



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 2 December 2010

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

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[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 09:15*]

Economy

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S3M-7159, in the name of Jeremy Purvis, on the Scottish economy.

09:15

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Although Scotland faces considerable economic challenges, there are also huge opportunities if we can match our ambitions to them. Although Scotland has some of the best entrepreneurs and industrialists in the world, it still does not have enough. Although some of the most exciting research being carried out anywhere in the world is being produced in Scotland, we need to create an environment in which we can produce more of it; and although we have one of the best education systems, it lets down too many young people who subsequently do not play a part in the economy.

We have an aim and ambition for Scotland to be the world's most innovative and entrepreneurial economy. That can be achieved with the private sector's participation, the United Kingdom Government's support and—most critical—a Scottish Government's leadership. After closely examining the various policy options that Governments have taken in Scotland since the 1970s and having spent the past year speaking to businesses in all sectors throughout the country, I and my colleagues have reached certain conclusions. We have outlined our thinking in a paper, the conclusions of which have been shaped to reflect those businesses' views, concerns and needs.

Scotland is and will remain a tiny economy in a fast-growing world, but we can play a disproportionately large role in supporting economic growth and ensuring that such growth is socially and environmentally sustainable. Not only do we want Scotland at the end of the decade to be the most innovative and entrepreneurial place in which to work and start up businesses, we want our businesses to be exporting more and to be more involved in the global economy. Although we have some outstanding exporting businesses, we want those exports to expand by at least 50 per cent in value over the next parliamentary session and, indeed, to double over the next decade. The

global economy is changing fast and we need to keep up.

The very first commercial text message was sent the year that I left school; today, more texts will be sent and received than there are people in the world. This year, the number of young people entering undergraduate courses in China will be greater than Scotland's entire population. In Scotland, one in two young people go into higher education after leaving school; however, in India, the number is one in 1,000, and we know the potential for growth in that economy.

The question is whether our public sector bodies are taking the right approach to reach the goals. We think not. When it came to office, the Scottish Government stated its intention of streamlining Scotland's economic development framework. Regrettably, it did not put in place any benchmarking to demonstrate whether such a move would actually increase growth. The smart, successful Scotland policy and the framework for economic development in Scotland have been succeeded by the Government's economic and skills strategies; the restructuring of Scottish Enterprise has led to the abolition of local enterprise companies and the creation of six new operational areas with advisory rather than non-executive boards; and business gateway functions have been transferred to local government. VisitScotland's operational areas have been realigned with the six Scottish Enterprise areas, while Skills Development Scotland has organised itself into operational areas that are not, however, coterminous with the SE or VisitScotland areas. Moreover, Creative Scotland has been established as the central lead development body for the creative industries.

One witness at an evidence-taking session on the creative industries by the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee in March 2008 called the new structure

"a bit of a mess. There could be blurred lines between who does what and it would be time-consuming trying to track down who does what. It does not sound great. Going through a central body that calls in specialist skills when necessary seems to be a more straightforward and clearer structure."—[*Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee*, 19 March 2008; c 789-90.]

In its most recent skills strategy document, the Government itself states:

"Too many employers, particularly SMEs, are frustrated by the complexity they encounter in accessing the right information about skills at the right time in the right format. It can be difficult for employers to know where to start looking for information without a prior detailed knowledge of the institutional landscape."

That was the same policy that the Government implemented after £16 million of set-up costs.

All that runs contrary to the Scottish Government's assurances that the structure is "more focused"—indeed, that is the substance of its amendment this morning—and there is uncertainty over the operations of SDS, whose delivery of skills and training support lacks coherence. It was established before the Government's skills strategy was introduced, and it remains unclear whether the strategy is shaping the agency or whether the agency is reshaping the strategy.

The First Minister was an MP when the Scottish Development Agency was changed to Scottish Enterprise, and I found the criticisms that he made in various parliamentary debates at the time very interesting.

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): In his motion, the member refers to

"a single body to offer equity finance ... and a single promotional, marketing and inward investment body"

and to the need

"to reform the enterprise bodies".

Does he plan to get rid of Highlands and Islands Enterprise by merging it with SE?

Jeremy Purvis: I will come to that, but I will say now that we propose the creation of a Highlands development bank.

As I say, Alex Salmond's criticisms in 1990 of a centralised approach to skills are interesting. He said that skills priorities

"are more likely to be identified in the same way that local enterprise trusts identify them at the moment—at a really localised level with detailed knowledge of the local economy. We could have kept the best aspects of the SDA and its structure as well as integrating the training requirements."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 9 January 1990; Vol 164, c 888.]

I agree with that view, and I regret to say that the current situation does not provide the same level of support.

The recent review of local authority economic development activity for the Scottish local authorities economic development group stated that although local authorities are now responsible for much more economic development support there is major variation in staffing, activity, reporting and investment and highlighted the lack of national guidance to provide either a consistent approach to the delivery of service or consistent baseline data on economic activity, quality standards or professional capacity. In its conclusion, the report says:

"The key issue is therefore to consider if the time is right for a radical overhaul of local economic development in Scotland—a new local agenda?"

That is the question that we need to answer. After discussing the matter with and listening to businesses, we have concluded that as well as shaping a new local agenda we must ensure that the right national framework—elements of which Dave Thompson touched on in his intervention—is also in place.

Many good sustainable businesses, including some in the textile industry in my constituency and across Scotland, have gone under in the past 18 months because of difficulties in securing finance.

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): I believe that a number of things outlined in the member's paper have merit, but does he genuinely believe that his solution of creating a new Government department, bodies called finance Scotland and Scotland international, a Highland development bank and 13 regional banks, and maintaining Creative Scotland and the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council is really as simple and as clean as he suggests?

Jeremy Purvis: Yes, it is. At the moment, Scottish Enterprise, VisitScotland, the Scottish Futures Trust and a number of other organisations all provide services, and businesses are struggling to identify which is the right resource. We have identified the two main challenges: to find the right national bodies to drive forward a national agenda and to find the right approach for a local and regional economy. With regard to the latter, we believe that there should be one body—a development bank—in each region to bring together tourism, business support and lending and skills. As a result, we will not have Skills Development Scotland, which is funded by the Scottish funding council; we will not have Scottish Enterprise; and we will not have the involvement of Government officials. We propose to create the kind of one-stop shop that many local businesses have told us that they desperately need.

As for the national framework that Dave Thompson asked about, we believe that Scotland needs a body that would offer equity finance and support for business lending and step in at times of commercial market failure. In our view, it is right to have the equity team of Scottish Enterprise and the advisory component of the Scottish Futures Trust brought together into one body, finance Scotland, a single agency that would be established to be self-financing but underwritten by Government. Finance Scotland would also advise on and co-ordinate national infrastructure and advise the local development banks on financing projects and delivery. The Scottish Futures Trust would be scrapped, saving considerable resource and providing much better support and investment for business.

We believe that there should be a promotional body for Scotland, but we do not believe that there

should be three: the Scottish Government, Scottish Development International and the national marketing body, VisitScotland. We believe that a single body should be given challenging functions and should incorporate leading business leaders into its direction. We believe that Scotland international—a single body, not three—would be better placed to offer support for businesses that want to expand and to attract investment into the economy.

We propose the establishment of regional development banks. As I have indicated, they would have the function of promoting the region in which they operate and, as such, would be responsible for constituting regional tourism policy and delivering it. The Scottish Enterprise regions would be wound up, and VisitScotland regions would be replaced by the banks, bringing a number of bodies into one body.

Regional development banks would also have the function of creating skills and training policies and, through the colleges in the region, delivering them. They would be composed of local authorities, colleges and universities, with representation for community planning partners and business leaders. That would bring a number of current bodies into one.

The bank would be capitalised by partnering with a private sector partner, looking at the best practice internationally of the Canadian Business Development Bank and the Austrian tourism development bank. Within the UK, we have the example of Banking on Essex.

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): It is interesting to hear the proposals spelled out. Has the member looked at the transitional arrangements: how the transition would work, who would be involved and what that would cost?

Jeremy Purvis: Yes, we have. In a recent television debate with me, the Minister for Housing and Communities said something very perceptive. He indicated that there would require to be an enterprise bill next year. We would propose such a bill, and we hope that the Parliament would consider it.

We believe that our approaches can be developed and we can constitute regional development banks as they stand, but they would be much more effective if we wound up the national bodies. The Government has indicated that, if there is the desire and leadership is provided, changes can be made, but we believe that there should be statutory changes, which would allow the Parliament and others both to be consulted and to scrutinise the proposals properly. We recognise that the changes would be major.

The regional development banks could also provide the support that businesses need, rather than simply the advice and support that the enterprise network shapes. Last year, I took a textile industry group to see the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism. With the minister were four officials, from the Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland and Scottish Enterprise. The business needed support for sample books, which were one of its biggest outlays. The business subsequently went into administration. It could not get any financial support from the private sector because the commercial banks were not touching the textile sector, but it could get support from the enterprise networks to meet 50 per cent of the costs of a marketing strategy. The business wanted to know whether it could use what the Government would be prepared to spend on a marketing strategy on providing sample books. That was not possible because it did not fit the enterprise framework products.

Dave Thompson mentioned the Highlands. We have looked at Highlands development over the years, and we believe that the Highlands as a growing economy can grow faster. A Highlands development bank would be a natural fit with what Highlands and Islands Enterprise is currently doing well: bringing together communities, skills, training and businesses and offering support to businesses with much greater flexibility than we see in the enterprise network in the lowlands area of Scotland. In fact, we have learned much from the Highlands to replicate in other parts of Scotland.

There are more than £1 billion of council reserves, sitting in investment banks across Scotland, plus the considerable reserves of housing associations, universities and other public bodies. We are not using those reserves creatively enough and, although I understand that this will be a challenge for councils, we propose to use that money more creatively to guarantee support for businesses—support shaped around the needs of the businesses, not determined by the shape of the enterprise body's products.

For the first time, we propose having business leaders directly elected to be part of the development banks, with the assumption that they will provide the chairs of the banks. Frameworks already exist for businesses to select their own priorities through business improvement districts, and the same model can be used to enable businesses to elect business leaders on to development banks.

These are major changes, but they are shaped by the need to step up to the major challenges that we face in the global economy. The world is moving and changing fast, and the pace of change

is accelerating. If we set the goal for Scotland to be the most innovative and entrepreneurial country in the world, it must have the most innovative and entrepreneurial public sector. We believe that the proposed changes would start that process. I have pleasure in moving the motion in my name.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that creating jobs and strengthening the economy is central to Scotland's future prosperity; further believes that for Scotland to meet a goal of being one of the most innovative and entrepreneurial economies in the world it needs to reform the enterprise bodies; considers that a network of regional development banks, bringing together business support, lending and grant making, skills and training support and destination management, would be an effective way to support jobs and economic growth across Scotland; further considers that Scotland should have a single body to offer equity finance support for businesses and a single promotional, marketing and inward investment body, and believes that this would create a framework for success in the long term to help more businesses grow and to stimulate innovation and entrepreneurialism over the next decade.

09:31

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): I welcome the opportunity to discuss the Scottish economy. Members will know that, since coming to power, the Scottish Government has placed the economy at the heart of everything we do. Our guiding principles are those of the Government's economic strategy—a bold vision for the future of Scotland that has directed the focus of Government and public services towards increasing sustainable economic growth. That purpose was right in 2007, and it is even more right now, given the crisis in the finance sector.

In addressing the purpose, we have put in place a transparent framework to inform our decisions through the Council of Economic Advisers, the national economic forum and the strategic forum. We have brought together businesses, trade unions, Government, the wider public sector and world-leading economists to build momentum behind our economic strategy and to bring about an increased understanding of the challenges that face Scotland. We have fostered the debate at sector and community level by getting out to talk to people and, most important, to listen to people.

Those steps have been severely tested. The challenge of turning around a Scottish economy that has underperformed for decades has been intensified by a massive failure in regulation and economic stewardship, an international financial crisis, and the resultant global downturn. It has been the deepest recession in recent memory, and it has been felt by all economies, large and small.

The Scottish economy endured five quarters of falling output and witnessed a sharp rise in unemployment as firms reacted to the collapse in demand, cruelly exposing the fact that successive Governments and a lack of economic powers have made Scotland a branch economy with too few head offices and too many vulnerable branch operations.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Will the minister explain why unemployment figures in Scotland were ahead of those for the United Kingdom and are now behind them?

Jim Mather: The catastrophe of a Government in Westminster that totally failed to manage the economy and regulate things allowed people to privatise profits and socialise losses. It created the cascade that underpinned the problem that Scotland has of being a branch economy with a lack of economic powers.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Mr Mather talks about a branch economy, but a significant part of the problem was the Royal Bank of Scotland. That was not exactly a branch economy problem, was it? It was the question of a small country and a very large bank.

Jim Mather: The Bank of Scotland is a UK bank, operating in a UK climate and regulated by the UK, and it was too big to fail for the UK, for America and for Europe. That is the reality of the situation, which is one that we will deal with.

The lessons that we learn from the financial crisis are important. They include the confirmation of the need for economic powers, a clear understanding of the mistakes and successes of other small countries, and the insights that we have gained about the regulatory framework for our financial sector. We now know that the domestic and international regulatory framework was insufficient to protect the financial sector and the wider economy from excessive risk taking and moral hazards. It was the failings of the UK Government's regulatory framework that allowed our UK-based banks to be so exposed to the international financial crisis.

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): Will the minister take an intervention?

Jim Mather: I have taken enough; I am moving on.

We are now seeing the measures put in place to prevent a recurrence, and I welcome the recent international agreement to raise capital ratios for banks and the changes to the UK's financial regulatory framework. We must now ensure that we never again suffer a financial crisis on this scale and that we prevent the repetition of such catastrophic impacts on the real economy and the people who drive that economy.

The recession has also highlighted the failure of the UK Government to properly manage the macroeconomic environment for not just the UK, but Scotland. We are now paying for that mismanagement. The UK coalition Government's comprehensive spending review heralds the deepest and most severe cuts in public spending since the 1940s. More fundamentally, the recession has thrown the spotlight on the deficiencies of the current constitutional set-up. The main policy levers to stimulate the Scottish economy during an economic downturn remain in Westminster. The key elements of the tax system, macroeconomic policy and, crucially, the ability to borrow are not options that are open to the Scottish Government. Without those, the Scottish Parliament cannot set the optimal macroeconomic policy for Scotland. That is the single biggest reason why, historically, the UK economy has tended to grow faster than the Scottish economy.

The situation simply must be addressed, as many commentators have said. In *The Guardian* recently, Simon Jenkins told us that we have been prevented by Westminster from getting the major advantages of being a small country and have got all the vices of a large country. The dangers of inaction are now stark and clear. The current budgetary situation is a salutary reminder of the need for urgent reform. Scotland must never again face years of sustained cuts to our public services. This is a time for the Scottish Parliament to reflect on the future and the responsibilities that it wants to take.

Faced with those unprecedented challenges, Scotland has an opportunity to take a different path, whereby the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government take much greater responsibility for the key financial decisions that affect Scotland. Full financial responsibility would give this Parliament the key fiscal and economic levers to promote growth in Scotland and use the proceeds to invest in Scotland's public finances. The achievement of Scotland's full economic potential rests on our greater access to those economic levers as an independent country.

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con):

The minister is talking about the measures that he would take if he had full financial powers. In making the Scottish economy more competitive, would they lead, in the short term, to a reduction in tax revenues? How would he ensure that public services were not slashed as a result?

Jim Mather: The basic assumption that Scotland is not a bankable proposition is absolutely ludicrous. Here we are, a country with all the key attributes for a successful 21st century—energy, water, food production and smart people—and the infrastructure that modern economies need to move forward.

