inefficient and confusing for the business community. I hope that zero waste Scotland, as a one-stop shop, will be a greatly improved means of giving advice and support to businesses, individuals, local authorities and communities.

Zero waste is a desirable aspiration, but if there is to be hope of achieving anything even close to it, a huge effort will be required to change our habits as consumers, and serious investment will be needed to secure the necessary recycling infrastructure, especially for commercial organisations. I hope that the zero waste plan will be effective in moving us towards a zero waste Scotland, and I look forward to studying it in due course.

16:25

Elaine Murray: Notwithstanding my preference for debating a published plan and how it would be taken forward, this has been an interesting debate, in which we have talked about rubbish rather than talked rubbish.

A number of important points were made about waste reduction and prevention, improving recycling, community recycling and the problems of differential recycling rates. Michael McMahon and Elaine Smith referred to some local authorities becoming dumping grounds because others do not take seriously their responsibilities for the disposal of their own waste.

Several members referred to the sometimes contentious issue of energy from waste. Robin Harper and Elaine Smith spoke about pyrolysis, and Chris Harvie referred to other techniques that are perhaps environmentally preferable. Dumfries and Galloway Council had the first energy-from-waste plant in Scotland to use the batch gasification technique. It uses solid recovered fuel from the Ecodeco plant nearby, and it has helped address the problem, which Jim Hume referred to, of the likelihood of landfill fines for the local authority. The plant can produce up to 6.2MW of energy, enough to heat 15,000 homes, and it supplies that to the national grid. On the other side, only 15,000 of the potential 60,000 tonnes of fuel are likely to be produced by the mechanical biological treatment plant. The remainder will come from other sources, including hazardous materials such as food waste, tyres, inks, rubber and heavily contaminated food packaging.

COSLA states in its briefing that energy from waste has an essential part to play in local authority strategies. It argues that the approach should not be rigid and that the 25 per cent cap needs to be clarified. I am interested to hear that there has been a change of view from the Government, that the 25 per cent cap is now not

likely to be implemented and that it will be replaced by regulation. That is to be welcomed, and I look forward to hearing more about it.

When we consider energy from waste, we must remember that it should be considered in the waste hierarchy, which is that waste that is used to produce energy must be waste that cannot reasonably be reused or recycled. Moreover, it should be coupled with efficient energy recovery and, if linked to efficient combined heat and power systems, it can be eligible for renewables obligation certificates and can contribute to meeting our climate change targets. However, we should not use the techniques if there is any other possible use for the waste that has been produced.

John Scott referred to the opportunities for employment in the new technologies and the possibility of 2,000 green jobs. Scotland must take advantage of the opportunities that are presented and the market development that is possible in new technologies for dealing with waste. In my constituency, one possible use for the former Chapelcross nuclear power plant is as a site for the development of green jobs in reuse and recycling.

Several members, including Robin Harper, mentioned waste prevention. Last year, WRAP—the Waste and Resources Action Programme—reported that £1 billion of food is needlessly thrown away at a cost of £430 to every household, rising to £550 to families with children. That is 570,000 tonnes of food, decaying to 1.7 million tonnes of CO₂, which is a scandal when so much of the world is without adequate food. It is an environmental problem, and it is a waste of money to individual families. The issue needs to be tackled. Rob Gibson and Nanette Milne referred to supermarket BOGOFs and multiple deals, but there is also an issue of food being available only in large packs, which is not particularly handy for single or elderly people.

It is true that most families probably have no idea how much food and money they are wasting, which is why educating people about waste prevention is important. Cathy Peattie and Friends of the Earth have made an important point in raising concerns that insufficient emphasis and money are put on prevention rather than on recycling and reuse. Cathy Peattie described to us the role of the INCREASE III project in educating volunteers and the time that it takes to train those volunteers and to educate the public. It is a great pity that that project was terminated in its last year of funding, because it had an important role to play. Waste prevention—domestic, commercial or industrial—is at the top of the hierarchy and needs to be incentivised. We need to look at the ways in which we do that.

I am pleased to note the progress that is being made. There is cross-party support for the approach and that will remain stable in the long term, given that the issue will exist for many generations in the Parliament and we will have to continue to work towards achieving zero waste. We have done a lot of talking over the past three years, so let us get cracking, implement the zero waste plan and look at the way in which we will resource it in the future.

16:30

Richard Lochhead: This has been a good debate. I am delighted that all parties wish to travel in the same direction and that we all find it unacceptable that in this day and age in Scotland we continue every year to send tens of millions of tonnes of waste, which is a valuable resource, to big holes in the ground. I agree with many members that there is a sense of urgency, because we want to tackle the issue sooner rather than later.

The Liberal Democrats suggested that there has been a delay in publishing the Scottish Government's zero waste plan, which is due to appear in the next two or three weeks. I remind the chamber, especially a number of the parties that are represented here, that back in 1999 SEPA published the Scottish waste strategy. Four years later, SEPA and the then Scottish Executive published the national waste plan. It took four years for the previous Administration to get its original plan off the ground. In January 2008, the Scottish National Party Government, with the support of the other parties that are represented in the chamber—which we welcomed—announced its intention to have a new emphasis on moving towards a zero waste society. Two years later, we are on the brink of publishing Scotland's first zero waste plan.

I have looked at my public comments on the issue. I said that the plan was due to be published in spring 2010, so I am surprised that the Liberal Democrat amendment states that there has been a delay in its publication. I appeal to the Labour Party and the Conservatives to note that it says on the internet today that spring in Scotland is due to end on 21 June 2010; I checked that before I came to the chamber. The secret cult of which the Liberal Democrats may be members may have a different calendar, but the calendar to which most members stick says that spring ends and summer begins around 21 June. I appeal to the Labour Party and the Conservatives to show common sense, of which I know they have volumes, and to accept that the Liberal Democrat amendment is not accurate. I am sure that they will not wish to support it. I am happy to support the Conservative and Labour amendments, as they highlight

important issues that we must keep at the forefront of our minds.

A number of complex issues have been raised. Elaine Smith and Michael McMahon, among others, referred to the need to build infrastructure in Scotland to ensure that, as a nation, we meet the important targets that have been set. However, the fact that Elaine Smith and Michael McMahon represent the same party and are sitting on the same bench in the same part of the chamber highlights some of the difficulties and complexities that are associated with building the right infrastructure in Scotland. Michael McMahon said that councils must take brave decisions on applications for infrastructure and appeared to suggest that the Scottish Government should work with local authorities to ensure that such decisions are taken. Elaine Smith explained that she was campaigning against projects in her constituency—for perfectly valid and correct reasons, no doubt, but the difference between the two members' positions sums up the complexities to which I have referred.