Jeremy Purvis: Does the Government have any observations to make on the proposals that I outlined to the Parliament this morning, or is it the Government's proposition that anything that can be done in the enterprise networks is utterly irrelevant because we can be successful only if we are independent?

Jim Mather: The Government has and always has had an open mind. We welcome any debate, but the member's proposal has such radical implications that it requires much more debate and much more confidence to be gained from the wider community out there if we are to take it on.

Meanwhile, the Government has acted at an early stage to bolster the economy and has put in place an economic recovery plan. We have provided 40,000 training opportunities, including 20,000 modern apprenticeships and 5,000 new flexible training opportunities this year alone. We are pressing the curriculum for excellence through the schools, and we are tackling the issues of poor health that impact on people in the workplace in order to maximise participation in the workplace. We have accelerated our capital spending to provide the stimulus that is needed to keep things going in difficult times, and we have modernised the planning process. We have set the lowest ever national poundage for business rates, and we have implemented the small business bonus scheme. The Liberal Democrats propose reforms to Scotland's enterprise agencies, but we have already reformed Scotland's enterprise support, ensuring that our enterprise agencies can support high-growth businesses and address the on-going constraints on finance for Scottish businesses.

Those combined actions, and the new levels of cohesion that we have worked hard to create in Scotland, have helped to mitigate the scale of the recession in Scotland and have ensured that we are well placed to benefit from the global recovery. The recession in Scotland was shorter and shallower than the UK's, and the recovery accelerated in quarter 2 of 2010 with growth of 1.3 per cent—the fastest quarterly growth since 2006.

Gavin Brown: What about quarter 3?

Jim Mather: We will focus on quarter 3 in a moment.

The Government is aligned with our jobs and communities, moving forward to build the education and skills that we require. We are pressing forward with innovation in our industries and making sure, through the Scottish loan fund and pressure for new inward investment, that we create the right climate in Scotland to move forward.

The reforms that Jeremy Purvis suggests—the network of regional development banks, a single body to offer financial support for businesses and

a single inward investment body—are running ahead of the analysis and debate. I am open to the debate going forward, but in facing the deepest cuts in a generation we need the Parliament to get behind the Government's economic agenda and recognise that the core problem is the need to gain the economic powers to put Scotland on a proper footing and create the virtuous circle that will allow successes in Scotland to be banked in Scotland. If Mr Purvis is serious about his proposals, he might talk to Ronald MacDonald, who made a similar proposition on fiscal federalism back in 2004 but has now recanted in favour of full independence, knowing that that has the integrity to drive forward the model and produce the long-term changes that we require to create a resilient Scotland, rather than changes that give us something that is half baked and a poison pill.

I move amendment S3M-7519.2, to leave out from “reform” to end and insert:

“build sustainable economic recovery; notes the work already undertaken by the Scottish Government on reforming the Enterprise networks and decluttering the delivery landscape, reducing duplication and driving up effectiveness and efficiency; further notes the ongoing Inquiry by the Economy, Enterprise and Tourism Committee on the Enterprise Network and the contribution it is making, and calls on the Scottish Government to consider its conclusions.”

09:41

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): There is quite a contrast between the sensible amendment lodged in the name of Jim Mather, the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism, and the speech that he has just given. I am left to conclude that he pulled the wrong speech out of his briefcase this morning and delivered the one marked “SNP Conference”.

We welcome the opportunity to debate the Scottish economy and I thank the Liberal Democrats for lodging the motion and publishing the paper that Mr Purvis wrote. As I said in my earlier intervention, various parts of the paper are of merit, but it will be clear from our amendment where we stand in relation to the broad thrust of his proposals.

I am the first speaker in the debate who is a member of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee. I reviewed all the evidence that was submitted to the committee in the course of its inquiry and I listened to all the arguments that were put to us by the business community in relation to the enterprise networks. I will, therefore, focus the bulk of my remarks on that.

On the major reform that has been proposed by Mr Purvis and the Liberal Democrats, I will read out three quotes that were submitted to the

committee. The first quote comes from the representative of the Federation of Small Businesses who gave evidence to us in September. He stated:

“I do not think that there is a case for major structural reform or for ripping things up and starting again—precisely the opposite, given some of the difficulties that we have experienced during the transition period.”—[*Official Report, Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee*, 22 September 2010; c 4030.]

A week later, Alasdair Northrop, the editor of *Scottish Business Insider* magazine and *Business7*, stated:

“Today, I will argue that it is more important than ever to have agencies such as Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise”.—[*Official Report, Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee*, 29 September 2010; c 4082.]

On 22 September—the same day on which we heard from the Federation of Small Businesses—the Scottish Chambers of Commerce said:

“Business would certainly not welcome the wholesale changing of things every three or four years. Instead, we need to look at how we can evolve and improve the current system and plug any gaps in it to ensure that businesses receive the support that they need.”—[*Official Report, Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee*, 22 September 2010; c 4032.]

There was a strong feeling among the businesses and agencies that gave evidence to the committee that we certainly should not be ripping things up and that we ought to be—as the Scottish Chambers of Commerce stated—improving the current system and plugging the gaps. Therefore, I feel that the Lib Dem motion has failed to capture the mood of the business community and fundamentally—certainly at this time—gets it wrong. Having read the paper, I am not persuaded that the proposed system would be less complex. That is what I asked Mr Purvis in my intervention. I watched the clock, and it took him four minutes to explain how the new system would be simpler than the one that we have. On the basis of that and the response that he gave, full as it was, it is difficult to argue that the proposed changes would be simpler.

I worry about the amount of time that businesses, business leaders and politicians would spend changing things, reviewing things and ironing out the details if the proposal were to go ahead, particularly through primary legislation. That is time that could have been spent trying to get our economy back on track.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Is the Conservative party not attracted to the idea of a one-stop shop for regional help and development?

Gavin Brown: Most businesses understand most of the architecture out there quite well. The

difficulty with the proposal that Mike Rumbles supports is that it is not really a one-stop shop. It would involve the creation of a new Government department and of bodies such as finance Scotland and Scotland international. I do not think that, in essence, that represents a one-stop shop. Of course, the idea of a one-stop shop is attractive but, having read the paper in full, I am not convinced that the proposals would create that.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member give way?

Gavin Brown: I want to make some progress.

I want to focus on how we can evolve and improve the current system, as the Scottish Chambers of Commerce said.

The evidence that was put to our committee clearly shows that there is a gap in the middle, so to speak. There is a perception that the business gateway deals only with start-ups and that Scottish Enterprise is interested only in the 2,000 or so account-managed companies. That leaves companies in the middle feeling that they are not getting a fair deal.

We cannot help everybody and we must not spread the resources too thinly, but there is merit in providing some changes to the business gateway. When the contracts are renegotiated in 2012, they should be changed so that credit is given for not only starting businesses up or moving them into being VAT registered, but providing help to businesses that are not start-ups but are in temporary need because of cash-flow difficulties or some other such temporary problem. There probably also need to be changes to ensure that Scottish Enterprise provides more help to businesses that are in the middle—not on a one-to-one basis, which would be impossible, but by providing more online support and, perhaps, working in tandem with business organisations to run more events, so that people feel that Scottish Enterprise is doing something for them, even if they are not getting account-managed support.

There must be a stronger focus on internationalisation. Scottish Development International is in effect tasked with two things: inward investment, and exports and international trade. I think that it has done a pretty good job on inward investment. Over the past decade or two, we have punched above our weight in that regard, but well below our weight on exports and international trade. Over the past 10 years or so, the value of our exports has fallen from £17 billion to £15 billion. We are the only part of the United Kingdom whose exports have fallen in cash terms. I will repeat a statistic that was given to the committee and which I have mentioned in this chamber on several occasions, because it really stuck with me. Some 8 per cent of all VAT-registered companies in the UK are headquartered

in Scotland, but we have only 5 per cent of the exporting companies. We punch well below our weight in that regard. SDI must be charged with focusing a bit more on exporting and internationalisation. We must also review the smart exporter initiative, which was a good initiative that was run jointly by the business organisations and Government, in order to ensure that it enables more Scottish companies to trade internationally, so that we can have an export-led recovery.

Jim Mather: I thank the member for mentioning the smart exporter programme. Does he recognise that the previous policy of foreign direct inward investment in the area of information technology has backfired in Scotland, causing an export problem? Would he, like me, welcome the chance to have a new beginning and to reinvent exporting across the wider spectrum of businesses in Scotland, including the professions, in order to help young businesses move forward and consider that proposition?

Gavin Brown: I am not precisely sure what the minister means by reinventing exporting, but anything that improves the lot of the companies that currently export goods is important. In particular, anything that increases the number of companies that are exporting is to be welcomed. If that is what he means, I would be interested in discussing the matter with him.

We must also consider our start-up rate, which has been poor over the long term. Over the next couple of years, spending on economic development by local authorities should continue. There is a danger that economic development spending will be squeezed because that is seen by the Government as being less painful in the short term.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member give way?

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but I must ask Mr Brown to conclude now.

Gavin Brown: What do we want our agencies to do over the next few years? Do we want them to spend all their time on internal matters, ironing out details and creating yet more changes, or do we want the current organisations to have a relentless focus on jobs, growth and recovery? The latter should be the priority.

I move amendment S3M-7519.2.1, to insert at end:

“; calls on the Scottish Government to pay particular focus to improving Scotland's record on exporting and internationalisation of businesses, and also calls on the Scottish Government to focus on improving the business start-up rate.”

09:50

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)

(Lab): At first glance, the debate might seem to be simply an opportunity for my friend Jeremy Purvis to gain more publicity for his 47-page document, which I believe he launched at his party's conference earlier this year. On one point, we are certainly in agreement: creating jobs and strengthening the economy are central to Scotland's future prosperity. However, I am not convinced that the creation of regional development banks will facilitate that, although I listened with interest to what Mr Purvis had to say. My colleague, Lewis Macdonald, will discuss some of that later.

It cannot be denied that the forecast for Scotland's economic growth does not make especially good reading. We have debated the facts on many occasions. Only this week, the Ernst & Young ITEM club predicted that Scotland would have a "slow grind" to recovery, with growth of 1.1 per cent anticipated this year, rising to 2.2 per cent next year. The same ITEM club report also highlights the fact that nearly a quarter of Scotland's local authorities will be among the hardest hit in the UK by spending cuts, due to the number of public sector jobs in their areas, current levels of unemployment, the degree to which their local economies depend on public sector procurement and the lack of skills among the working population. Its forecast matches previous forecasts, including those of the respected Fraser of Allander institute. The scale of the problem is not unknown to us.

If the aim of the current Scottish Government is sustainable economic growth, I suggest that deciding to cut the enterprise, tourism and transport budgets seems to be a backward step. That applies not only to this budget; the Government did the same thing last year, when Scotland had the highest-ever amount at its disposal, including an extra £1 billion from various sources.

Mr Mather and the SNP can make all the claims they want to make about the lack of fiscal levers, but what has the SNP achieved for the growth of the Scottish economy with the levers that this Parliament does have? The grand and overblown promises from the First Minister about copying the Republic of Ireland and creating another Celtic tiger have proved to be about as reliable as many of the SNP's other promises.

Let us consider the economy. At present, 21,070 individuals in Scotland have been claiming jobseekers allowance for over a year, which represents a rise of well over 100 per cent on pre-recession levels. SNP members might not like to hear it, but the Salmond slump is real—it is not a myth. Figures from the Scottish Trades Union

Congress showed that, in January 2008, 9,110 people had been claiming jobseekers allowance for over a year. We all know that there is no magic wand, but when we hear that the ratio of jobseekers allowance claimants to Jobcentre Plus-advertised vacancies is 7:1, we can understand the scale of the problem. That is why we on this side of the chamber believe that it is essential that the Scottish Government maintains the levels of investment in skills training and in ensuring that every school leaver has a job, a training place or a university or college place. The demographics of Scotland mean that it is essential that all of our young people can contribute to the wider Scottish economy instead of being a drain on it.

Earlier this week, my colleague Andy Kerr and I met representatives from across the private, public and third sectors to discuss Mr Kerr's proposals to create a Scottish future jobs fund if we are elected to government next year. That is not pie in the sky or a national conversation about nothing; it is about creating a Scottish solution to a real Scottish problem.

Labour is not prepared to sit back and watch Scotland's youth—or, indeed, anyone of working age—being consigned to the scrapheap as a consequence of the economic policies of the Con-Dems in London and the lack of economic policy direction from Edinburgh. The case for action to tackle youth unemployment is becoming more urgent by the day. Yesterday, the Scottish Government's own figures revealed that the proportion of school leavers entering employment has sunk to levels that have not been seen since the previous Tory Government. Only 18.5 per cent of 2009-10 school leavers entered employment, which was a fall from 25.3 per cent in 2007-08. The number of young Scots who are not in work, education or training programmes has soared from 31,000 to 36,000 in the past year. That is the biggest increase in any single year since devolution.

To help the economy grow, we need action—not words or documents. The Scottish future jobs fund would create 10,000 jobs or training opportunities for young people. We need to guarantee an apprenticeship for every qualified young person who wants one, and we need to provide a place in education, training, work or volunteering to all 16 to 18-year-olds.

We all know that finding those jobs will not be easy, but preparing people for employment and giving them the skills to go into the workforce is a vital step in the right direction, as is offering retraining to those who have lost jobs. We must talk to large and small businesses about the types of jobs that they have to offer, the skills that they require from those whom they seek to recruit and the incentives that would help them to recruit.

Jeremy Purvis: The Liberal Democrats propose to wind up Skills Development Scotland, which costs too much and does not deliver enough for skills in Scotland, and to devolve the ability to deliver to Scotland's network of fantastic colleges, which will provide many more places. Would the Labour Party be minded to support that proposal?

David Whitton: I agree with Mr Purvis on one aspect: I do not think that Skills Development Scotland is delivering what it was supposed to. The jury is still out on what its future holds. Improving the skills and productivity of Scotland's workforce is vital to creating and maintaining jobs and growing the Scottish economy. However, I am not persuaded that breaking down all the public bodies that are charged with economic growth and redesigning them along the lines that Mr Purvis describes will do the trick, although I will bear in mind what he has just said about Skills Development Scotland.

I am certainly not persuaded that cutting the budgets of key economic drivers such as our enterprise organisation and its inward investment arm, cutting the budget of the tourism organisation, cutting grants for industry, technology and innovation, or cutting the housing and regeneration budget will do anything to contribute to Scotland's economic growth. However, there is still time for the SNP to think again.

According to Mr Mather this morning, the answer to all of Scotland's ills is for it to become independent. That is a strange policy to have when the popularity of independence is declining—it is sadly not declining as fast as we would like to see the snow outside declining, but there is still time.

Perhaps when we see the SNP's direction of travel and when—and if—the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth produces indicative budget figures up to 2015 as the Parliament has asked him to do, we will know whether the SNP is interested in Scotland's economic wellbeing or in its own narrow political interest.

I move amendment S3M-7519.1, to leave out from first "further" to end and insert:

"; notes that the Scottish Government chose to cut the budgets of enterprise and tourism this year even though the Scottish budget was going up; notes that Scotland's unemployment levels are now higher than that of the UK; calls on members to support a Scottish future jobs fund to help young people get in to work, and calls on the UK Government to base the green investment bank in Edinburgh."

The Presiding Officer: We come to the open debate. We have a little time—actually, quite a lot of time—in hand this morning.

09:58

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): It has been an interesting morning. I can see, having heard the details of the SNP amendment, why Gavin Brown is slightly embarrassed to have suggested an addendum to it. I had always thought that Gavin Brown understood better our need to be able to sustain borrowing, and that he understood that we, as a United Kingdom, were the only people who could possibly bail out the Royal Bank of Scotland. However, he seems to have joined the Jim Mather school of thought, which believes the country might just have gone bust.

Jim Mather spoke eloquently on fiscal matters, but was entirely silent on monetary matters. Perhaps that was because he did not want to explain to us that Scotland would have gone bust if it had been independent at the time of the Royal Bank of Scotland and HBOS collapse.

Jim Mather: Will the member give way?

Ross Finnie: Yes. I would be delighted to hear just how bust the country will be.

Jim Mather: Ross Finnie's view presupposes that we would have been as cavalier about regulation as was the triumvirate of the Financial Services Authority, the Treasury and the Bank of England, which were all asleep on the job.

Ross Finnie: They may have fallen asleep on the job, but they were still operating under the current rules, which have not been diluted by a light-touch regime such as the SNP has advocated for the past five years. The minister criticises the rules, but if they were bad, members should think about how much worse they would have been under the SNP's light-touch regime. I am glad that the minister mentioned that, and that he is now taking—

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Ross Finnie: No. The prospect of the SNP's light-touch regime is bad enough without having Rob Gibson explain it to me further. That is really too horrible to contemplate. The SNP wants a light-touch regime, but we are against that.

This morning's debate is about a serious issue, which Gavin Brown identified. The current arrangements have one merit, which is that the minister made clear when he came to power that he wanted a more direct central focus for the economic strategy. We do not demur from that view, but we believe that there are, throughout Scotland, issues of a more regional nature and sectoral issues that demonstrate part of the gap to which Gavin Brown alluded.

Our arrangements for dealing with start-ups and the arrangements in relation to the managed accounts—as Gavin Brown described them—of the enterprise network are not uniform. There is a huge gulf in the middle with regard to small and medium-sized businesses that are actively seeking support in one way or another.

It is interesting to note that no Government or political party has given serious thought to interfering with the arrangements that apply in the Highlands and Islands, which is because those arrangements have been successful. It is interesting that that model—

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Rob Gibson: Will the member take an intervention?

Ross Finnie: I want to develop the point.

That model has come closer to introducing a social element into the thinking. We have created a difficulty by getting rid of the enterprise network throughout Scotland, in that we now do not have people who are finely tuned in to the different natures of the sectors or to the various regional differences.

In the West of Scotland we mercifully still have the urban regeneration companies, although their timeline is perhaps somewhat limited. They are the only organisations that are currently engaged in stimulating the economies in areas where there are serious structural defects. There is no point in trying to pretend that central management by Scottish Enterprise has ever successfully addressed the issue of those separate and very different regional structural defects, which exist not only in the West of Scotland but in other parts of the economy.

The Liberal Democrats suggest this morning that we must acknowledge that the gap is complex, and accept that it is worthy of a different solution for the future. It would not matter whether a proposal for change came from the Conservative party or the Labour Party; one would almost put money on the Federation of Small Businesses and the Scottish Chambers of Commerce—although I do not know whether the editor of *Scottish Business Insider* would be wholly consistent—telling us that they do not want any real change.

They will, of course, write articles and tell us that they want to address the market failures that are occurring in sectors throughout Scotland. They will also tell us vociferously that they want to address the market failures in the sectors that need more support. I am therefore not sure that we can simply dismiss—in fact, I am clear that we cannot dismiss—the suggestion that we remodel the economic delivery mechanisms in order to fine

tune them to deal with the sectoral and regional variations that must be addressed.

Gavin Brown: Is it fine tuning that is required, or do we need to rip things up and start again from scratch?

Ross Finnie: There are fundamental differences to be addressed. If we want to reflect the different requirements throughout Scotland and within the different sectors, we must have a structure on the ground that will deliver that. We do not believe that the current structures do that.

The minister and others mentioned the need to sustain the involvement of local government in the development process. At the moment, local authorities find that difficult because they are not well equipped to be part of the process. Indeed, many of them would agree that they do not wish to do the work on their own, and that the absence of a local or regional structure in which they can play their part makes it difficult.

Although Gavin Brown was reluctant to accept the point, Jeremy Purvis made it clear in answer to his question that there would not be a huge clutter as a consequence of the proposal. Specific bodies would be responsible for specific tasks and, more important, the proposal gives wider recognition to the regional and structural variations in the economy. Our proposal is a rational one; it recognises the existence of a gap and it recognises that our funding mechanisms on a banking level and an investment level have to be more informed by local circumstances. That is one of the few ways in which we can address some of the historical structural economic defects in the Scottish economy.

10:06

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am pleased to take part in a debate about the Scottish economy and the structures that should support it. The fact that the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee has been investigating the problems of importing and exporting and the enterprise networks has a major bearing on the debate. As the SNP's amendment states, we should look at the outcome when the committee publishes its report on the inquiry into the enterprise networks, which we will debate later in the session. That will allow us to debate an overview that has been agreed across the parties.

Looking at the national and local levels, which we have to do to see the whole structure, we first of all have to think about what lies underneath. Does Jeremy Purvis understand what the country is actually like? He talked about Scotland having a “tiny” economy. I would like to take him back to a remark that was made by James Hunter, who is the former chair of HIE and a commentator on

economic matters. He said that, in 1895, Ullapool and Seattle were both fishing villages on the north-west coasts of their countries. I would like to add another one—Stavanger. It, too, was a small port and fishing village. The difference is that it now has different means to develop the assets that the minister, Jim Mather, mentioned—energy, food, water and smart people. We have all those things, too, but we lack one of the powers that those places have to change things. In a place such as Seattle, there is a regional government—a state government—and there is also very local government. We just do not have that in Scotland, and even under the Calman proposals we will not have the powers that the state of Oregon has—if that is the correct state.

Jeremy Purvis: It is Washington.

Rob Gibson: Is it? Well, whichever state Seattle is in, the point stands.

Like those other places, we also have ambitious entrepreneurs. Interestingly, most of them back full fiscal autonomy with a Government that can borrow, develop things, and punch above its weight in the world. We can take a small economy, or a “tiny” one as Jeremy Purvis called it—

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member take an intervention?

Rob Gibson: I am sorry, but I will not at the moment. I will develop the point, and then I will let Jeremy Purvis in.

The debate is characterised by a lack of ambition in a proposal to shuffle the cards in the pack rather than to look at delivering a better overall picture at local and national levels. What bothers me is that that lack of ambition is tied up with the ability to tie the hands of the Scottish Government through the Calman toils that we are about to enter. We must recognise that, in a small economy, we need the freedoms that the people of Seattle and the people of Stavanger have. Jeremy Purvis is not prepared to give us those. The point that was made by James Hunter is most useful.

Let us look at structures for a moment. Jeremy Purvis gave the most interesting explanation that what we need in the Highlands is a bank. Yes—of course we need banks, but there are already banks. One of the questions is whether we are a statist country. Do things always have to be led by the public services or are we increasingly looking for the commercial sector to support such things, given the right financial structures? As John McFall pointed out, what we had was not a light touch but a soft touch under the British regulation of money. I am afraid that Ross Finnie and other people had better start to remember the difference. We can be smart in how we organise such things.

We must consider how we should proceed. The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee has recognised that Scottish Development International has a job to do as part of the process of promoting exports. The chambers of commerce, the Scottish Council for Development and Industry and so on are also taking part in that work. It is not a case of just one body doing it, and it is not necessarily a question of saying that the bodies do not work. In the committee's report, we describe the Heineken model, whereby bodies provide services that are not already provided by others.

The committee is now considering the enterprise networks. Strengthening communities is one of the functions of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and a similar function is desperately needed in many parts of the Scottish Enterprise area. Increasingly, the evidence shows that not just firms but whole communities feel ignored. I hope that we will be able to address that. We can help by providing support, not just by providing loans through a bank. Such support is a state function that fills the gap and reduces the inequalities that have grown up over many years.

To talk about banks for a moment, where does the green investment bank fit into the picture that Jeremy Purvis painted? That is an interesting question. Thinking about our current crisis, the enterprise networks tell us that, in order to create jobs, we have to major in renewables in both the SE and the HIE areas. We are promised a green investment bank with our money being seeded into it in four years. Why cannot we have it now? In practical terms, why does not Jeremy Purvis address the fact that, if we could add to the £400 million that is available to Scottish Enterprise and HIE this year the £191 million in the fossil fuel levy, and use that money to support renewables investment, skills development and so on, we could see a transformation rather than a delay in taking the work forward? The argument that Jeremy Purvis is putting is a form of delay in dealing with the issues that we face, because we are discussing structures and not reality.

Jeremy Purvis: I am not entirely sure whether the member is supporting or opposing devolution to the Highlands through an economic development body that takes the strengths of HIE but has devolved responsibility for skills, training and tourism and the ability to invest and provide grants and loans for businesses. I would have thought that he would welcome that proposition.

Rob Gibson: The bank that Mr Purvis is talking about would not have the powers that HIE already has. A bank to back it up does not need to be part of the investment structure. We should recognise that the debate is an attempt to divert us from thinking about the realities in Scotland to shuffling the cards in the pack. Looking at structures rather

than reality is holding Scotland back, and this debate is holding us back from discussing the fundamentals of the economy. That is why the motion is fundamentally wrong.

10:13

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): It appears that the saying "Another Thursday, another economy debate" is coming true, but I commend the Liberal Democrats for choosing yet another economy debate as it is also true that, unless we grow the Scottish economy, neither the Scottish Government nor local authorities will have the financial resources to provide the services that we believe benefit our communities.

I will come back to the issue of the enterprise bodies, but first I want to comment on two of the most important sectors in the Scottish economy: construction, with particular reference to housing, and retail. Like a number of other MSPs, I recently attended the business in the Parliament conference. In the workshop that I attended, one of the main issues was how the various economic and enterprise agencies support businesses. There was particular concern that the focus is often on new businesses rather than on stabilising and supporting current business.

That could be a concern in the Scottish construction industry, which has suffered significantly in the economic downturn. In 2009, output fell by £1.7 billion and direct employment by 42,000. There has been a slight upturn this year, led mainly by the public sector. Public housing output is up by 25 per cent, but that is before we see the effects of a cut in the affordable housing investment programme this year of £204 million. Unfortunately, last week the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth announced a further cut of £94 million. When is the Scottish Government going to acknowledge the front funding of new house building by housing associations and start to pay it back?

Last week's housing statistics showed an increase in the number of new council houses of more than 100 per cent, which is welcome. However, that is still only 866 houses. Across all housing sectors, there was a 2 per cent fall, which is nowhere near the 35,000 houses that the Scottish Government asked for.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): Will the member tell us when the Labour Party will bring forward its amendments to the draft budget bill?

Mary Mulligan: We will do so when we have a debate on the draft budget bill.

The Scottish Government has spoken about levering in other resources, but has not said from where. The local authority might find itself

constrained by the 1 per cent increase in borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board, and housing associations have seen housing association grant cut and private borrowing is more difficult. Already, last week's housing statistics showed the second-lowest number of housing starts since 1981. In the early 1990s, house building was seen as one of the major routes out of the recession. It could be again, but not if we do not invest in it. The Scottish Government needs to promote the right conditions for the private sector. One idea that I have constantly asked the Scottish Government to look at is an infrastructure fund. I apologise to Mr Mather that I have not yet managed to meet him to discuss such a fund, but I tell him that I would forego the meeting if he wanted to just get on and do it.

The construction industry could be a great source of jobs, including apprenticeships. I understand that the capital budget has been cut by the Con-Dem Government, but the Scottish Government needs to prioritise and new-build housing should be given a greater priority.

Derek Brownlee: Perhaps I have this wrong, but I thought that the current UK Government had reduced the capital budget by the same amount as the Labour Party had proposed but with one difference: the reduction was £2 billion less.

Mary Mulligan: The Government has reduced the capital budget and that is the issue.

That brings me on to retail. Having worked in retail in Edinburgh and Glasgow, I know about the support that it gives to our tourism trade. Retail employs close to 250,000 staff across Scotland and contributes to economic growth and regeneration locally and nationally, but it is not immune to the harsh economic climate. The latest figures from the Scottish Retail Consortium-KPMG Scottish retail sales monitor show a clear fall of 1.8 per cent in like-for-like sales in October. Even in food sales, that number is close to zero, so any increase in burdens on the sector would need to be thought through carefully.

Imagine retailers' surprise when Mr Swinney announced that the Scottish Government was to increase business rates that are paid by the largest retail properties in the country. At the Local Government and Communities Committee yesterday, Mr Swinney acknowledged that he had had no discussions with the retailers about that move. The industry has said that it is particularly concerned about the lack of detail. Will the measure be targeted at large stores, supermarkets, out-of-town shopping centres or at all three? Yesterday, Mr Swinney seemed to imply that it would be based on square footage. If so, what will be the cut-off point?

The Scottish Government has indicated that there are two reasons for the measure. The first is to increase public resources, but if it holds back further investment, will it not be reducing taxes from another angle? The second reason is an apparent desire to redress the balance between town centres and large supermarkets and out-of-town retail parks. Does that mean that the money that will be raised will be ring fenced and reinvested in traditional town centres? Members will acknowledge that I have always been a big supporter of traditional town centres and sometimes a little critical of the Government's inaction. However, I know that shoppers want choice and some large supermarkets are in town centres.

My biggest concern about the proposal is the impact that it might have on jobs. Retailers are still taking on new people and I understand that ministers might have looked at the profits of the likes of Tesco and thought, "We should have a share of that." I only hope that it does not turn out to be a gamble that rebounds on the Scottish Government, and that affected retailers do not decide to open stores in other parts of the UK while Scotland loses out on those jobs.

The Scottish economy is on a knife edge, so the Government needs to support the industries that we have. Construction and retail could provide more jobs. People in work are able to spend and so the economy grows. I support David Whitton's amendment that calls for a Scottish future jobs fund. Construction and retail are just the kind of industries in which our young people could find employment. I sincerely hope that the Scottish Government will support our amendment.

10:21

Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): I welcome this debate because it is imperative that the Scottish economy moves forward to create employment opportunities, improve skills, increase the internationalisation of business and, in general, make the Scottish economic product the most innovative that it can be.

There will be much that members across the chamber can agree on, as well as the usual party politicking that divides us. Nonetheless, I am sure that we can all agree with the famous political phrase, "It's the economy, stupid." That needs to be paramount in all our minds.

The Lib Dems have every right to promote their policies, whether I agree with them or not, but I find it strange that they are pursuing their policy on yet more reorganisation of the enterprise agencies while we on the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee are undertaking an inquiry into the same agencies.

Jeremy Purvis: If that is the member's major criticism, will he explain why there is the Christie commission?

Stuart McMillan: It was not actually a major criticism, if I may develop the point.

The Lib Dems do not need to take any cognisance of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee and our deliberations because they are not in a position of power. They do not have to listen to anything that comes out of the committee. However, I would have thought that the evidence that we have heard up until now and which we will hear during budget scrutiny would be of use to the whole political process and to all parties in the Parliament. I hope that all parties keep an open mind instead of closing off potential opportunities that arise in evidence.

The committee has not completed its inquiry and no report has yet been published, so I cannot predict what it will say. One thing that is evident is that there should be no further changes to the enterprise agencies so soon after 2007. We have debated that point already this morning and Gavin Brown commented on it.

Robert Brown: Does Stuart McMillan believe that the Scottish Government has got it exactly right on the enterprise agencies or is it that we have to watch the disadvantage of change?

Stuart McMillan: I was just coming to that point. The evidence suggests that there needs to be some tweaking, partly because the process is still fairly new. The chief executive of Skills Development Scotland admitted to the committee that lessons need to be learned and that the process is not perfect. He also said that the agencies have been fully operational for only a short time, so why scrap them now and try to do something brand new?