Michael McMahon: I cannot let the minister get away with that. There is no contradiction between what I said and what Elaine Smith said. We represent constituencies that sit side by side and we are aware of the number of waste facilities that exist in the localities that we represent. An additional facility in the area would not be welcome. Some companies are looking to North Lanarkshire because of refusals in other areas. We want everyone to take their share.

Richard Lochhead: I am not arguing against the member's sentiments. I merely pointed out that he commented that councils were rejecting too many applications and that that highlighted the complexities of the issues that we face as a country, because another Labour member on the same bench was arguing against having some waste facilities in the communities that she and Michael McMahon represent.

Tough choices lie ahead. Do we want to have a lot of landfill sites? Do we want barren landscapes, because we have used up all the resources, or do we want to have treatment facilities in some parts of the country instead? Those are difficult debates for our communities and it is only right that they should have a say in where some of the facilities are based. We will have to take some big, brave decisions in the months and years ahead if we are to achieve some of the targets.

Affordability is always an issue. I am surprised by some members, particularly on the Labour benches, calling for more direct funding from the Scottish Government, when we are all aware of the financial climate in which we are working. Less funding will be available to the Scottish Government in the future, not more. I ask Labour

members, in particular, to think before they speak and call non-stop for more funds from the Government to address some of the important issues.

Elaine Murray: I was asking not for additional funding, but for clarification of the Scottish Futures Trust and how it might provide funding for infrastructure, and about the role of the Parliament.

Richard Lochhead: I was referring to Elaine Smith, who called for more direct funding from the Scottish Government for some of these projects. I am highlighting the financial difficulties and the realism that is called for.

Elaine Smith: Will the cabinet secretary accept an intervention?

Richard Lochhead: I am sorry. I have taken a number of interventions so far.

We cannot afford not to take action. Landfill taxes will have to be paid if local authorities do not take the relevant action and there are other penalties that could come down from the EU for Scotland, as a country. Those will, in turn, impact on local authorities if certain targets are not met. Local authorities are recognising that a good financial case is stacking up for building some of the facilities and for taking the right action around the country. I have a list of infrastructural projects that are in the planning system for many communities in Scotland. Some are, no doubt, controversial and some are absolutely essential if we are to achieve the targets.

Much has been happening over the past two or three years. We met our landfill directive target for diverting biodegradable municipal waste from landfill 18 months ahead of the 2013 deadline. Councils are now recycling approximately 36 per cent of municipal waste and are on track for the 40 per cent target by the end of this year. We have streamlined and simplified the delivery landscape for our zero waste advice and guidance and we now have the single zero waste Scotland delivery programme. The Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, which addressed some of the waste issues that we have been debating today, has gone through Parliament.

A new dialogue is taking place with the retail sector. Many people mentioned the role of our shops and retail outlets in packaging and related issues. From going into our local supermarkets and seeing the number of bags for life that customers are using, we all know that things are changing in that regard. Scotland's first recycling zone has been built in the past couple of years and reverse vending machines have been installed in some supermarkets in Scotland. There have been a lot of firsts over the last couple of years. We are heading in the right direction.

We need a new emphasis and that is what the zero waste plan is about. I welcome the fact that many members have acknowledged the need for that new emphasis. The zero waste principle is about the fact that, as Robin Harper said, we should see waste as a valuable resource. We should treat all waste with equal importance. The emphasis, so far, has been on household recycling and municipal waste. Next, we will have to tackle all waste in Scotland. We must look at landfill bans, new regulatory measures, mandatory collection of food waste from households and early separation of materials to make all of that much easier. That is the new emphasis that we all agree on and which will be at the heart of the zero waste plan that will be published. As John Scott mentioned, the issue of commercial and industrial waste must be at the heart of that plan.

We do not have good robust data on commercial and industrial waste. We have to tackle that, and it will be addressed by the plan when it is published. We know the broad-brush figures, but we do not know where all the commercial and industrial waste goes and how much of that waste is transported. We must identify that in the first instance, perhaps before we can identify proper targets that we want to adopt. Let us, at least, welcome the fact that the industrial and construction sectors in Scotland have adopted a target in the past year or two to halve the amount of waste that they send to landfill by 2012. That is going in the right direction, and we have seen more producer responsibility legislation in this Parliament and throughout Europe in the past year or so.

Considerable progress has been made, much of it since devolution in 1999. People were elected to this Parliament because they wanted to protect Scotland's special environment and resources. We have taken many decisions, on a consensus basis, to ensure that that happens. We need the support of the people of Scotland, who are changing their habits and lifestyles to support that aim. We also need the support of community organisations. I support the point made by Robin Harper and others that we owe a huge debt to social enterprises and community bodies that have played such a role in their communities. Some £2.5 million every year goes, through the proper channels, to fund that type of activity. However, I am happy to look into the points that were raised by Cathy Peattie about some of the wider impacts of local decision making.

We need the support of businesses, households and communities to travel down the road towards a zero waste society. I welcome today's debate. I have taken note of a number of good points and we will do our best to ensure that some of them are reflected in the zero waste plan, which has not

been delayed and will be published in the next two or three weeks.

William Simpson's Home (Transfer of Property etc) (Scotland) Bill: Preliminary Stage

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-6258, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on the William Simpson's Home (Transfer of Property etc) (Scotland) Bill. I call on Shirley-Anne Somerville to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the William Simpson's Home (Transfer of Property etc) (Scotland) Bill Committee.

16:40

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): I am pleased to open the preliminary stage debate on the William Simpson's Home (Transfer of Property etc) (Scotland) Bill, and to set out the committee's consideration of this important area of work. In considering the general principles of the bill, the committee was interested to hear evidence on the operation of the home and its ambitions for the future.

In 1829, Francis Simpson of Plean gifted his estate to trustees to establish the William Simpson's home. He made the gift in memory of his son, William, who had died at sea. The trustees sought and were granted incorporation under a private act of Parliament—the Simpson's Asylum Act 1864, which received royal assent on 23 June 1864.

The home currently provides specialist residential accommodation for up to 44 service users with alcohol-related brain damage and mental health problems. In a separate building within the grounds is a facility that provides respite and day-care facilities for up to 10 persons. Local authorities throughout central Scotland use the service, with Falkirk Council and Stirling Council being the home's principal customers.