Yesterday in the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, we heard some more interesting evidence. Unprompted, we heard that one thing that would make a massive difference to the Scottish economy would be for the fossil fuel levy to be allocated to Scotland immediately. The opportunity to boost the renewables sector in Scotland is vast and the feeling from both Scottish Enterprise and HIE was that it should happen now instead of waiting for the creation of the green investment bank. I am sure that all the parties in the Parliament want Scotland to deliver on its renewables potential. We have a wonderful opportunity to harness a sustainable energy future. The sooner we further progress that, the better. Throughout the country, we have the opportunity to create employment and to revitalise economies and communities. Let us stop limiting our potential and get the renewables boom moving.

Jeremy Purvis touched on the importance of education in our economy. The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee has heard of the importance of foreign students coming to Scotland and the additional money that that brings into the economy. There is the knock-on effect of additional tourism from family and friends coming to visit a student here or the foreign national returning to Scotland for a vacation after graduation.

Irrespective of that, education is vital to our economic position and our economic growth prospects. With that in mind, I question the Lib Dems and their Conservative colleagues in the Westminster Parliament on their proposal to raise tuition fees to up to £9,000 south of the border.

Jeremy Purvis: Does Stuart McMillan have similar concerns about his Administration's plan to cut the budget for universities? Universities Scotland has said that only the number of fees-only students can be increased to maintain the number of students. That is the point on which he seems to criticise other Governments.

Stuart McMillan: The direct effect of tuition fees of up to £9,000 for students in England and the knock-on effect on Scotland will be terrible—it will certainly be terrible for the Scottish economy. We in the Parliament would be foolish to think that such fees will not have a knock-on effect on the Scottish economy, although they will not have a direct effect on Scottish students.

What would happen to the number of people in Scotland who could study in a Scottish university if Scottish universities had an influx of students from south of the border who could not afford to pay up to £9,000 in tuition fees or who did not want to pay those extortionate fees? Such an influx would make it more difficult for Scottish students to go to university here. If fewer Scottish students went to university, surely that would make the situation more challenging for the Scottish economy in the future—not to mention the life chances of the potential students.

Increasing tuition fees will have a devastating effect on students, particularly those from less well-off backgrounds. In effect, it could punish people for being poor. I do not think that that is what the Lib Dems want. If the reports are true, the minister responsible—Vince Cable—might even vote against his own proposal. Some people would think that that was political opportunism in the extreme. Forcing through such massive changes on students will have a knock-on effect on Scotland, the Scottish economy and Scottish students.

A week is a long time in politics. I sincerely hope that the Lib Dems and the Tories will have a change of heart and will drop the education tax

bombshell but, given the announcement last night that the vote will be brought forward to next Thursday, I have my doubts. Scottish students will suffer as a consequence.

I hope that the Lib Dems will have a change of heart on several matters—their apparent narrow focus on enterprise, on which their minds are made up; their long-grass position on the fossil fuel levy; and their punishment of poor students. I will therefore back the amendment in Jim Mather's name and reject the Lib Dems' motion.

10:28

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): Creating jobs and strengthening the economy are laudable aims. Jeremy Purvis proposes that the way to achieve those aims is through wholesale restructuring of the public sector agencies that are tasked with supporting economic growth. The core of his plan is that councils and perhaps housing associations and universities should bank with a new Government agency that is partnered with a commercial bank, which would use their deposits to lend money to businesses that could not raise the finance that they need from the conventional banking sector.

Mr Purvis mentioned the experience of Essex County Council, which a year ago set up a bank that was then described as the first council-run bank in more than 30 years. The purpose of Banking on Essex is to provide funding when commercial banks choose not to do so, which appears to be part of the plan that Mr Purvis has proposed today. However, at least some people in Essex hold that the model does not work. Earlier this year, the *Daily Mirror* quoted a local councillor who said:

"After all the hype and publicity everyone hoped the fund would provide much-needed support. But it would appear that borrowing from Banking on Essex has been as hard as getting cash from other banks."

Jeremy Purvis: I am fully aware of all the reports and of the internal auditing, which highlighted many of the difficulties in Essex. That is why we do not want to adopt that model, although we have examined it, as we have considered the Business Development Bank of Canada, the Austrian tourism development bank and the south of Scotland loan fund, which is now self-financing. We have concluded that we can take from the best and not adopt simply one model for Scotland.

Lewis Macdonald: I am glad that Mr Purvis takes that view. The quote that I read out from the *Daily Mirror* was from a Liberal Democrat county councillor, David Kendall, who clearly concluded that the model in Essex did not work.

What Jeremy Purvis proposes is far more ambitious than simply a council-run bank. The planned regional development banks would not only recycle local taxpayers' money into businesses that were struggling with the credit crunch but take over many functions of Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, VisitScotland and Skills Development Scotland. Such banks would control a range of hugely important public policy areas from business support to tourism, skills and training.

Ownership and control are critical to the proposal. Jeremy Purvis suggests that initial capitalisation of a regional development bank would be provided by local authority deposits and reserves, but that

"a contract would be tendered out to a private bank for the management of the Bank's lending services."

That private partner could buy up to 50 per cent ownership of the regional development bank. When bankers' popularity is perhaps at an all-time low, that proposal seems to empower bankers to take more risks with public money than they are prepared to take with their own.

The proposal for private control of public assets goes further. The regional development banks' boards and management would be made up of council representatives, principals of universities and colleges and local business representatives. The business representatives would be elected by other businesses in the area. Mr Purvis suggests

"that there is a presumption that the chair of the Bank is an elected business leader."

The plan for creating jobs and strengthening the economy is to plough local authority deposits into a regional bank that is led by a private business leader and managed by a commercial bank and to give those people a deciding voice on public policies on business support, tourism and meeting skills needs.

Public-private partnerships can work. In principle, there is nothing wrong with public and private partners agreeing to work together to increase wealth on the basis of shared and managed risk and mutual benefit. However, serious questions must be asked about the plan. My local council—Aberdeen City Council—provides a warning of what Liberal Democrat notions of public-private partnership can look like in practice if they go wrong.

A month ago, Aberdeen City Council's enterprise, planning and infrastructure committee decided to press ahead with setting up a city development company to take over control of a wide range of council-owned assets and which will be a form of public-private partnership, as a regional development bank would be. The public sector will sign over to the company for five years

taxpayer-owned assets that are worth millions of pounds, such as Union Terrace gardens, and will hold only a minority of seats on the board. As far as I can ascertain, the private sector will bring no assets and no capital but will hold a majority of seats. I quote:

"A private-sector representative would act as chairman and have the casting vote on any contentious issues."

That sounds familiar in the context of Mr Purvis's paper. The council's inability to explain its model of public-private partnership is a warning that the devil might be in the detail of any such plans.

Jeremy Purvis: What Lewis Macdonald outlines is not a million miles away from what Glasgow City Council has done in the spread of its public buildings and assets, which I have recently seen for myself. He must be aware of local authorities' discussions with Airdrie Savings Bank and credit unions about a similar model to the one that I have examined, which involves using public money plus the best of private and co-operative services to create development banks.

Lewis Macdonald: As I said a moment ago, the difficulty is not with the principle but whether trust is retained and people understand fully what is being proposed.

When Aberdeen City Council produced its paper last month, it said that Scottish Enterprise would have a seat on the board of the proposed company. When I asked John Swinney about that, it was clear that he had had no conversations with the council on that. I now suspect that even Scottish Enterprise has not been asked about taking a seat on the board. Councillors from the administration parties decided at a meeting to write to me to explain why the proposal was not privatisation—that is their word, not mine—but I am afraid that I still await their explanation.

Aberdeen City Council's administration lost what trust it had from many citizens earlier this year when it chose to disregard public opinion on city-centre regeneration. When the Liberal Democrats fight next year's election, they will no doubt be asked about Jeremy Purvis's plan for regional development banks. They will be asked about their plan to abolish Highlands and Islands Enterprise and about how they plan to promote visits to Scotland from within the British Isles, in light of their plan to abolish VisitScotland. They will also be asked about their record in power—whether at Westminster or in Aberdeen: how they have handled assets; and, in the case of Aberdeen, their proposal to abdicate their responsibility, as elected local representatives, for the government of the local area to an unaccountable private sector quango.

While it was perfectly reasonable for Mr Purvis to secure the debate, in developing his proposition

he needs to be careful that he bears in mind that example and the need for trust in any public-private partnership. He must be careful that he does not make the mistakes that some of his colleagues have made elsewhere.

10:35

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Like other members, I have read Jeremy Purvis's paper, "Making Scotland the Most Innovative and Entrepreneurial Economy in the World". I have some sympathy with its aspirations and the aspirations that Mr Purvis has espoused today. I am grateful for the historical aspect to the paper, which discusses the enterprise networks over the years. It reminded me about the previous, cluttered landscape that was difficult to work one's way around. One thing that the SNP Government should be commended for is that it has hugely simplified that landscape.

I was particularly interested in certain parts of the paper. Mr Purvis wants us to consider an innovation-driven economy, in which

"new ideas and skills ... emphasise the high end of the value chain, rather than replication."

We could all get behind that idea and there are examples of how we can move forward on that, such as renewables, which Stuart McMillan mentioned. I would cite biotechnology as a cutting-edge industry in Scotland, for example Controlled Therapeutics in East Kilbride, which makes medical products. The company has been a great success story, having won export awards and a Queen's award for enterprise. We have to celebrate our achievements rather than talking ourselves down all the time.

I recently chaired an event about exporting architectural skills. Scotland's architects and engineers are working all over the world. Some have done so with the help of SDI but many have gone out there and done it on their own. We have the entrepreneurs and the innovation-driven trailblazers.

I was interested in the section in the paper about science. That ties in with the Government's science strategy. There are issues in the paper with which we are all in accord and that we can take forward.

Debates such as this are good because we get to bang on about things that really matter to us. I have managed to find a reference in Mr Purvis's paper to something that I care hugely about, which is languages. Jeremy Purvis is right when he says:

"Language skills are crucial to the competitiveness of Scotland."

I am glad that we have strategies in place to improve Scotland's language skills—strategies that can be backed by everyone.

Ross Finnie talked about small and medium-sized enterprises, which comprise 95 per cent of businesses in this country, and about business start-ups. It is true that Scotland's record on business start-ups has not been great, pre and post-recession and, indeed, pre-SNP. The SNP is improving things. The small business bonus scheme has helped businesses to survive the desperate times that mismanagement of the UK economy has brought upon them and will help them to thrive when they have a chance to get out from under the cloud.

Leaving some disposable income in the pockets of Scotland's council tax payers has helped, as have social benefits. The policy of freezing the council tax has meant that more money circulates in Scotland's economy, giving it a boost. I contend that those and other policies of the Scottish Government have helped the economic recovery programme. They have helped the Scottish economy to survive and have been innovative in themselves.

We can use Government to improve the economy but we could do a lot more with full economic powers. Imagine how much more we could do if the Secretary of State for Scotland had decided to put the findings of the Steel commission rather than of Calman up for consideration as the basis for the Scotland Bill. A debate on that is taking place next week so today I will only repeat what I have said before, which is that it is my firm, unshakeable belief that the Scottish Government should have substantial authority over the levers of power that most affect the Scottish economy: infrastructure; education and skills; business regulation; and taxation. Of course, only the first two are under Scottish control. As the Steel commission said,

"there is a need for Scotland to have its hands more effectively on these four key levers and be able to pull all of them together."

Jeremy Purvis: As Robert Brown and I were members of the Steel commission, I am curious about what the member is saying. Does she now support the findings of the Steel commission? At the time of publication, they were rubbished by the SNP.

Linda Fabiani: I am surprised at the backtracking of the Lib Dems, who are willing to compromise the further powers recommended by the Steel commission to go with a Liberal Democrat Secretary of State for Scotland who is tying in with the Tories for something much less.

Jeremy Purvis's paper talked about privatising Scottish Water. Like Murdo Fraser, Mr Purvis calls

it mutualisation, although I have concerns that the end result is the same. The latest version of the statement of funding policy published alongside the UK budget talks about how

“Government may take into account proceeds from the sales of ... assets in setting its grant to the devolved administrations when capital receipts are realised as a result of privatisation of a public sector trading body or a major change in the role of the public sector”.

In such circumstances, it says,

“Treasury Ministers reserve the right to reduce the grant to the devolved administration to reflect receipts.”

I wonder whether Mr Purvis, in his closing remarks, could reassure us that he has considered that fully and discussed it with his UK counterparts.

Derek Brownlee: Would it not be more appropriate for the Scottish Government to discuss it with the Treasury? Is that not exactly the point that the SFT made in its paper, which considered not privatisation but a different model, too?

Linda Fabiani: The Scottish Government is constantly in discussion with the Treasury over such issues. Mr Purvis put in his paper—reflected in the motion—that he believes that that is the way forward, so I would ask him whether he has had such discussions and whether he can give us some comfort that he is not merely signing away one of Scotland’s assets.

I have some other issues with the proposal from Jeremy Purvis. Where would the boundaries of the regional development banks lie? I have concerns about expecting one body to control grant funding, lending, skills and training and destination management for all businesses in an area. I worry about bureaucracy.

Although I do not agree with everything that Jeremy Purvis has said on the issue, he has put ideas forward and I hope that they will be taken into account by Campbell Christie’s commission. The debate is worth while.

10:43

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I am happy to contribute to this important debate. It is the second week in a row that I have been involved in a debate on the economy, which in itself is hugely unusual. The issue of what we can do to support the Scottish economy, create jobs and generate economic growth is a critical one.

I start with a confession. Unlike Linda Fabiani, I have not managed to read Jeremy Purvis’s 47-page document. However, given the stimulating pitch that he provided, I can assure him that it will move to the top of my to-do list as soon as I leave the chamber.

I was interested to listen to Jeremy Purvis’s critique and to his proposals for the infrastructure to create a stronger economy. There is a danger of being blinded by the science and losing the purpose of the debate. We can have a long, thorough discussion about the infrastructure but perhaps miss why we want to get that infrastructure right. I am concerned that we may focus on structures and lose the opportunity to reflect on how we might support individuals, the private sector and voluntary organisations to create economic opportunities. In stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship, we need to think not just about the process but about people.

The issue of social entrepreneurship—the idea that there are different models for how people can contribute to the economy—is critical. We need to feed that in to any debate about infrastructure and its purpose.

I recognise the fundamental point that we need to get the infrastructure right to will the means to the ends that we seek. Government has to assert that it is an active agent; it is not enough for it to stand by. It is not enough for the Scottish Government to claim that it is doing things; it must focus on delivery.

I was rather depressed by an intervention from Mr Mather on the facts of the economy, in which he seemed to retrench further into the SNP comfort zone of explaining why the Government cannot do things and what is not its fault. Instead of doing that, ministers should be grasping the levers that are available to them and focusing on their responsibilities.

Jim Mather: Will the member give way?

Johann Lamont: After I have made the point. The minister may want to respond to it, too.

The minister said that the Scottish Government is committed to a transparent process. When will we get the conclusion of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth’s reflections on the significant vote last Thursday in which the chamber agreed that local authorities, public bodies and voluntary sector organisations in Scotland need spending plans for the next four years, just as bodies across the whole of the United Kingdom do?

Jim Mather: Will the member reflect on and consider the extent to which Westminster under Labour was an active agent in the disaster that we all face? I refer to the failure of the banking system and the cuts that are now ensuing in Scotland.

Johann Lamont: I certainly want to put on record the fact that the Labour Government saved the banks and made a significant contribution to the Scottish economy as a consequence.

The fact of the matter is that having four-year plans is not an academic process. We need answers. People are making decisions now, and making them in the dark. As the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities indicated, as a consequence of that, unnecessary cuts may be made. The voluntary groups that I met yesterday told me that they are in exactly that position. They are losing people because their staff do not know what the future holds and so are looking for other jobs, which leads to an increase in recruitment costs, a loss of capacity and weakened service delivery. We need a Government response to that.