The trustees are promoting the bill so that the home can be set up as a charitable company. They consider that that will allow them to improve the home's governance arrangements and provide its services to a wider and larger group of people. They also consider that the changes that they seek are not possible under the terms of the home's constitution, which are set out in the 1864 act, and that it is in the best interests of the home to transfer its property, rights, duties, interests, employees and liabilities to a new charitable company and to repeal the 1864 act.

To inform its consideration, the committee took evidence from the home's trustees, patron and service users, from an advocate who has worked with some of the service users, and from

representatives of Stirling and Falkirk councils. The committee also invited written evidence from the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator, the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care and a user's family. We are grateful to all those who took the time to contribute either oral or written evidence, all of which greatly assisted the committee's deliberations.

We were keen to establish the extent of the restrictions that the terms of the 1864 act place on the trustees and the home, and to establish whether the bill is necessary. The first key issue is the appointment of trustees. Under the 1864 act, two of the trustees must be the current sheriff principal of the area and the minister of St Ninian's church in Stirling. Although there are certainly no complaints regarding those who currently hold those posts, current trustee the Rev Gary McIntyre pointed out that he and the sheriff principal are both limited in the amount of time that they can offer the home, which is now a sizeable operation.

If the new structure is established, the home will have both members and directors. The promoter suggests that that structure will provide a greater opportunity to include the widest possible representation in the running of the home, potentially involving representatives of the local community. The committee raised the point that users' families could also be included, and we understand that the home will consider that. The home's patron, Dennis Canavan, emphasised the close links between the home and the local community and said that local people might be interested in becoming members.

Another key issue that witnesses raised is the restriction on who can access the services that are provided. Under the 1864 act, the home can offer its full service only to "men of advanced age". Evidence to the committee suggests that, sadly, changes in society have led to increased demand and a change in the profile of those who need the home's services. Witnesses told the committee about the growing number of cases of alcohol-related dementia and said that prevalence rates among younger men and women, some only in their 30s, are increasing. We learned that very few facilities in Scotland provide the kind of specialist care that the home offers and it is clear that those who run the home and those who are responsible for referring its users to its services want those services to be available to men and women of all ages, in the future.

It is also clearly important for modern charities that they have appropriate governance arrangements in place. At the moment, the home is regulated by OSCR, but the trustees feel that their constitution restricts their ability to manage the home in accordance with modern governance requirements. For example, we heard of the

home's difficulty in entering contractual relationships to support its development, and the trustees told members of the committee that they want the same powers and rights that a charity that was being set up today in Scotland would have.

The promoters have concluded that establishing a company limited by guarantee, and with charitable status, is the best way forward, because that structure would protect trustees from unlimited liability. We understand and note that the proposed Scottish charitable incorporated organisation model, which would have provided such protection, is still not available to the trustees as an option.

In summary, the committee recognises the necessity of the bill to the home's operation and future development and therefore agrees to its general principles.

The committee is also required to consider whether it is appropriate for the bill to proceed as a private bill, in accordance with rule 9A.8.3 of standing orders. That involves the committee satisfying itself first, that the bill conforms to the definition of a private bill as set out in rule 9A.1.1 and, secondly, that the accompanying documents conform to rule 9A.2.3 in order to allow the bill's proper scrutiny. The committee's consideration of the issues is set out in its report but, in brief, it agreed that the bill conforms to the definition of a private bill and that the accompanying documents are adequate to allow proper scrutiny. It should also be noted that the committee received no objections to the bill.

Once again, I thank all those who gave evidence to the committee and take this opportunity to thank my fellow committee members and the clerks for their support.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the William Simpson's Home (Transfer of Property etc.) (Scotland) Bill and that the Bill should proceed as a Private Bill.

16:47

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):

The committee convener has set out the committee's consideration of the bill so, in my speech, I want to focus on a few details. As has been explained, the bill seeks to change the status of William Simpson's home to a charitable company to allow its constitution to be updated and to ensure that it can expand its services.

An important consideration for the committee in considering the bill's general principles was how the proposed changes would fit in with the home's

original ethos. Jean Lyon, the home's chief executive, said that Francis Simpson

"realised the dream of his son, William, who had, like his father, served in the navy and had seen men coming home and living rough after serving their country. His vision was that there should be a place of all-encompassing holistic care for their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. That is still the positive focus of our organisation."— [Official Report, William Simpson's Home (Transfer of Property etc) (Scotland) Bill Committee, 27 April 2010; c 17.]

The Rev Gary McIntyre, a trustee of the home, and Dennis Canavan, the home's patron, both emphasised their commitment to keeping the home's original purpose. Although the planned expansion is considerable, Mr Canavan told us that it "will not be massive", with the number of residents increasing from 40 to approximately 60, and said that

"With additional staff, it would be possible to expand the provision while keeping the original ethos." —[Official Report, William Simpson's Home (Transfer of Property etc) (Scotland) Bill Committee, 27 April 2010; c 26.]

Moreover, in its evidence, OSCR said that although the new company will benefit a broader section of people, the proposed change remains

"within the spirit of the original constitution".

Although the committee was reassured by evidence from the promoter of the commitment to keeping the home's original purpose, we were keen to examine how the move to new governance arrangements would fit with that. In that respect, we heard how a new structure will allow broader representation on the board of directors and broad membership of the company. The proposed constitution will allow members to decide who will become directors of the charitable company; it is envisaged that that will facilitate the involvement of residents, their relatives and the community.

Another important issue for the committee to examine was how the promoter had consulted people who would be affected by the bill. We heard about how the promoter had talked about the home's development at residents' meetings, had used the key-worker system and in-house staff meetings to talk about proposals, and had met staff, trustees, board members, families and service users to discuss changes. Marion Robinson, who is an advocacy worker, advised us that she had met service users to discuss their views on the proposed changes.

The convener of the committee touched on the unique nature of the home and on how we heard about the increasing demand for its services. The committee recognised the promoter's wish that the home be able to offer its services to a wider and larger group of people. We also noted the lack of any geographical restriction on who

might access the home's services. Users come from various parts of Scotland, albeit that they are mainly from the central belt. The committee recognised why the bill is necessary and supports the promoter's commitment to retain the home's original ethos.

I, too, thank all the witnesses who appeared before the committee and those who provided written evidence to it. The committee recognises the important work that is carried out at William Simpson's home, and supports the promoter's commitment to its future operation under a modern structure.

16:51

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

I thank both members for their contributions to this short but important debate.