I am interested in the reforms that Jeremy Purvis outlined. I appreciate the importance of Government agencies in supporting the economy and Co-operative Development Scotland, which was set up by the former Scottish Executive, has an important role to play in that. We need to review its activities and consider the opportunities that it could create for co-operative businesses across a whole range of areas. Doing that would reinforce our ambitions for this country. I welcome the minister's views on the direction of travel for Co-operative Development Scotland.

I am hugely frustrated by the changes that have already been made to the purpose of Scottish Enterprise, which no longer has a role in people or place. Any future plans for our infrastructure must have that. I recall asking a Scottish Enterprise official what Scottish Enterprise could do to support economic generation activity in my community, where few people start up businesses and more people are likely to be unemployed. When I asked what Scottish Enterprise was doing to create local jobs or to recognise the barriers to people in my constituency—including people with disabilities and the disadvantaged—getting into work, the answer was, “Nothing. That is not our job.” The current strategy for Scottish Enterprise represents an absolutely failed strategy. It spends a lot but has no role in local communities. That needs to be changed.

Supporting specialist sectors and big and highly profitable businesses to bring in work should be tested as an approach. We are all aware of the small and medium-sized business argument that we get a far greater return in economic activity and employment opportunities if investment is directed at them. The most significant businesses in my constituency are housing associations and housing co-ops. The lack of information from the Government on its spending plans, combined with cuts to the housing and regeneration budgets, are creating a destabilising effect for those critical community anchors and generators of economic opportunity, a situation that must apply across the country.

In its economic enterprise budget strategy, the Government needs to understand the disproportionate impact of its decisions on particular groups. I will highlight two: women and school leavers. On average, women make up 70 per cent of the local authority workforce. In the health service, the evidence is that women predominate in jobs that are more likely to be lost. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth is asking for pay restraint, but he will not will the means for local government to protect low-paid women workers who earn under £21,000. My colleague, David Whitton, highlighted the disturbing situation of school leavers going into employment, the figure for which is lower than at any time since 1992-93. We also see the continuing trend of vulnerable school leavers being less successful in securing work. Any strategy around infrastructure and enterprise has to find a way of releasing that potential and addressing the lack of opportunity across our communities. That is why I believe that Labour's proposed Scottish future jobs fund is so important.

We must reflect on whether the commitments on infrastructure bodies are being delivered in the real world. A couple of weeks ago, in response to a question from Iain Gray, the First Minister spoke about his commitment to apprenticeships. Within an hour, I had received a phone call from someone in my constituency who a month ago, three and a half years into his apprenticeship, had been laid off and told that no one could help him. There has to be a commitment to infrastructure engaging in the real world and taking things forward.

I would welcome the Scottish Government's response on all those critical areas, including how its equality duties are shaping choices. Those duties are about not just describing the impact on groups but changing choices to ensure that they are fair. In particular, will the minister comment on the fact that, at UK level, the Government has not enacted the socioeconomic duty? Will the Government ensure that, in the spending plans that it takes forward, the socioeconomic duty is a central part of its approach to the structure—whatever we come up with—for enterprise, employment and creating economic opportunity that will address the needs of people who are economically disadvantaged?

10:51

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): I welcome today's debate and the opportunity that it gives the chamber to focus on Scotland's economy. Although many of the powers that affect it are held at Westminster, Scotland's economy is dealt with merely as a fringe issue in that chamber—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Mr FitzPatrick, that noise is not happening by accident.

Joe FitzPatrick: I do not think that it is my phone that is causing it, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think that it is.

Joe FitzPatrick: I will put it away.

The Liberal Democrats have put forward some genuinely interesting proposals in their motion, but they need to be considered as part of a much wider look at public services. I hope that Mr Purvis will submit his paper to the Christie commission for detailed examination. That would enable the document to be considered in the wider look into the public services that Campbell Christie is taking forward.

Although the Liberal Democrat paper contains a few interesting ideas, the party misses the point when it comes to the Scottish Futures Trust. With a budget of £3.2 million, the SFT delivered benefits for the public sector of £114 million in the 2009-10 financial year. That is a 35-fold return on investment for the Scottish public. That value for the Scottish purse is set to continue in the years ahead, with the SFT's corporate plan for 2009 to 2014 setting a minimum target of a £7 benefit for every £1 spent over that period.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the Scottish Futures Trust be referred to the Christie commission?

Joe FitzPatrick: I think that there is no limit to the width of issues that Campbell Christie can look at. We need to take a wide look at where we are going.

Scrapping the Scottish Futures Trust and replacing it with the Liberals' favoured option of finance Scotland makes no sense other than as a piece of politicking. Doing that would put at risk projects such as the £1.25 billion schools for the future programme that is delivering 55 schools across Scotland, including the rebuild of Harris academy in my constituency. The education establishment in Dundee was absolutely delighted to have the intervention of the Scottish Futures Trust, which ensured that the proposals for Harris academy are now far more ambitious than had been thought possible originally. The SFT has added real value to a project that is very important to that long-standing school in my constituency. In coming to a decision on the Scottish Futures Trust, I urge my Liberal colleagues to listen to the facts, not the grumblings from the Labour benches.

As we have heard, Scotland's economy is still in a delicate state, but we are making progress. By using the limited powers at his disposal, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth is endeavouring to make the most of our

shrinking block grant. However, until we have the same fiscal responsibilities that every other normal nation has, it is inevitable that we will remain hamstrung in our efforts to grow the Scottish economy.

I have raised the comparison that I am about to make in the chamber before, so it will not surprise members that I do so again. The computer games industry is a prime example of why we in Scotland are missing out as a consequence of economic policy that must benefit the UK as a whole rather than Scotland. The industry has been highly successful in Scotland over the past two decades and is disproportionately important to the Scottish economy, with 10 per cent of the total UK industry based in Dundee. Evidence strongly suggests that, without tax relief on games development, we are in danger of losing our market share to countries such as France and Canada, which offer tax breaks.

Mike Rumbles: Is it not within John Swinney's power as Scotland's finance minister to use business rates to give the industry some assistance?

Joe FitzPatrick: The computer games industry has asked for clearly targeted support for the development of computer games. The argument has been put forward by the whole industry, which is asking for UK-based taxes to be used to support it. The evidence suggests that a tax break would increase the Exchequer's take. Without it, there is a serious danger that we will lose both money and jobs, which is a particular shame.

Tax breaks for the computer games industry would be self-funding, protecting existing jobs and generating new graduate jobs and extra investment for our economy. However, despite the sector's importance to the economy, not £1 of tax relief has ever been paid out, in spite of the good words that we heard from the previous Labour Government towards the end of its term.

The computer games industry in Dundee is supported by the Scottish Government in those areas where it has a remit. In particular, the Scottish Government has ensured that the industry has the best graduates in the world. Graduates from the University of Abertay Dundee are so good and well trained that companies from across the globe, especially Canada, come to Dundee to cherry pick some of the best people in the business. We need to ensure that that talent remains in Scotland and Dundee.

Members may not be surprised to hear that I also have a particular interest in the life sciences sector, which is important to Dundee and to Scotland. The news that the UK Government is to go ahead with plans for a patent box is welcome. Scotland is truly a global leader in life sciences. I

hope that the sector-specific tax break for pharmaceuticals and the biotechnology industry will have a positive effect on investment in Scotland. It is important that, when people get it right, we acknowledge that.

However, the current constitutional set-up means that sometimes people get it right and sometimes they get it wrong. We need a constitutional set-up that ensures that we make the decisions and that those decisions are always made in the interests of Scotland. The solution is straightforward: the best basis on which to make decisions for the Scottish economy is for those decisions to be made in Scotland, with Scottish interests at the forefront, rather than as an afterthought. Full fiscal powers for the Scottish Parliament would ensure that we developed Scottish solutions to Scottish problems. We look forward to the day when the Parliament has all the powers that are necessary successfully to manage and support Scotland's economy.

Dundee used to be known as the city of the three Js: jute, jam and journalism. It is now becoming known as the city of the three Gs. I have already mentioned two of those: genes and games. The third potential G for Dundee is green jobs. We desperately need the UK Government to release our fossil fuel levy money so that it can be invested in Scotland right now.

10:58

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): I thank Jeremy Purvis for producing his document. Like Johann Lamont, I will put it beside the other voluminous books that I must read over the next few months. However, I wonder whether it is a negotiating counter should there be any electoral changes come May 2011, because the Liberal Democrats are famous for negotiations that involve 48-page documents and predetermined views on how they should move forward.

My colleagues have touched on some specific issues, but it is important for me to respond to some of the things that I have heard in today's debate. When I was a little kid, I was always terrified when my mother said that there was an elephant in the room. I am quite terrified this morning, because it sounds as if there are two elephants in the room. One is the elephant of the wider UK economy and the strategy that the coalition Government has adopted. The second is the position that Jim Mather, the minister with responsibility for the economy in Scotland, has taken.

I will deal first with the coalition Government. Recently the cartoonist Martin Rowson created a wonderful image of Nick Clegg, David Cameron and George Osborne looking at an Enigma

machine and hitting it with a hammer, just to see what might happen. In a sense, that is how they are handling this country's economy. They do not have a plan B, should things not go right, and have a predetermined view of why we have arrived at this situation—a view that directly contradicts much of the assessment that international economists have made. In Scotland, as well as in other parts of the United Kingdom, we now face substantial changes in public investment that will have a serious effect on the wider economy. Those changes are predicated on the view that the private sector will fill the gap. Again, no serious group of economists has indicated that that will happen. The coalition Government has adopted a high-risk strategy.

Derek Brownlee: Does the member accept that, during the previous period of public sector employment contraction in the early to mid-1990s, the private sector created many more jobs than were lost in the public sector? Within the UK, there is exactly the evidence that the member seeks.

Mr McAveety: Joseph Stiglitz has said:

"The best guess is that Britain in 2011 will look like Britain in 1931, or the United States in 1937, or Japan in 1997."

More critically, during the 1990s there was not the global economic recession that has been identified in the past couple of years. I disagree with the member, as the preconditions are markedly different.

The other elephant in the room is what I used to know as a kid as the get-out-of-jail-free card. That was deployed by Jim Mather, who argued that things would be different if only we had more fiscal powers; I think that he referred to the optimal fiscal model. He also mentioned

"excessive risk taking and moral hazards".

Some of the models that the Scottish Government has identified in recent years took substantial risks. One website—the reference will probably need to be removed by a junior member of staff at the end of today's debate—still highlights Ireland as the model for economic development. That fails to recognise the difference between the preconditions in Ireland and those in Scotland.

In an sense, I am reminded of the debates that I used to have when I was 17 or 18 and was exploring political ideas. I would bump into various folk on the far left, who would say, "We have never really had real, actual socialism, because no one has quite tried it yet." Today's debate is much the same.

I may have used this comparison before, but I am reminded of the wee cartoon in which a wee guy goes into a room and asks a bookseller, "Where are the books on socialism?" The

bookseller replies, "Where they have always been, son—just round the corner." That is a bit like the debate that we are having with SNP members, who say, "If only we had full fiscal powers, if only Calman were not inadequate, if only other people would really listen to us, we would really drive forward."

Today Jeremy Purvis and my Labour colleagues have indicated that there are powers that the Scottish Government can use and actions that it can take now that would make a real difference.

Mike Rumbles: Joe FitzPatrick complained that we did not have the powers to help the games industry in Dundee. When I intervened to say that John Swinney has devolved powers over business rates, from which he could exempt the games industry, Joe FitzPatrick did not respond. Is Frank McAveety not making the point that the SNP is just ginning?

Mr McAveety: I would like to amplify that point, but I invite Jim Mather to comment first.

Jim Mather: I put on record the fact that Mr McAveety is in a state of grace, as he was the one Labour member to support the establishment of a cross-party group on more financial powers for the Scottish Parliament. I treat that action with great respect. He has put himself into a state of grace, whereas others have painted themselves into a corner.

Mr McAveety: I am happy to confirm that; I had better not use the word "secret", as I know that the First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning were a wee bit upset about that yesterday. It is a matter of public record.

That touches on a fundamental issue that was echoed in yesterday's proceedings and is part of today's debate. The debate is not solely about the either/or of absolutes at either end. The big debate in Scotland is about how we move forward to having more powers that are appropriate to and determined in Scotland, in the sense that they will make a real difference. Last week, we had the misfortune of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth having to apologise for not exercising a power that was available to the Parliament. We have many opportunities to address such issues.

I am conscious of the fact that I am running out of time, but I would like to comment on the Labour amendment. I welcome Labour's commitment to work with local authorities to make economic development a statutory responsibility. Having spent a period of time as a local councillor, I know that many of the drivers for change in the city of Glasgow in the past 25 years have come because of local initiative. Glasgow's use of cultural involvement and activity in the late 1980s made a

real difference not just to the city's confidence but to its sense of wellbeing. It also generated economic benefit. That is the sort of model that we should be examining.

I welcome the paper by Jeremy Purvis, at least for stimulating the debate, and I look forward to a more honest debate about the powers that this Parliament can properly exercise.

11:05

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP):

The motion before us is a very interesting one, and I am delighted that the Lib Dems are finally starting to put forward policy ideas. We have spent only three and a half years in this place listening to Opposition debates that are devoid of policy, but it feels much longer.

Jeremy Purvis has obviously given some serious thought to the issues that he explores in the policy paper on which today's motion is based, and he has to be commended for that. There is much on which we can agree. Few of us in the chamber would disagree with the desire to increase the number of business start-ups, for example, or to green up Scotland's business sector. However, there is a prevailing sense throughout the paper that although Jeremy Purvis believes that he has come up with all sorts of new and innovative ideas, he has not necessarily taken the time to look and find out that a lot of what he talks about is happening already.

To give just one example, on page 22 the paper discusses the role of Scotland's colleges in driving economic growth, correctly pointing out that

"Investing in training and skills makes a real difference."

Indeed it does, which is why the SNP Government has not only invested record sums in further education but worked with Scotland's colleges to ensure that they have been able to respond quickly to the challenges that have been presented by the economic downturn—a task that colleges have performed admirably. Additional resources were targeted last year at colleges in the local authority areas that experienced the greatest increases in unemployment and where the rate of unemployment among young people rose the most. The SNP has enabled further education colleges to realise their potential as drivers of economic recovery as they have never been able to do before, with the necessary flexibility to respond to the needs of their own regions as well as to provide support to our national economic recovery.

In my own area, Central Scotland, where the number of young people attending college has grown enormously in recent years, the FE colleges have grasped that agenda. Motherwell,

Coatbridge, Cumbernauld and South Lanarkshire Colleges have worked together to take on new courses that will allow them to play their part in addressing the particularly harsh impact that the economic crisis has had in Lanarkshire.

It is not that Jeremy Purvis's ideas are all wrong; it is just that, to a large extent, he has arrived a bit late at a party that is already in full swing.

Jeremy Purvis: I was agreeing with what the member was saying right up until that last point. The paper acknowledges the fantastic work that colleges are doing, but its proposals would give them the ability to do a lot more. Bringing into SDS and devolving to colleges a lot more power and the ability to do more work would represent a step change up. That is why Scotland's Colleges has welcomed the proposals.

Christina McKelvie: That is a commendable idea. As I said earlier, however, colleges are already working very well with SDS in delivering what Jeremy Purvis has been talking about. Again, perhaps he did not get the invitation to the party.

As the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism has made clear, much of what Jeremy Purvis has proposed is unnecessary and potentially destabilises on-going work. Part of it does not look at all radical to me; it looks like a reorganisation. Retain this, don't retain that, shift this bit here, shunt that function over there—it is a moving of desks and a changing of names. Look below the surface of the various new bodies and agency titles and, as Rob Gibson said, it is more like an administrative shuffling of the pack than a genuinely bold policy idea.