The debate has highlighted the important issues that the committee considered. The invaluable work that is conducted by the facility and how the bill will support its future development have also been described.

As we have heard, the promoter has informed the committee of the need for the service that is provided at William Simpson's home to be extended to younger people and women. Witnesses who appeared before the committee supported that development. Falkirk Council and Stirling Council explained the increasing demand for the specialised support that the home provides. We also heard from Falkirk Council that, without the kind of service that the home provides, younger people would be placed inappropriately in older people's care provision.

We have heard that, throughout its consideration of the bill, the committee has been mindful that it was Francis Simpson's original gift of his estate that ensured that the home could be established. Nanette Milne touched on our examination of how the promoter would ensure that Francis Simpson's original vision would be remembered and how the original ethos of the home would continue. The committee was assured by the promoter's commitment to staying true to the intention of the 1864 act. However, there was a particular issue that we wished to examine: we wanted to establish how ex-servicemen and women would be included in future developments, given that a preference for ex-services personnel was built into the 1864 act. The committee was pleased to note that strong links with ex-services personnel remain and that the promoter intends to continue that emphasis in the new constitution.

We heard in the evidence that was given how the home will be able to update its facilities and move into phases 2 and 3 of its development.

Marion Robinson of Forth Valley Advocacy said that she thought that there is, among the home's residents,

"a positive feeling about the future."

Dennis Canavan, the home's patron, explained how he and other members of his family could personally vouch that

"the standard of care that is provided at the home is excellent."—[*Official Report, William Simpson's Home (Transfer of Property etc) (Scotland) Bill Committee, 27 April 2010; c 22.*]

That the bill will allow governance arrangements to be updated to allow for broader community input into its operation is a positive development for the home. The committee recognised the commitment and expertise that that fresh impetus might bring. As the convener of the committee mentioned, we support any opportunity that that might bring to involve users and their families in the home's operation.

The committee welcomed the opportunity to consider this private bill. However, during the debate on the Ure Elder Fund Transfer and Dissolution Bill—I had the honour of convening the Ure Elder Fund Transfer and Dissolution Bill Committee—we touched on the requirement to ensure that we respond appropriately to the needs of small charities that wish to make similar changes to parent acts. We need to monitor the number of charities that face a similar situation in which an alternative to a parliamentary route is not available. Earlier, we heard about other vehicles that are available, such as the Scottish charitable incorporated organisation. Subsequent to our evidence session, I lodged a written question to which the Minister for Community Safety, Fergus Ewing, replied. He said:

"The Scottish Government recently consulted on policy proposals developed by the Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) Working Group for the implementation of the SCIO. In light of the responses received and views expressed at consultation events, we will develop draft SCIO regulations, built on the policy foundations of the SCIO's Working Group's preferred model."

He also said that

"Under current plans, we do not anticipate that the SCIO will be introduced before the end of 2010."—[*Official Report, Written Answers, 11 May 2010; S3W-33447.*]

Finally, I thank everyone who gave evidence to the committee, my fellow members of the committee and the clerks for their support. I ask that Parliament agree the general principles of the bill, and that the bill should proceed as a private bill.

Business Motion

16:55

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-6291, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. I invite Bruce Crawford to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 19 May 2010

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Local Government and Communities Committee Debate: Local Government Finance Inquiry

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 20 May 2010

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
Education and Lifelong Learning;
Europe, External Affairs and Culture

2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate: High Speed Rail Link

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 26 May 2010

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 27 May 2010

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
 Health and Wellbeing
 2.55 pm Scottish Government Business
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business—[*Bruce Crawford.*]
Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

16:56

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Bruce Crawford to move motion S3M-6292, on the designation of a lead committee for the Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question on that motion will be put at decision time.

I also ask Bruce Crawford to move motion S3M-6293, on parliamentary recess dates.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following parliamentary recess dates under Rule 2.3.1: 12 February – 20 February 2011 (inclusive).—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Again, the question on the motion will be put at decision time, which will be at 5 o'clock.

I suspend this meeting of Parliament until 5 o'clock.

16:56

Meeting suspended.

17:00

On resuming—

Decision Time

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

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

The first question is, that motion S3M-6228, in the name of Irene Oldfather, on the new European Commission's legislative work programme, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the European Commission Work Programme, published by the European Commission on 31 March 2010; notes that it is likely to inform European Union policy for the next five years, and supports in particular the proposals for delivering a new economic strategy (Europe 2020) and allied platform to combat poverty, the commitment to further develop renewable energy and the energy grid, the recognition of the need to reform both the Common Fisheries Policy and the Common Agricultural Policy and the desire to restructure the European Union's budget.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6275.1, in the name of Elaine Murray, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6275, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the zero waste plan, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6275.2, in the name of John Scott, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6275, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the zero waste plan, as amended, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6275.3, in the name of Liam McArthur, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6275, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the zero waste plan, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)

Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)

McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Abstentions

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 49, Against 43, Abstentions 16.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-6275, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the zero waste plan, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the need for a coherent zero-waste policy approach to encourage waste prevention and efficient use of all resources; supports measures to increase recycling and deliver high-quality recycled materials, to ensure resources are recovered and treated in the most environmentally beneficial way and to minimise the disposal of resources into landfill; looks to the forthcoming Zero Waste Plan for Scotland to provide clear long-term policy stability for the necessary investment to deliver a zero-waste Scotland and to address the concerns raised in the Audit Scotland report, *Protecting and improving Scotland's environment*, that councils need additional waste management facilities to meet national landfill and recycling targets; considers that greater encouragement to recycle and reuse must be given to the commercial and industrial sector and that a focus must be placed on ensuring that the necessary infrastructure is created and put in place in moving toward a zero-waste society; regrets the delay in the publication of the Zero Waste Plan, and recognises the necessity of meeting EU

landfill diversion targets in order to avoid potentially punitive fines.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-6258, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on the William Simpson's Home (Transfer of Property etc) (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the William Simpson's Home (Transfer of Property etc.) (Scotland) Bill and that the Bill should proceed as a Private Bill.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-6292, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-6293, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on parliamentary recess dates, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees the following parliamentary recess dates under Rule 2.3.1: 12 February – 20 February 2011 (inclusive).

VE Day (65th Anniversary)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-6236, in the name of Stewart Maxwell, on the 65th anniversary of victory in Europe day. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament commemorates the 65th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day (VE Day) when on 8 May 1945 the Allied Forces formally accepted the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany; honours the contribution by veterans of all ages and from all conflicts; believes that there should be greater recognition of war veterans in Scotland, many of whom sustained severe physical or mental injuries in defending their country, and encourages veterans to take advantage of their eligibility for the Veterans' Badge, a small, but visible token of society's appreciation of their service.