I seemed to remember that the Lib Dems had a different position for the election in 2007, so I went back and had a look at their manifesto. There is a whole section in it on Scottish Enterprise. Page 24 has quite a lot of interesting information, including:

"government should give strong support to the business leaders who invest their time, knowledge and expertise at all levels in Scottish Enterprise".

That is interesting in itself, but there is a better bit, which says:

"Those who say the enterprise agencies must be scrapped or slashed must explain how they will deliver their functions in skills and training, in investment in industry, in regeneration. Too often other parties call for changes without saying what new bodies they will set up to take over, or complain vociferously if Enterprise agencies suggest cutbacks or changes to the service. We will be consistent."

Consistent, indeed.

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): Does the member not realise that the enterprise agency that we were talking about then included local enterprise companies, which had local decision-making powers and were able to react in local

areas? We were talking about saving them from being scrapped—and, of course, they were scrapped, as soon as the SNP formed the Administration.

Christina McKelvie: My colleague must remember that the two previous Ministers for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, Jim Wallace and Nicol Stephen, left a mess that Jim Mather had to tidy up.

Gavin Brown has talked a number of times this morning about ripping things up and starting again. That reminded me of a great Orange Juice song written by Edwyn Collins. The bit that keeps playing through my head is:

"I hope to God you're not as dumb as you make out
I hope to God".

Another commitment in the Lib Dems manifesto in 2007 was to create a new quango in the shape of an investment and innovation agency. Those commitments seem to run counter to the intent of the motion that is before us today.

Of course, I am not saying that reorganisations do not ever have a place, and the streamlining of the cluttered enterprise and skills landscape that the SNP undertook when it entered government was much needed. However, it has been barely three years since the Scottish Government's reforms of the enterprise and skills landscape took place, and for Jeremy Purvis to propose further reorganisation now feels more like doing something for the sake of it rather than an effective policy platform to achieve our shared aim of strengthening the Scottish economy.

The opening clause of Jeremy Purvis's motion is:

"That the Parliament believes that creating jobs and strengthening the economy is central to Scotland's future prosperity".

I could not agree more with that. I would argue, though, that a more effective way to achieve that aim is to support the people whose job it is to build sustainable economic recovery by doing just that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come now to the winding-up speeches. We have used up all the slack during the debate, so the closing speakers should stick to their time limits. Derek Brownlee has six minutes.

11:12

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): I take the opportunity to say something that I have never had the chance to say during my five years in Parliament: Mike Rumbles made a fair point. I am glad that he is here to hear that. In relation to the point that he made to Joe FitzPatrick about business rates, it is absolutely within the Scottish

Government's competence and ability to offer incentives to sectors. It did so for the renewables sector, and I am aware of no reason why it could not do the same, if it chose, for a sector such as the games industry.

Lewis Macdonald: Mr Brownlee appreciates that it is also within the competence of the UK Government to provide support to the games industry. Can he explain to the Parliament why the incoming UK Government decided to abandon that proposal?

Derek Brownlee: My understanding is that the incoming UK Government found that the proposals that had been made by the previous UK Government were poorly targeted and ineffectual. We can have a long debate about fiscal policy, but we will not take lectures on it from the Labour Party.

There is a broader point on which we should reflect in any debate on the economy, and both the SNP and the Labour Party have touched on it: the extent to which the Scottish Government can actually influence economic performance in Scotland. The Labour Party has effectively put forward the position that the Scottish Government is responsible for a slump; the Scottish nationalists have effectively proposed that the SNP Government has somehow mitigated the recession, which is less severe. Those are both extreme propositions.

A word of caution: the main factors that drive the performance of the Scottish economy are surely those relating to the base rate that is set by the Bank of England; the exchange rate, over which the Scottish Government has no control; and access to finance from the banking sector. I suggest that those are all equally important as, if not more important than, the ability of the Scottish Government to use its activities to influence the economy.

I take issue with the part of the Liberal Democrats motion that says:

"for Scotland to meet a goal of being one of the most innovative and entrepreneurial economies in the world it needs to reform the enterprise bodies".

The goal is absolutely fine, but to suggest that reform of the enterprise agencies is a necessary precursor to pursuing that goal is not necessarily where I would place the issue.

Jim Mather: Does the member recognise the correlation between head offices, research and development and innovation?

Derek Brownlee: There is a fair point there about the importance of head offices in driving economic impact. Undoubtedly, that is also the case for innovation.

The points that Gavin Brown made in the Conservative amendment about the need to support exports and internationalisation and to improve the business start-up rate relate not to problems that are new or limited to the SNP Government and the previous Administration but to problems that go back a long time and will not be solved easily. However, they are surely core issues that must be fixed.

The structure that the Liberal Democrats proposed would, in effect, lead to a situation in which we had 13 separate skills strategies for Scotland. The suggestion that the SFT should somehow be merged into a business support role is flawed, because it blurs the role of the SFT, which in my view should be about effective procurement and helping taxpayers to get value for money.

Jeremy Purvis: I understand the point that the member is making. However, there are currently 32 skills strategies, in the context of the single outcome agreements. We are saying that strategies should be combined, that there should be fewer of them, and that the bodies that deliver them should be empowered to do so at LEC area level and in the Highlands. I am talking about colleges and local authorities, with business input. Rather than have a number of national quangos cluttering the area—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have had long enough, Mr Purvis.

Derek Brownlee: There is a reasonable point to be made about localisation, but 13 skills strategies seems to be significantly too many.

We have questions about the detail of the Liberal Democrats' proposals, which I do not think have been answered in the debate. If the Liberal Democrats were to be in a position to implement their proposals next May, how long would it take to legislate for and establish regional development banks? How long would it be before banks could begin lending? How much lending could be achieved each year? What would the length of loans be? What rate of default would be appropriate?

Is it credible to suggest, as the Liberal Democrats seemed to do, that short-term deposits from local councils—we heard the example of Scottish Borders Council and the Icelandic banks—could be used to capitalise long-term lending, if indeed that is the proposal? There is also a serious issue to do with the appropriate default rate that a council could accept for money that would otherwise be in reserve and available to it for later years.

The minister set out a long list of things that he would like to do if he had more powers. The Scottish Government is getting itself into a terrible

tangle over fiscal policy. I am a believer in the Laffer curve; I think that over time lower taxes lead to higher revenue. However, no one would suggest that in the short to medium term there is not a reduction in revenues, which will lead to lower spending. The Scottish Government cannot accept that, because it is making a political point in its opposition to lower spending by the UK Government, and because SNP members regularly troop to the Parliament to defend the economic policies of Venezuela and Cuba. I worry about what the SNP's position on the economy will be when Mr Mather departs from the Parliament and leaves us in the hands of the people on the left of his party.

Fiona Hyslop expressed concern yesterday about the volatility of income tax, but other taxes over which the SNP wants control are equally, if not more, volatile. Consistency from the SNP as well as from the Liberal Democrats would be welcome.

11:18

David Whitton: We have had an interesting debate. The rare appearance of Mr Mather to lead a debate was welcome, but then he launched into an astonishing attack on the handling of the economy by UK Governments past and present—I do not know whether that was because he speaks to the Parliament so rarely.

Mr Mather talked about the failure of regulation, but his First Minister has talked about an independent Scotland having a lighter touch. Indeed, some SNP supporters would go further and turn Scotland into some kind of tax haven, perhaps similar to the Cayman Islands. Included in that number might be members of the Council of Economic Advisers, which is chaired by Sir George Mathewson, who in a previous life was chief executive and chairman of the Royal Bank of Scotland. RBS was then, as it is now, based in Scotland, with its headquarters at Gogarburn, but according to Mr Mather our economic decline is the fault of RBS being a UK bank that is regulated by the UK. It would be interesting to know whether that is Sir George's view. Perhaps Sir George has shared that view with Mr Mather at one of the dinner parties that the Council of Economic Advisers has had.

The minister said he has an open mind. I am sure that he does, given his vast amount of reading and accumulation of knowledge. It is unfortunate for the Parliament that he has a closed mind when it comes to independence for Scotland, which he thinks is the cure for all Scotland's ills. I disagree with him on that. Support for the policy is in decline, and if he does not believe me he should look at the most recent opinion poll.

Jim Mather: Will the member take an intervention?

David Whitton: I always take interventions from Jim Mather.

Jim Mather: How might Mr Whitton explain the lower number of head offices in Scotland, and the lower spend on research and development and the fewer business start-ups that are a function of that? We have fewer offices, less R and D, fewer spin-outs, a smaller service sector and more young people are leaving to go elsewhere. The population and growth numbers back that up.

David Whitton: How, then, does Mr Mather explain what on earth he has been doing for the past three years, because the numbers have declined even in that period?

Mr Purvis's paper is worthy of consideration and investigation, and it is clear that he put a lot of work into it. However, it is a bit strange that his policy did not get more support from back benchers in his own party. I was a little disappointed that Mr Smith, the convener of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, did not take part in the debate, given that the committee has been investigating the subject. Be that as it may, we are willing to consider Mr Purvis's proposals, as Mr Macdonald said, although we do not think that he has got everything right.

Of course, we do not think that the current SNP Government has got its policy right, either. How can we be serious about having sustainable economic growth as our number 1 priority when decision after decision has undermined that objective? In my earlier speech, I detailed the reductions in the budgets for enterprise, innovation, tourism, housing and regeneration.

There has also been slavish opposition to the use of private finance to fund capital infrastructure projects, which has caused the pipeline of work to dry up. However, proposals in the budget for next year represent a complete U-turn, albeit belated. According to the budget documents, the Scottish Futures Trust, which Mr FitzPatrick mentioned, will use the non-profit-distributing model, which I think that I am right in saying is part of the public-private partnership family. Perhaps Mr Mather will confirm that we are also to have the design, build, finance and maintain model for hub projects, which sounds to me like PPP. It is too little, too late for the 40,000 construction workers who lost their jobs while Alex Salmond, John Swinney and the SNP defended the Scottish Futures Trust, which until its Damascene conversion was advising local government on how to manage and procure rather than coming up with a new finance model to get construction workers back on the nation's building sites.

Jim Mather: I really think that the member might celebrate the fact that Scotland has learned through the SFT and will never again do what it did with Hairmyres hospital, when one hospital was built for the price of two.

David Whitton: It is interesting that every time that we talk about PPP, someone mentions Hairmyres hospital, but there is never any mention of the many PPP projects since then that have delivered value for money. In my constituency, six brand new secondary schools opened last year, which were delivered on time and on budget and are good value for the local taxpayers in my area—[*Interruption.*] I beg your pardon?

Stuart McMillan: Is that what you are saying?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Let us not have conversations.

David Whitton: There was a sedentary intervention from Mr McMillan, who seems to think that he knows something about my constituency. I am sad to say that he is wrong, just as he is wrong on the PPP schools projects.

We welcome the fact that the Con-Dem Government is going ahead with Labour's proposals for a green investment bank, but we note that it does not intend to introduce the bank until 2013-14. Only last week, Danny Alexander, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, visited Holyrood and met the Finance Committee. When he was asked whether he supported our view that the green investment bank should be based in Edinburgh, he urged us to keep campaigning. His approach contrasts with that of his colleague the Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Moore, who declined to offer support when he was asked the same question. We will continue to fight to have the bank based here.

We have heard many promises from the SNP, most of which have been broken. We must get our economy back on track, to ensure that the young people who leave our schools and colleges have a job to go to.

11:24

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): I start by delineating some of the areas of agreement in the debate, of which there were a substantial number. There was broad agreement that we can and must do better, that we can and should export more and that we need a structure that provides support for business, which is probably segmented into support for large growing companies, mid-range growing companies and small start-ups. There was also broad agreement that we need a banking system that provides transaction services for business and private

individuals, provides access to small-scale borrowing to keep the economy going, and—this is fundamental—has local presence. Those are the fundamentals.

The Liberals have brought forward a useful debate that at least brings forward a proposal that is open to analysis and discussion. That is perhaps in stark contrast to the blank-sheet-of-paper approach to policy formulation that the Labour Party takes.

Jeremy Purvis correctly said that the Scottish economy is a tiny economy in a fast-growing world. I do not think that that is beyond a fact—it is simply true—and it highlights an important thing. Tiny and small economies take an approach that is different from that which has to be taken in large economies. Small economies can be fleet of foot and can respond more rapidly to changes and opportunities.

Jeremy Purvis suggested that we should see exports rise by 50 per cent over the next session and by 100 per cent over the next 10 years. We all wish that parameter to move ahead over those periods of time. He also mentioned China and India. It is likely that they will be partners for us rather than competitors. That is an important point. Small countries do not operate in isolation from the broader world economy or from the major and growing players in the world. That is why it is so important that Government ministers have spent time in China and India with Scottish companies that are successfully exploiting the opportunities in those countries.

Robert Brown: Will the minister help us by defining the extent to which the Scottish economy is distinct from the UK economy, particularly in light of the Irish experience?

Stewart Stevenson: It is clear that the Scottish economy is different from the UK economy in a number of respects. It is also different from the Welsh economy. Compared with the Scottish economy, a much more substantial proportion of the Welsh economy is involved in manufacturing. The Scottish economy has particular strengths in intellectual endeavours—in training and education—and, as a result, many of our universities set up outposts in other parts of the world. We do not have to be there to deliver there. There are differences in the Scottish economy, which is precisely why we need a different approach. If we had a wider range of powers, we could do even more than we currently do.

Let us consider the proposals that the Liberals have put in front of us. Some people have read those proposals and some, rather than reading them, have relied on gossip from others. If each of us took a couple of pages of the document, we would be able to read its 47 pages quite quickly. In

certain respects, there is muddle in the present iteration of Mr Purvis's proposals, but he has made proposals that pose the right questions.

Mr Purvis has talked about the difficulties in securing finance. It is fundamentally correct that there are difficulties in doing that. He has identified that a network of 13 regional banks would be the answer to those difficulties, and his motion mentions

"a single body to offer equity finance support for businesses and a single promotional, marketing and inward investment body".

As politicians, we love to tinker with such things and we love to introduce legislation—it is fun and gives us a sense of achievement—but it does not necessarily influence the outside world in any way. However, it keeps us employed.

Mr Purvis made the important point that all of that would be self-financing, but underwritten by the Government. That is fair enough as far as it goes, but, of course, things would not be taken off the Government's balance sheet. Liabilities would remain for the Government and, if things were not properly managed, private companies would be able to play fast and loose with public money. There is an opportunity to develop that point further. I invite Mr Purvis to consider doing so, not necessarily today, but in the future. There is a genuine difficulty that we need to consider.

Jeremy Purvis: I caution the minister that the model that I have used is, by and large, operating in the south of Scotland loan scheme, which has been in operation and self-financing for a number of years. I think that the Government entirely supports it.

Stewart Stevenson: I hope that members will not think that I shot Mr Purvis's proposal out of the water absolutely. That was not my intention.

Let me make a broad general point. All the parties that are represented in the chamber are minorities. Minority Governments must lay out their fundamental goals, but they should work within the long-term grain of strategies. Those strategies may have been inherited from previous Administrations, and it is likely that, in a chamber of minorities, we will all have contributed to such strategies. There is certainly something in that.

David Whitton: Will the minister give way?

Stewart Stevenson: I am really out of time for dealing with the points that I have to deal with.

There is a divergence between the principles that have been espoused and the proposals that have been made.

Rob Gibson talked about Stavanger, Seattle and Ullapool. Ullapool has changed a little bit, but not much; Stavanger and Seattle have changed.

Mary Mulligan made a very amusing speech, although I am not sure that she meant to be so amusing. She referred to housing. The previous Labour Administration built six council houses. She talked about the previous UK Government's capital reduction and criticised it, and she said that food sales are close to zero. The rumbling sound was obviously the sound of empty stomachs around the chamber. She also talked about ring fencing of the tax on supermarkets, although I think that she meant hypothecation.