17:03

Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP): Saturday 8 May 2010 was the 65th anniversary of VE day. Although every anniversary of VE day is a cause for celebration, commemoration, remembrance and reflection, I hope that members will agree that there is some extra poignancy in the fact that a baby born on VE day reached retirement age last Saturday. By the time victory in Japan day comes around later this year, all those who were around during world war two will be pensioners.

That is why it is important that we do not lose the stories and experiences of people who lived through those traumatic times. For example, in the west of Scotland, John Docherty, who lost seven family members during the Clydebank blitz, remembers tables in the streets loaded with home baking, which he had not seen for a number of years. Hugh McIntyre of Port Glasgow recalls the bonfire at the junction of Clyde Street and Glenburn Street, which would have been unimaginable during the war, because of the blackout. In Giffnock, where my family home is, Iain Frew, who was nine at the time, remembers the blackout curtains being thrown aside and that he went to the Tudor cinema in Giffnock to watch throngs of people celebrating as an orchestra played through the cinema's open first-floor windows.

Those who were there have fantastic memories of an unforgettable day, but I imagine that, among the celebrations, immense relief was felt that the war in Europe was finally over and that brothers, fathers and husbands would come home. The services and support that would be needed to deal with many veterans returning to Scotland were not at the forefront of people's minds.

It is right and proper that we pay special attention to the second world war, but we must not forget what has occurred since then. Europe returned to peace on 8 May 1945, but allied forces were still fighting in the far east and the Pacific. It is unfortunate that the end of the second world war did not mark a time of peace for our armed forces, which have been asked time and again to answer the call in many wars and conflicts—in the Korean war, the Suez crisis, the Falklands, Northern Ireland, the Gulf war, the Iraq war and Afghanistan, to name but a few.

All those conflicts have resulted in new waves of veterans who have had to adjust to life after the horrors of war. It is unfortunate that some fail to do so. In the Falklands war of 1982, 258 service personnel died. Since that time, it has been reported that 264 veterans of that war have committed suicide. That second figure should alert us to the urgent need for psychological and mental health support and services for some veterans.

As we commemorated the 65th anniversary of VE day last Saturday, hundreds of soldiers marched through Edinburgh to mark their return from a six-month tour of Afghanistan. The men and women of 3 Rifles and 1 Scots—a 1,400-strong battle group—also marched to honour their 30 comrades who were lost in the Afghan conflict. That is the highest death toll of any Scots regiment in 60 years.

In many ways, we are good at paying our respects to those who have been killed in action. However, we are not as good at dealing with the aftermath of military service and particularly with people who emerge with physical and/or mental injuries.

Most people who leave the armed forces go on to lead successful and productive lives outside the military, but the transfer to civilian life is somewhat more difficult for a minority. Some veterans have obvious challenges to overcome that relate to the physical injuries that they have sustained on active service. Others show no outward sign of difficulty but soon succumb to mental illnesses. The figures are unclear, but veterans are likely to make up a higher percentage of the prison population than they do of the population at large. A more recent phenomenon that people who work with veterans have had to deal with is veterans who have contracted diseases of old age, which are sometimes complicated by the emergence of psychological problems that have been buried for many years and perhaps even decades.

When I was made the Minister for Communities and Sport in 2007, I discovered that one responsibility that was hidden in my title was that of dealing with veterans issues. I was greatly impressed by the work that was being done throughout Scotland to support our veterans,

particularly by Veterans Scotland, but I realised that we had to go further. That was why we launched the Scottish veterans fund in May 2008 and why I announced the consultation on “Scotland’s Veterans and Forces’ Communities: meeting their well-being and welfare needs” in June 2008.

As a result of those initiatives, improvements have been made, such as the extension of the priority treatment scheme to all veterans, including reservists; priority access to shared-equity schemes; the extension from spring 2011 of the concessionary bus travel scheme to forces veterans who were seriously injured while on duty; and increased funding for the Combat Stress charity.

I was fortunate to visit Combat Stress’s centre at Hollybush house in Ayrshire, where I talked to veterans and saw the excellent work that is done there. I also visited Erskine hospital to see the work that was being done and to distribute several veterans badges to residents. The tie that I am wearing—with pride—is the Erskine tie, which was a gift to me when I visited.

The veterans badge that I distributed to the Erskine veterans is available to all men and women who have served in Her Majesty’s armed forces. I encourage people who have been in the forces to apply for the badge. I was fortunate to help my uncle to receive his veterans badge just a few weeks ago. Applying is simple and the short application form can be posted, faxed or even sent electronically to the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency. The badge might be a small symbol of our appreciation, but veterans deserve to be recognised. I hope that many veterans throughout Scotland will wear their badges with pride.

Good work has been done and it continues, but we must keep it up if we are to repay the debt that we owe our veterans—particularly those who have been injured in the line of duty.

Arguing for fair treatment for veterans should be unnecessary, but it is clear that we still need to do so. Only today, I picked up from the exhibition outside the chamber a leaflet from the Equality for Veterans Association, which argues for fair treatment in pensions. I wish the association very well in its campaign. I signed the petition that it has put on the table in the lobby outside the chamber. I urge other members to do so, too.

When we commemorate VE day, let us also reflect on our duty as a country to ensure that all our veterans are treated with the respect that they deserve. Among the many things that we need to tackle is the risk that young people end up with the wrong idea about who our veterans are. There is a danger that some perceive our veterans as old

men from a war that was fought long ago. The truth is very different: the veterans community is large and varied. It is made up of men and women of all ages who have one thing in common: they have supported and defended us in our hour of need. They deserve nothing less from us.

17:10

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate Stewart Maxwell on securing this important debate, and I commend him for the motion.

Although it is now more than 65 years since VE day, the conflict of world war two will always be remembered. It is important that we mark VE day, as well as remembrance day, veterans day and other poignant moments when we remember the great wars of the 20th century.

World war two was a conflict that touched every corner of the world. The archive pictures and film of the celebrations at Trafalgar Square and across the United Kingdom on VE day remind us of the relief and joy at the end of the war in Europe and are a stark reminder of why we should only ever go to war in the gravest of times and for the noblest of causes.

World war two embodies one of the closest bonds between the different nations on these islands—Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland—which, along with the Commonwealth, came together to fight Nazi Germany. We should remind ourselves that, in 1940, these islands were the last beacon of hope against the Germans. Europe had already been swept aside after gallant France had been struck down. We struggled on single-handedly for a whole year until we were joined by the military might of Soviet Russia and then the power and resources of the United States of America.

Men and women from every community in Scotland fought or contributed to the war effort. My region of Mid Scotland and Fife is proud to be home to the famous Black Watch. Its service during world war two underlines the commitment and sacrifice that so many made for the United Kingdom. Battalions of the Black Watch fought in almost every major British action in world war two, from Palestine to Normandy. Black Watch units held the line against the Germans at Dunkirk, fought in the battle of El Alamein, took part in the allied invasion of Sicily and landed in Normandy on D-day. Those men served Scotland, the United Kingdom and the free world with distinction and dedication. I agree with Stewart Maxwell: we owe so much to all those who fought in the second world war. Our armed forces faced unimaginable horrors. They were called upon to go to the extremes of humanity and they faced up to the

enemy with valour, dignity and defiance, as they have done in other conflicts.

I was very taken by what Stewart Maxwell said about our veterans, particularly the fact that, because of recent conflicts, not all veterans are old men. When I was very young, I was allowed to stay up late to watch the festival of remembrance from the Royal Albert hall in London. I recollect very clearly the Chelsea pensioners parading in their famous red jackets, as they do to this day. I remember that the parade included veterans of the Boer war—I am revealing how old I am, Presiding Officer. None of the veterans of the first world war remains with us, and even veterans of the second world war are getting older and older. Sadly, those veterans are being replaced by more and more veterans from recent conflicts—such is human nature.

Like Stewart Maxwell, I agree that we owe a deep debt of gratitude to the soldiers who put everything on the line for our country, but I fear that we are not doing enough to repay that debt. Our soldiers should never again be sent into battle ill equipped, and they should never again have to walk into battle when they could be flown in. Also, their families should not have to live in substandard homes.

In marking VE day, one of our most important duties is always to remember the heroism and sacrifice of our armed forces. I am glad that we are having this debate today so that we can put on record our eternal gratitude.

17:14

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Stewart Maxwell on securing the debate. We should never forget the horrors of world war two. Folk in my generation—and Stewart Maxwell's and Murdo Fraser's—cannot possibly imagine the horror of being directly involved in a war of that magnitude, or indeed the joy and relief that came at the end, on VE day. Stewart Maxwell has referred to the memories of people in Clydebank and elsewhere. The services that are required in the aftermath of war are intense. We cannot imagine the horror and what it does to people. Psychological support is obviously needed. That is as valid today, with our armed forces still at war, as it was on VE day.

Angela Constance recently secured a members' business debate that is relevant to this debate, on veterans in the criminal justice system. Stewart Maxwell mentioned some figures, which more than suggest that issues remain in that regard. Reference has been made to the campaign in the Parliament this week for signatures to a petition—I understand that the members of the Equality for Veterans Association will be in the Parliament

again tomorrow, fighting for pensions equality for all veterans, regardless of when they served in HM forces. I had heard about the campaign before, but I was shocked to discover the extent of the problem. All that those people are doing is seeking justice for people who left the forces before 1975 with less than 22 years' service, who, I was amazed to learn, do not qualify for any military pension. Like Stewart Maxwell, I urge people to sign the EFVA petition.

Many people served with great honour during world war two, and their efforts culminated in our ability to celebrate VE day. I pay tribute to one of the groups involved: the Territorial Army. The TA fights alongside the regular military in all conflicts. Having looked into the history a wee bit, I note that the TA was formed way back in 1908, when the voluntary army was combined with parts of the yeomanry and militia, which date back to the Napoleonic wars. The TA was first mobilised to fight in the first world war, serving alongside the regulars. We should never forget that the lives of those in the TA are also on the line. In 1939, as war approached, the size of the TA was doubled, and it was mobilised when hostilities broke out. It was reconstituted, in the form that we know now, in 1947, as a part-time reservist force.

The TA currently provides about 1,200 troops each year to support the regular Army in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Balkans. The TA does extremely important work—and none more so than the signal squadrons. I am pleased that 51 signal squadron (V) troop is based in the constituency where I live—I must find out whether that V stands for 5. I have visited the troop many times. The TA in East Kilbride is very much part of the community, with open days and other forms of support for the cadets.

Among the components of the TA's success have always been the good will, support and encouragement that it gives to young people in the communities where it is present. Tribute must also be paid to the employers who support their employees who do TA service. It is the willingness of employers to champion the men and women of the volunteer reserve force that makes the TA's role possible.

The TA's role is huge and does not just involve front-line fighting alongside the regular troops. The signal regiment, for example, provides vital communications support for emergency services during times of crisis. The regiment responds to terrorist threats and attacks, flooding, industrial action and outbreaks of disease. The TA uses some of the most up-to-date communications and information technology equipment.

There is no time in this speech—or even in the entire debate—to begin to pay tribute to all those who contributed to our ability to celebrate VE day

in the manner that Stewart Maxwell discussed, or to repay the debt that we still owe them all. Let us not forget that there are still people heading out from this country to the front line—to war—who are putting their lives on the line for the rest of us. We owe them such gratitude.

17:19

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I congratulate Stewart Maxwell on securing this debate so that we can talk about matters that are long in the past, but which have huge implications to this day for the participants, and for the families of people who did not survive.

The Arctic convoys to Russia were among the most hazardous and important activities that created the potential for the allies' victory in the war. On Sunday, when the Russians celebrated the 65th anniversary of the great patriotic war, it was interesting to see a body of Welsh Guards parading in Red Square in Moscow, along with French, United States and Russian troops. One of the leaders of the convoys is still alive and was a guest of the Russian Government at the ceremony.

I have been involved in helping to ensure that there are memorials to the convoys at Loch Ewe and at Lyness, in Orkney. Merchant ships gathered at Loch Ewe before they sailed off, with a naval escort, which gathered around Orkney. On Sunday I laid flowers on the memorial for the Russian Arctic Convoy Club at Rudha an t-Sasain on the south side of Loch Ewe. Beside the fine monument there are little stones, on which individuals who took part have laid their names, reminding us that there are still people alive who took part in the incredible convoys.