Lewis Macdonald said that the popularity of bankers is at an all-time low. Those who have looked at my register of interests will realise that I have moved from banking to politics in an attempt to improve my reputation. That has worked, which is very good. He also talked about the proposed company in Aberdeen. The important point is that with limited liability companies, that is just what we get.

Joe FitzPatrick referred to the three Gs of Dundee and showed that there are local opportunities that we all have to take.

Let me say finally that the amendment—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that the minister's time is up.

11:32

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I welcome the tone in which the motion has been debated by many members across the chamber, who have closely considered Jeremy Purvis's propositions. His pamphlet is on his website. Given the increasing interest that there appears to be in it, it is a pity that it is free to download. It is obvious that it would have gone to the top of the bestsellers list, as Johann Lamont and Frank McAveety got to grips with it.

Stewart Stevenson made an interesting point at the end of his speech, which I will build on. He talked about a chamber of minorities and the need for a strategy that moves us forward. There have, no doubt, been differences between different Governments' strategies. That good proposition should be central to our approach to the matter. No party that is represented in the chamber has a monopoly of wisdom on these matters or a monopoly of good ideas. Nevertheless, I think that the Liberal Democrats have put forward a number of ideas that are worthy of serious consideration.

Our central proposition is the importance of strengthening the Scottish economy—not least in order to provide jobs and opportunities for all our citizens—the importance of Scotland becoming more entrepreneurial and innovative, and the importance of wealth creation as the key to both public and private good in our country. Achieving

those things is an aspiration at the heart of what Liberal Democrats believe, but I think that members across the chamber share it. We have heard comments about that. I welcome Stewart Stevenson's comment that Jeremy Purvis began by posing the right question. That is a useful start.

The public debate, which is vital, is about the public structures and supports that best drive that aspiration. There is an element of paradox in that the Scottish Government appears to be timid about looking at the structures in the enterprise, tourism and innovation world, whereas its back benchers in particular and the party in general want to dismantle the whole of the United Kingdom and fiddle about with the structures in that regard. That seems to me to be much more fundamental fiddling than what is proposed in Jeremy Purvis's pamphlet.

Earlier this week, the Scotland Bill was launched. That bill is important to the accountability and increased responsibility of the Scottish Parliament. It will give the Scottish Parliament much greater financial and fiscal powers for a purpose. As Frank McAveety rightly said, those powers are appropriate to strengthen our ability to support the growth of our economy in partnership with the United Kingdom Government, councils and other players.

In that context, the changes are particularly important to Scotland, because our domestic market remains heavily intertwined with the UK market generally. That was the point of my intervention on Stewart Stevenson earlier. Our country does not want or need the damaging economic circumstances that have descended on the Republic of Ireland, which requires an injection of £87 billion to rescue it.

Jim Mather: The member asked a question of my colleague Stewart Stevenson regarding the differences between the economies. The Irish did not have the opportunity to do quantitative easing. We have had quantitative easing and have therefore weakened our currency and our position in the long term.

Robert Brown: There are several wider debates. I do not want to go too far in that direction, but I want to deal head on with the independence proposition. It is worth saying that, if Scotland had been independent prior to the onset of the recession, Scottish tax income across all taxes would have dropped by £2.5 billion. Under independence, the Scottish Government would have lost £4 billion from corporation tax because of the difficulties with the Royal Bank of Scotland alone. It is important that ministers remember that context when they try to put across the proposition that Scotland, under independence, could have all the benefits of increased taxes and all the goodies that ministers think would come, but in some way

would not have to pay the bill for that. There needs to be a bit of balance in the debate.

The debate has focused on the enterprise, banking and promotional bodies, and several constructive proposals have been made. Somebody rightly said that structures are a means to an end, which I accept entirely, but we have to ask whether the structures are right. I say again that the criticism comes from a Government that changed structures and emasculated Scottish Enterprise when it took office. That body has suffered what might be described as death by a thousand mind maps, and it seems to have lost a degree of its sense of purpose and direction.

Jim Mather: Fantasy.

Robert Brown: I accept that it is not a very good joke.

Jim Mather: It was Whittonesque.

Robert Brown: Nevertheless, it is true that, as Jeremy Purvis points out in his pamphlet, as a result of the changes to Scottish Enterprise, for every £2 spent by our economic development quangos, £1 is spent on staffing, accommodation and administration. That serious issue must be dealt with.

Several other issues have been raised. One is the question of what the right national and regional bodies are. Undoubtedly, that is the correct question to ask, and several answers have been proposed. There is an element of bringing back into play the more localised approach that Liberal Democrats have traditionally supported and which to a large extent was taken away by the changes that the SNP Government made in 2007.

Gavin Brown talked about the importance of exports, and I agree with him on that. Joe FitzPatrick talked about several individual issues in Dundee relating to the life sciences industry and others.

In his opening speech, Jim Mather referred to a branch economy. He is on rather weak ground in that connection, because in fact we have headquarters here. Among others, there are the headquarters of the Royal Bank of Scotland, not the Bank of Scotland—I think that the minister misheard me earlier. The minister must take on board the issue of how an independent Scotland would have dealt with a bank the size of the Royal Bank of Scotland, headquartered in Scotland, getting into difficulties.

Jim Mather: The member presupposes that Scotland would have been as incompetent as Ireland and the UK in financial management and that it would not have been in the least bit like Norway.

Robert Brown: That is not what the SNP used to say about Ireland, is it? That is an interesting admission from Mr Mather.

I was grateful for the welcome for our proposals from a number of members. Lewis Macdonald said that he had no difficulty with the principles, but had several issues on the details. We are more than happy to debate detail. That is important in taking matters forward. Our contribution has been important in trying to open up the debate and to consider different models of dealing with the issues. The proposal is not, as one member suggested, to abolish Highlands and Islands Enterprise; it is to expand and build on it and to give it additional powers.

There are existing models. Like Jeremy Purvis, I have visited the Glasgow City Council organisation that supports the IT structures and manages the property portfolio in Glasgow. That model is similar to the one in Aberdeen that Lewis Macdonald described, which seems to work extremely well.

Reference has been made to the Christie commission and the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee. The issues that have been raised are important, but they should not hold up the development of debate and discussion on the matter.

On the ideas that Jeremy Purvis has mustered, the questions that Liberal Democrats have posed today and will pose during the election to come are the important ones. We have made a significant contribution to the debate. It must be shaped as a positive and constructive debate, because Scotland can afford nothing less.

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:40

RAF Kinloss (Economic Assistance)

1. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands)

(Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what economic assistance it will provide the local community in Kinloss with to offset the impact of the proposed closure of the Royal Air Force base. (S3O-12210)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): The Scottish Government, its key agencies and other partners are already providing support to the community. We will live up to our responsibilities to the people of Moray and we are actively supporting the efforts of the Moray task force to develop an economic action plan for the area. The timescale and shape of the response are, of course, dependent on decisions by the United Kingdom Government. The UK Government and the Ministry of Defence cannot be allowed to make decisions and then walk away from the impact. We expect the UK Government to live up to its responsibilities.

David Stewart: Will the minister join me in congratulating the Moray task force on its tremendous efforts to date, and the Moray community generally, whose strength and resilience were exhibited in the outstanding rally in Lossiemouth last month? Does the minister share my view that, as well as fighting to keep the Nimrods at Kinloss and the Tornados at Lossiemouth, we need a three-point strategy—a Government job relocation to Moray; assisted area status; and diversification in the Moray economy by using European social funding to retrain redundant RAF personnel and to create new skills for Moray?

Jim Mather: We must consider all those options. We must compare and contrast with what happens elsewhere, such as the way in which UK forces exit from Germany, which is a much more structured and lengthy process, and the way in which the US moves its military round its country in consultation with local communities. The key issue is that we are addressing the whole Moray economy, which is inextricably linked to the RAF. If we do not have a proper and full response to that, including a much better response from the UK Government, we will have a cascade of problems, as I still have in my constituency in Campbeltown, which the RAF left many years ago.

Strategic Transport Projects Review

2. John Scott (Ayr) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made on implementing the improvements identified in the strategic transport projects review. (S3O-12150)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): We are making good progress with the priority STPR recommendations. The stage 3 parliamentary debate on the Forth Crossing Bill will be held on 15 December and, alongside that, the Edinburgh to Glasgow improvements programme is progressing well, with new services having been introduced on the Shotts line. On the Highland main line, the Scottish ministers have confirmed in the Scottish draft budget for 2011-12 that services operating between Inverness and the central belt will increase from nine to 11 trains per day.

John Scott: As the minister will know, improvement works to the A77 around Ayr are essential to assist further proposed development to the south-east of the town. What progress is being made on those improvements, which are detailed in the final report of the strategic transport projects review, and, in particular, the dualling of the A77 around Ayr?

John Swinney: As Mr Scott will know, the projects to which he refers are part and parcel of the strategic transport projects review. A fundamental characteristic of the review was the recognition that, in every spending review period, the Government would set out what further activities it could take to progress the developments. As Mr Scott will know from reading the budget, we have given priority to the maintenance of the existing road and transport infrastructure, subject to a number of developments that we have announced as new projects, because of the significant reductions in capital expenditure that we have received.

I assure Mr Scott that the projects that he mentions remain part of the strategic transport projects review and that the Government will identify financial resources to take them forward as soon as that is practicable.

Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware that in Bonnybridge, in my constituency, there is strong support for the re-establishment of a train station in the town, but that is not included in the present transport projects review. The cabinet secretary might not be aware that there is considerable frustration in the town because Falkirk Council has been unwilling to make the strongest possible case for the station, on the basis that the project is not in the existing review document. If there is a strong case for such a station to be established, will there be an opportunity for it to be included in

the transport project review list as something that could be considered for future funding?

John Swinney: I certainly acknowledge that when we have had the ability to expand access to rail services, such measures have been highly successful in all circumstances. In the short term, we look forward to the opening of the Airdrie to Bathgate line, which is one of the most significant rail public transport developments in Scotland in 100 years. There has been a tremendous response from the public to the expansion of rail capacity.

As regards the Bonnybridge station project, ministers would be happy to consider the issues that Mr Matheson and his constituents have raised. If he wishes to communicate with the transport minister, Mr Stevenson will be delighted to hold discussions with him on the matter.

Higher Education (Student Places)

3. Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how many funded places in higher education will be transferred to unfunded places under its budget proposals. (S3O-12201)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council has the responsibility to work with universities on the detail of the balance between funded and unfunded places. I have asked it to give universities as early an indication as possible of the planning assumptions that they should make for next year's funding. Members of the funding council meet on 10 December, when they will discuss the implications of the draft budget announcement.

Des McNulty: It is disgraceful that two weeks after the budget in which the cabinet secretary set the figures for universities, he cannot tell us what the implications for universities are. What are the implications not for next year's students but for students the year after, whom the universities have said that they will not be able to admit as a result of the one-year deal that he is trying to do for next year?

Michael Russell: I am unaware of the universities saying any such thing. Let me quote what they have said. In a news release on 17 November, the convener of Universities Scotland said:

"This is a tough settlement but one universities can live with for one year, given the very difficult budgetary pressures Scotland faces. It's clear from this settlement that the Scottish Government has sought to protect universities from deeper and more damaging cuts. We are relieved that the Scottish Government sees high level skills and an innovation-led recovery as critical to help Scotland get itself out of these difficult times."

The effort is going in to ensure that the green paper that will be published in a fortnight's time presents the menu of options that need to be considered for the long-term success of Scotland's higher education sector. I pay strong tribute to the universities, the National Union of Students, the University and College Union and the other parties in the Parliament, which are engaging seriously with that process so that we can ensure the very best for Scotland's universities in what Professor King would say—and I would agree—are very difficult times.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Question 4 was not lodged.

Transport (Aberdeen and the North-east)

5. Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what the implications are of the draft budget proposals on transport projects for Aberdeen and the north-east. (S3O-12213)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Scottish Government is continuing to make record levels of investment in transport projects right across Scotland, including Aberdeen and the north-east. We remain committed to delivering the Aberdeen western peripheral route and the Balmedie project, and construction is under way on the £31.5 million A96 Fochabers and Mosstodloch project. On rail, we remain committed to service enhancements between Aberdeen and Inverness.

Brian Adam: Does the cabinet secretary share my view that the biggest danger to those projects, particularly the AWPR, is not the budget but the court case in the Court of Session? Can he advise us how robustly the Government will defend its position?

John Swinney: I assure Mr Adam that the Government will be extremely robust in defending its position in the court case. The Government's decision on the AWPR is securely founded. I would wish to be able to make more progress on the project but, as I am sure that Mr Adam and other members will appreciate, the Government cannot do that when there is a live court case on the matter. I assure him that the Government will defend its position and the strength of its decision robustly.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Is money identified in the budget specifically to solve the problems of the Inveramsay bridge in Aberdeenshire, as the Scottish National Party promised?

John Swinney: The Government remains committed to resolving the serious issue of the Inveramsay bridge that the member for the area

raised, which is the subject of focused attention by the transport minister. Progress on that will be set out when it can be undertaken.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Given that the court case is frustrating the development of the western peripheral route, is it not time for the Scottish Government to decide not to delay work on the Haudagain roundabout until after the completion of the WPR and to start work on that transport problem for Aberdeen before beginning work on the WPR?

John Swinney: I am pretty sure that Mr Baker accepts that there is an inextricable link between the improvements that are required at the Haudagain roundabout and the AWPR project.

I acknowledge the issues at the Haudagain roundabout, which is why the Government has said that it will undertake the improvements before the roundabout is handed over for local management and responsibility, once the AWPR is completed. I am as frustrated as the member is that, after all the scrutiny that has taken place, a strong and robust ministerial decision on the AWPR is being thwarted by an unnecessary court case. Unfortunately, we must wait until that is concluded before we can make the progress that all of us would like to see. It will be appropriate to make the Haudagain roundabout improvements once the AWPR is complete.

Education Maintenance Allowance

6. Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to make changes to the education maintenance allowance. (S3O-12220)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): In the draft budget statement on 17 November 2010, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth announced plans to protect the education maintenance allowance scheme for the remainder of this academic year and the next academic year. That is consistent with the Government's commitment to support the least well-off students in Scotland and to open up opportunities for poorer families.

Joe FitzPatrick: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response, which will be welcome news to young people across Scotland. What maintenance support will be available for those 16 to 19-year-olds who attend courses at education centres such as Dundee College in my constituency?

Michael Russell: In addition to securing the education maintenance allowance—which, of course, has not happened south of the border—we are committed to ensuring that the level of support for students in the coming year remains consistent with this year's level. That has been

very difficult to achieve, but it has been achieved, and I welcome the support of, for example, the NUS for that. In addition, the number of places that are available in colleges and universities will be maintained, which is a considerable achievement, for which I pay tribute to the college principals and boards of governors and the universities.

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): I certainly welcome the retention of EMA, but many questions remain. Will it be kept in its current form? In Dundee, for example, the number of applications for EMA has fallen by almost 40 per cent since the first year of the present Government, as a result of changes such as the lowering of the parental income threshold and the scrapping of the £20 and £10 payments. Last year, NUS Scotland estimated that those changes would lead to more than 7,000 students in the 2007-08 intake dropping out of participation or attending classes less regularly.

The Presiding Officer: Question, please.

Marlyn Glen: Are there further plans to change the thresholds? Will the minister instruct local authorities to continue paying EMA after this month?

Michael Russell: I reassure the member and the chamber that, as I have said, there are no planned changes to the EMA. The EMA programme overspent in 2009-10 and it was necessary to look at it extremely carefully. I made a commitment to review it in December this year. In the process of the budget discussions, I was very keen to defend the EMA, which I think is highly effective. I am glad to say that that has happened—student support is being maintained. These are exceptionally difficult times, but I know that the poorest in society need the most help. We are targeting them most effectively, which I remind the chamber is not something that others have chosen to do. The fact that we have made it a priority to support students will have an effect on education. *[Interruption.]* I hope that the member and all other members, including the one who is shouting, welcome that commitment, because it should be welcomed by the entire chamber.