To celebrate the 65th anniversary of VE day, Sergey Krutikov, consul general of the Russian Federation in Edinburgh, honoured 30 survivors of the Arctic convoys with medals. The stories that those people have to tell are amazing. Every schoolchild should hear some of those stories—they would be eye-openers for them. The survivors are scattered across the country and I know two or three of the old guys. Sandy Manson, from John o'Groats, got his 65th anniversary medal. Reay Clarke, from Edderton, was not well enough to attend, so his medal was posted to him. It seems to me that as part of the celebration we can do more to pass on people's memories to younger people.

At the ceremony in the Merchants' hall, Fergus Wood, the provost of Stirling Council, made a speech. He is the veterans champion for the Stirling Council area. I would like to hear more about veterans champions taking up the cause of veterans of the current age and being given every

support to do so. Champions are the local link for the processes that are set in train, in particular by the Scottish Government.

Like the Russians, we in Scotland respect our veterans and remember the people who set out on the convoys, some of whom were never to return. In that regard we have a fitting link with Russia, which is becoming an important partner in trade, education and cultural exchanges. I encourage the people who come to Scotland to visit the places from which the convoys left—it is tourists rather than service personnel who come now, of course. When I was a member of Ross and Cromarty District Council, the council set up a naval trail that enables people to visit those places. Since then, the convoy memorial at Loch Ewe has been built. I hope that Highland Council does more to ensure that it is properly signposted and that people know about it.

The Russian consul general laid flowers at the memorial in Orkney, which was unveiled at Lyness in August. For the first time, there is a memorial there to acknowledge the convoys that were so vital to success in the war. What a pity that it had to be the Russian Government and supporters who provided the money for the monument.

17:24

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I congratulate Stewart Maxwell on securing the debate. Like him—although perhaps for a shorter time—I was a minister with responsibility for veterans. Of all my responsibilities, that was probably the one that I regarded as being the greatest privilege and the one for which I felt most inadequate. I regarded the job as being very serious; there is a huge responsibility on whoever has that job.

The reality is that whatever we say in the chamber or elsewhere will be insufficient to match the courage and sacrifice of a generation that fought against fascism, defended the country, put their own lives at risk and paid the ultimate sacrifice. It was clearly a battle of good against evil. As we reflect on those times, we remember how quickly the ideas of fascism could catch hold and what a challenge they were to everybody's lives throughout the world when they did so. It is important not only to mark the celebration but to acknowledge the struggle and what caused it.

We have a people's history of the experience at that time and it is important that we capture that. There are records not only of the experience of those who fought, but of the impact on families and communities. They record the impact on large communities in the west of Scotland and on small seafaring communities, such as the one from which my family came in Tiree. Such small

communities suffered a huge impact because they lost a generation of young men. The small monuments in those communities, along with the large ones in our big cities, reflect respect and commitment to a generation that fought on our behalf.

As we pass on from the general election, it is interesting to reflect that that generation not only fought fascism, but it came back determined to shape the world in which it lived. A disproportionate number of those people still go out to vote and understand the importance of doing so.

It is important to acknowledge that we now have veterans of all ages. We owe a duty not only to the elderly veterans; we must also recognise the particular needs of those who are involved in, or are recovering from, more recent struggles.

It is important to recognise the role of veterans organisations such as Veterans Scotland and Erskine that campaign and challenge those who make decisions about veterans' needs. We must recognise the huge housing needs that have been mentioned, the health needs and the need for support for families in caring for veterans. I heard on the radio the other day people talking about the impact on families after the second world war, when fathers came back to families where the children did not know them. That is still true today, and we need to ensure that the services to support them exist.

In these challenging funding times, we need to listen to veterans organisations and give assurances that, in the times when there are pressures on funding, veterans services will not miss out and that, in shaping services, we will talk to those who understand the needs and priorities.

Not a few years ago, on a visit to the United States I was struck by how that country manages to celebrate its veterans and soldiers regardless of the purpose or cause of the conflict: they are owed a duty of care and should be treated with respect regardless of what Government decisions had led them to conflict. We must find a way of doing that in our discourse so that it is about recognising not only what was done in the second world war or what is done now, but that people live daily with the consequences of decisions over which they had no control.

In the practical delivery of services to those veterans, we will honour those who, a long time ago, fought fascism in Europe and those who now take on serious responsibilities on our behalf. Because it is a cross-party issue, I look forward to the minister identifying the ways in which funding can be secured to meet the needs that veterans organisations have identified.

17:29

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I thank Stewart Maxwell very much for lodging the motion.

About this time of year, three years ago, just after being elected to the Parliament, I was waiting for our oath taking to be shown on the television when my father, at 92, started up, jabbed his hand towards the TV and said, "There's Harvie." He did not mean me or Patrick; he meant his cousin, Sir George Harvie-Watt, who was being shown in a big open car with Winston Churchill, driving in London on VE day.

Harvie-Watt was Churchill's principal private secretary during the war. My father's role was much more modest. He was in the Highland Light Infantry, then he went to the air force. He had the sort of war that many servicemen had, which was one of colossal boredom interspersed with terror—that was when he was on convoys to the United States and was the officer of the watch. Of course, even on the large liner that he was on, it was always possible that you would be overwhelmed by U-boats.

I made my political debut in 1945, when I was wheeled in my pram by my mother when she went to vote for Dr Robert McIntyre to be the member of Parliament for Motherwell. He was the minister's son, which was why she voted for him. To her horror, he got in. She has never voted Scottish National Party again. A couple of weeks later, I was out in my pram demonstrating for allied unity, with little American, British, French and hammer-and-sickle flags. However, it was not as straightforward as that. The second world war tends to be rather sentimentalised by a lot of us, but it hit Scottish society hard. There were 50,000 dead. There were much larger numbers of dead in the merchant navy in the second world war than there were in the first world war. Others died as bomber air crew or prisoners of the Japanese.

In world war two, Britain was not the great power that it had been in 1914 to 1918. Then, had the arsenal of the Clyde stopped functioning, the central powers—Germany and Austria—would have won. However, Scots industry was fully engaged in world war two under a remarkable Secretary of State for Scotland, the Labour politician Tom Johnston. As Rob Gibson reminded us, Scotland provided the great junction for the transatlantic convoys, which went south to the English ports where the D-day preparations were being made, and north to Archangel and Murmansk in the icy, dangerous dark, described by the novelist Alistair MacLean in his best book, "HMS Ulysses". A third writer, Captain Hamish Henderson, who fought his way through the desert over to Sicily in what he described as the last classical war, then up the spine of Italy, described

the fate of both sides in one of his “Elegies for the Dead in Cyrenaica”, in a poem called “Seven Good Germans”—good, of course, because they were dead. However, when the soldiers investigated the dead men’s wallets and that sort of thing, they discovered that the Germans had the same sort of lives as the Scots or English soldiers who had killed them. It is there that the words that I used in a contemporary history of Scotland come from:

“There were no gods and precious few heroes ... They saw through that guff before the axe fell.”

My father’s cousin, Tom Notman, was of that company. He shared the pacifist views of Jimmy Maxton, a friend of his father, who was a Glasgow minister. However, Tom Notman won the military cross for evacuating soldiers of both sides from Monte Cassino in the summer of 1944, only to be killed about two months later at Lake Trasimene. I was born shortly after that, and I bear his name.

That reminds us, I suppose, that there were many casualties apart from the troops. We have that wonderful monument in Edinburgh castle that recorded the range of people who became involved in the first world war: the firemen, sailors and nurses. In the second world war, that range included the evacuees and refugees—those who were caught up in a war and made into enemies by actions that they had no part in. In that regard, one thinks of the tragic fate of the Scots Italians being deported to the United States who went down with the Andorra Star in the Atlantic. Angus Calder, who wrote “The People’s War: Britain, 1939-45”, has reminded us of how Britain changed at that time and how the Beveridge report led to the creation of the British welfare state.

The least that we can do for soldiers and other people involved in war—the women at home, the refugees, the people looking after the victims of terrorist action—is to ensure that they are commemorated in the way described in the motion. My father has never claimed his badge, but I will encourage him to do so. I will also do what I can to help the veterans so movingly remembered today to get what they deserve.

17:34

The Minister for Housing and Communities

(Alex Neil): I, too, welcome Stewart Maxwell’s motion and congratulate him on securing a debate to mark the 65th anniversary of victory in Europe on 8 May 1945. I am very supportive of the motion, which thoroughly deserves the endorsement of all members—albeit that we do not vote on such motions.

Every speech in the debate has been exceptional. It is a pity that members’ business debates are not so well attended, either in the

chamber or in the gallery. This is the second veterans debate that we have had in recent weeks. The quality of the debates—perhaps because they do not lead to a vote, which means that we can unite behind the motion—has been exceptionally high.

As a number of members have indicated, VE day marked a halt to the deaths of people from as far apart as the eastern USSR, as it was then, and the west coast of the United States of America. Almost every nation on earth paid a heavy price. Australia lost 40,000 military personnel, which was a lot of people, given that its population at the time was about 12 million. Canada, which also had a fairly small population, lost 45,000 military personnel. Poland, the Soviet Union, the United States and the UK lost 240,000, 10 million, 417,000 and 380,000 personnel respectively. As Christopher Harvie pointed out, about 50,000 of those 380,000 British military deaths were of Scottish soldiers. Those are only the military deaths. On top of those were the civilian deaths, of which there were millions across Europe and the rest of the world. In addition, there were the Holocaust victims, of whom there were 6 million.

VE day was a celebration of good over bad and totalitarianism. It meant that people could hope, plan for the future, return to their normal lives and put war behind them. The massive celebrations that took place—with some justification—on the day stretched from Los Angeles to Vladivostok and from the Arctic circle to the south of New Zealand.

The UK and its then empire had much to celebrate. Troops would be returning home, families would be reunited and people would have a chance to build a new country from the ashes and destruction of bombing. Celebrations were held across the UK. I am too young to remember VE day, but I am sure that those who lived through it will remember the crowds around Trafalgar square and on the Mall in front of Buckingham palace in London, and the celebrations that took place here in Edinburgh and the length and breadth of the country. Churchill said on the day:

“It is the victory of the cause of freedom in every land. In all our long history we have never seen a greater day than this. Everyone, man or woman, has done their best. Everyone has tried.”

VE day should not be left just to the history books. It is our duty and our responsibility to ensure that the toil, the effort, the sacrifice and the ultimate success of our armed forces continue to be recognised and acknowledged. Our veterans, whether they be Scots or people from any other part of the UK, the then empire or the allied nations, deserve nothing less. We are all agreed that what we owe them is immeasurable.

In his motion, Stewart Maxwell makes clear that

“there should be greater recognition of war veterans in Scotland”.

I totally agree, and all those who have served as veterans minister, regardless of which Administration they have served in, would agree, too. We now know the shape of the new Cabinet in London. I had a good and close working relationship with Kevan Jones, who was the minister for veterans in the previous Westminster Administration, and I spoke to Liam Fox, who is the new Secretary of State for Defence, a few weeks ago—although I am not in any way suggesting that I predicted the outcome of the general election. I met him at a function for veterans in St James’s palace, when we agreed that if he became the defence secretary, we would work closely to ensure that our veterans got the level of service that they required and to which they were entitled north and south of the border.

I have an update for members on the debate that we had about veterans who end up in the criminal justice system. We have asked the Scottish Prison Service to undertake a survey of the prison population to determine the number of ex-service personnel who are serving custodial sentences in Scotland. That will inform our policy with a view to avoiding many of them ending up in the criminal justice system, often as a result of mental health and addiction problems that they have incurred as a direct result of their war experiences.

Rob Gibson mentioned veterans champions, on which I take this opportunity to update the chamber. Veterans Scotland is holding a seminar tomorrow for veterans champions from across Scotland. At that seminar there will be an examination of their role, how they engage with service providers, how they share information, including on best practice across Scotland, and how they can help to resolve issues that our veterans face. There are already approximately 50 such champions in Scotland, and we expect most of them to attend tomorrow.

As well as having veterans champions at the political level in our local authorities and in health boards, we have veterans co-ordinators at official level, with a view to ensuring that when veterans leave the services to go into civvy street they have as smooth a transition as possible and a continuum of service provision from the armed forces resettlement officer to the local champions and co-ordinators.

I confirm that I and my ministerial colleagues will attend and participate in as many commemorative events as we can across Scotland, as well as elsewhere in the United Kingdom and Europe, from VE day to armed forces day, which takes place in June. I assure members that, right across the range of devolved services for which we are

responsible, we are working with the Ministry of Defence, the armed forces, the health service, local authorities, the veterans community and service providers to put in place the best possible level of support for our veterans across Scotland.

Although the control and management of the award of medals to veterans is reserved to the Ministry of Defence, I agree with Stewart Maxwell’s call to veterans to take advantage of their eligibility for the veterans badge, which they should wear with pride.

We celebrate VE day with pride. It marked the end of tyranny in Europe and rekindled hope and the human spirit. For that, we should all be eternally grateful.

Meeting closed at 17:43.

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