Firefighters

7. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what assessment it has made of the number of firefighters in Scotland. (S3O-12174)

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): In 2009-10, there were 5,027 firefighters in Scotland's fire and rescue services. The responsibility for the assessment of the number of firefighters belongs to our local authority partners through their fire and rescue authority structures.

They have tools at their disposal to enable the adoption of a risk-based approach to ensure that, even with reduced budgets, resources remain focused on the greatest need and therefore continue to deliver our desired outcome of a safer, stronger Scotland.

Richard Baker: Does the minister agree that, in structuring our fire and rescue services, we must always ensure that we have in place the front-line firefighters whom the public need? What progress will be made through the publication of a new fire and rescue framework document in ensuring that there is a robust assessment of the number of firefighters required in local areas to ensure community safety?

Fergus Ewing: There is a great deal of consensus in the chamber on the sentiments that the member has just expressed. It is essential that we protect front-line services. As a result, we are reviewing all aspects of the fire and rescue service to ensure that we continue to provide the front-line services that are so important to the public, but within the reduced budgets available. We should not consider closing fire stations or removing fire appliances until or unless we are clear that every possible saving has been made in all other areas. Work on finalising the priorities and objectives for a revised fire and rescue framework is related to discussions between national and local government and the fire and rescue service on the available options. However, given the framework's statutory role, it is important that any new burdens are balanced and achievable and it would be inappropriate to place additional burdens on the service until a final decision on options has been agreed.

Water and Sewerage Charges (Exemptions)

8. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how many churches and charities have been required to reapply for exemption from water and sewerage charges following transfer of responsibility for administration of the scheme to Scottish Water Business Stream. (S3O-12215)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Business Stream, which applies to Scottish Water on its customers' behalf for exemption, is unable to provide an exact figure but has confirmed that, in this financial year, it has sent 141 exemption applications to Scottish Water. Business Stream ensures that the application is complete and delivers Scottish Water's response to it.

There are a number of reasons why charities and religious bodies might have to reapply to the exemption scheme. For a start, not all charities and religious organisations applied to the scheme when it was introduced in 2002 and they have had

to reapply more recently. Due to a recent increase in the scheme's scope, some organisations that were previously not eligible have now made an application to join. Furthermore, when Scottish Water was first formed, some properties were logged as vacant rather than exempt. Some of those have been picked up during routine audits of vacant properties and have now been required to complete an application to ensure that the organisation still meets the scheme's criteria.

Willie Coffey: In 2002, Maxwell and Kilmarnock United Free church received a letter of exemption from water and sewerage charges, which it still has. Despite that, Business Stream is hounding it for non-existent arrears. Apparently, when the organisation took over the scheme, the church was indeed, as the cabinet secretary touched on in his response, recorded as vacant not as exempt and it now tells me that Scottish Water is insisting on a new application. Will the cabinet secretary take the matter up with Scottish Water? After all, voluntary groups that can prove exemption should not lose out because of mistakes in administering the scheme.

John Swinney: I sympathise with the situation that Mr Coffey has set out and which has been the subject of correspondence between the member and Mr Stevenson, who is the relevant minister in dealing with such matters. I assure Mr Coffey that the issue has been taken up with Scottish Water—and indeed I will take it up again, given that the issue has been raised with me this morning. Work is going on between Business Stream and Scottish Water in the hope that applications supported by an exemption certificate from 2002 can in these circumstances be automatically accepted and, although that work has not been completed, I assure the member that I will fully examine the issues that he has highlighted and raise them with Scottish Water.

Children (Advocacy Services)

9. Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what provision is being made for new cases requiring free child advocacy, given that Barnardo's take note project is reportedly not properly up and running and has only recently advertised for staff. (S3O-12165)

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram): The new advocacy service for parents and young people who have made a reference to the Additional Support Needs Tribunals for Scotland has been accepting references since 14 November. Barnardo's and the Scottish Child Law Centre, which are working in partnership to provide the new service, have received a number of enquiries and are already dealing with one case.

Mike Pringle: I am glad that the minister shares my sentiments about the importance of child advocacy. Given that importance, I hope that, when the take note project is up and running, it provides a comprehensive service but, given that the only job currently advertised is for one part-time worker and contains no requirement for court or legal experience, I am concerned that the new service is not being given the attention that it deserves and is at risk of a false start. Will the Scottish Government commit to an immediate investigation into the matter to reassure parents and children who may require child advocacy?

Adam Ingram: I hope that I can reassure Mr Pringle right here and now. Barnardo's and the Scottish Child Law Centre already have experienced staff in place to provide an advocacy service. The recruitment exercise is to expand the number of staff available to the service to provide both lay and legal advocacy.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S3F-2747)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Later today I will be taking forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

I should say to the chamber that we applied yesterday evening for a derogation on the limits on drivers' hours, initially in the interests of securing animal feed supplies, although it may be extended today to fuel deliveries. It is not something that we do lightly, but I am sure that members will appreciate that it is a wise move to make in the current circumstances in Scotland.

Iain Gray: Will the First Minister agree that, if his much-promised 1,000 extra bobbies on the beat are actually bobbies stuck in the back room, his promise on police numbers is just a con?

The First Minister: No. We have a record number of police officers in Scotland—1,190 more than when we took office and 1,190 more than we were promised by the Labour Party at the previous election. Despite the extraordinary pressure on Scottish budgets, thanks to our deal with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities—except the Labour Party, unfortunately—we have every opportunity to maintain the record numbers of front-line police officers in Scotland. Everyone should welcome that achievement.

Iain Gray: I am all in favour of police officers; I just think that they should be out on the beat, policing. The reality on the ground is as described to me by a civilian custody support worker who contacted me to say that he is to lose his job, but only after he has trained a new police recruit who will replace him. He said:

"When you hear that my force has recruited 100 new officers, 80 or more will then be taken from that and placed within the custody area doing jobs already being done by Custody security officers."

The First Minister trumpets his 1,000 extra police, but they are being used to fill civilian jobs. Is not that a con?

The First Minister: The only cons that are going down in Scotland is the number of criminals, as we have a 30-year low in recorded crime. The test of front-line policing is in the crime statistics. That is what should convince even Iain Gray that there are 1,190 more police officers on the streets and communities of Scotland than there were in March 2007.

Of course, Iain Gray's track record in these matters is not very impressive. On 29 August 2008, as a novice leader, he forecast that it would take the Scottish National Party 13 years to keep its promise. Here we are, only three years later and 10 years ahead of Iain Gray's timetable, with the achievement of 1,190 additional police officers in Scotland.

Iain Gray: The crime statistics are not testament to the First Minister; they are testament to the work of police officers, like—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order.

Iain Gray: The figures are testament to the work of police officers such as Detective Inspector Paul Swinburne from East Kilbride. He has 30 years' service, and this year he has seen 10 murders solved, 50 house break-ins solved, and eight drug dealers brought to justice. He has received five commendations, a Royal Humane Society award, and two police medals. Surely he is exactly the kind of dedicated police officer we want. No: he is being released. Why? So that he can be replaced by cheaper probationers, so that the SNP can get its 1,000 police officers. Does the First Minister think that the police should be protecting the public or protecting his election pledges?

The First Minister: Yes, of course the drop in the level of recorded crime, which gives us the lowest crime statistics for 30 years in Scotland, is due to the work of front-line police officers. Thankfully, there are 1,190 more of them than there would have been under the Labour Party—and the process goes on. In our negotiations with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, as we negotiated to maintain the number of front-line police officers, every other party in Scotland saw the priority in keeping that number in place except the Labour Party, which does not regard it as a priority. A political party that went into the last election promising zero extra police officers, that then forecast that it would take 13 years for the SNP Government to achieve the target of 1,000 extra police officers and was proved wrong, and that now, in local authorities, is doing its best to scupper the deal that will maintain police numbers can do many things, but it cannot come along to this chamber with a shred of credibility and start weeping crocodile tears for police officers in Scotland.

Iain Gray: It is the real experience of real experienced police officers and civilian support staff that I bring, but which the First Minister treats with contempt. When I was a justice minister, we worked to release hundreds of police officers from back-room work in order that they could do their jobs on the streets, and we worked to keep experienced police officers in place. Every time we hear the First Minister talk about 1,000 police

officers, we should remember that it is a con. Support staff are being sacked so that they can be replaced by police officers who are taken off the beat, and experienced officers are being forced out. Grampian Police have called it “naive”; Unison has called it “a cosmetic political exercise”.

Last week, the First Minister admitted that he was not telling the whole story on tax powers. Yesterday, he had to admit that he was not telling the whole story on The Gathering 2009 Ltd's loan. Today, will he admit that he is not telling the whole story on police numbers, either?

The First Minister: If I were Iain Gray, I would not remind the people of Scotland of the days when he was a justice minister. When he was a justice minister, the level of crime in Scotland was much higher than it is today.

Iain Gray claims, despite not backing a single extra police officer in Scotland and despite his extraordinary misforecast, that he is the voice of Scottish policing. Why do we not listen to the real voice of Scottish policing—the Scottish Police Federation? It stated:

“Today's decision to maintain existing levels of front line Police numbers confirms our feeling that the politicians listened to our plea, shared our concerns and have responded accordingly. We now call upon local authorities to step up to the mark and match the Government's commitment.”

That was on 17 November, two weeks ago.

There is no doubt where the voice of front-line police officers stands. The only doubt is that some local authorities—the Labour ones—may not share the commitment of COSLA and the Government to maintaining the record 1,000 extra police officers in Scotland so that we can continue to force down the level of recorded crime to levels that were unheard of when Iain Gray was a disastrous justice minister.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S3F-2748)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans to meet the secretary of state in the near future.

Annabel Goldie: We have seen the worst winter weather in November for 40 years. I pay tribute to all our public service workers in transport, in our hospitals and in our general practitioner surgeries. I pay special tribute to our care workers, who have battled through the snow to reach the most vulnerable people in our communities. Does the First Minister agree that a powerful message can be sent from the Parliament that there is a duty on all of us who are

fit and able to keep an eye on our elderly and frail neighbours—to lift the phone and see whether we can help? The First Minister and I do not always agree but, on this occasion, will he join me in saying that this is a time for us all to muck in?

The First Minister: I congratulate Annabel Goldie on turning to the dominating issue of the week and on the way in which she made her comments.

I agree with her points. Perth and Kinross Council, despite the extraordinary conditions, has managed to reach all but two of its social care clients, who are being cared for by neighbours in exactly the spirit of volunteerism that Annabel Goldie mentioned. I know of one of this Parliament's security guards who got up at 4 am, long before the crack of dawn, picked up four of his colleagues in his four-by-four and brought them in for the early shift.

I do not like to single out individual newspapers, but *The Sun's* double-page spread today on sub-zero heroes includes example after example, from around Scotland, of people in public services and others contributing above and beyond the call of duty. Everyone in this chamber should read the article, as it gives excellent examples of what should be done, which we should all try to emulate. That is exactly the sort of spirit that is required to get Scotland through these difficult times.

Annabel Goldie: We read that four out of five people have made it to work this week; that is, indeed, incredible.

One group that is particularly challenged by this weather is parents. Tens of thousands of them, who are willing to battle their way to work, have found themselves coping with the result of the decision of numerous councils to impose a blanket closure of every school.

The safety of children and teachers is paramount and, of course, individual judgments must be made. However, surely the point is that we should trust our headteachers to make the right decisions for their schools and their pupils.

Does the First Minister agree that a blanket closure policy is obstructive and inappropriate, and causes huge and avoidable disruption to thousands of families across the country? We need local judgment. Why cannot we trust our headteachers?

The First Minister: I know that Annabel Goldie will have seen the advice from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning that has gone out today to every education authority, which stresses the importance of the headteacher as the key decision maker in this regard and the

importance of the decisions being made as early as possible, in order to give parents notice.

The position of schools around Scotland is significantly better than it was yesterday. Thirteen of our 32 authorities have all their schools open. In schools in which the decision has been left to headteachers, there are some extraordinary stories of best practice. In Fetterangus primary school in my constituency, the headteacher, John Black, has heroically kept his school open despite mountains of snow—until today, I should say, when the elements finally overcame him. His efforts have been deeply appreciated by the parents and others in that village. That example stresses the point that headteachers should be the key decision makers, as they are best placed to assess the conditions. Obviously, no child should be sent to school in dangerous conditions, but the parents are in the best position to assess that, just as the headteacher is in the best position to assess the conditions around the school.

The education secretary is encouraging all local authorities to follow the best practice that is evident in some local authorities. Although I agree with the tenor of Annabel Goldie's question, we should remember that people have had to make extremely difficult decisions in extremely difficult timescales, and we should reflect on that, as well as on the advice that the education secretary has sent to education authorities throughout Scotland.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S3F-2749)

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

Tavish Scott: The First Minister will know that, this morning, the United Kingdom Government announced that there is to be a review of how transport operators are coping with the weather, which will report before Christmas. The weather was forecast—operators who are responsible for roads, railways and runways knew that snow was coming and that it would last. What action is the Government taking to consider how ready Scotland is to keep people, goods and emergency services moving?

The First Minister: After last winter's conditions, we reviewed all parts of our resilience, which is why, for example, we have two months' supply of grit and salt in Scotland at the present moment, even under heavy usage conditions.

Like Government ministers and many others in Scotland, I am concentrating on getting through these conditions. We will be perfectly happy to have any number of reviews or parliamentary

examinations but, right now, the priority is to get on with the job and to allow as many people in Scotland as possible to get on with their jobs.

Tavish Scott: Aberdeen and Dundee airports in the east of Scotland are open. They have had constant snow in recent days, but to the operators' credit they are open. The Highlands and Islands airports, which are owned by the Government, are—to its credit—also open. Scots fly to Oslo, Stockholm and Amsterdam in winter, and those airports are geared up for snow.

Edinburgh airport, however, spends millions on drop-off charging lanes and ever more shops, but not enough on essential equipment. The First Minister's Government is pushing Scotland as a winter fun destination. That is good for tourism, the economy and jobs, but not if visitors cannot get here.

What will the Government do to ensure that all Scotland's airports have appropriate winter contingency plans? Would not the best thing for Scotland be a capital city airport that operates 365 days a year and which invests in essential equipment—and especially in hard-working staff—to make that happen?

The First Minister: As Tavish Scott well knows, despite the extraordinary efforts that have been made by the airports in the Highlands and Aberdeen, even they are not open 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. Sometimes the weather overtakes them.

In defence of the British Airports Authority, which also owns Glasgow airport, I know—because the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change has been in fairly constant touch with the airport operators—that Edinburgh airport has had five times the amount of snowfall that Glasgow airport has had. That has made for extremely difficult circumstances.

With regard to the general tenor of Tavish Scott's question, if we take away his lack of allowance for the extraordinary conditions—I witnessed, as we all did, what seemed to be very extensive efforts yesterday to clear the runways at Edinburgh airport—I have some sympathy with one aspect of what he said. There are certain areas and airports in Scotland that, because they are more used to the sort of conditions that are now being visited on all of Scotland, perhaps by definition have better preparation in line.

That may be a lesson for Edinburgh airport, but I would argue that the overall position is that it has been subject to exceptional conditions. I see that substantial efforts are being made to clear the runway, and we all hope that Edinburgh airport will be open later today.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I echo the comments that have been made about the commitment that many people are showing to keeping normal life going through the tough weather. However, I have heard—I wonder whether the First Minister has—of public sector employees who have been told that they could face disciplinary procedures if they are unable to get to work.

Does the First Minister agree that for any employer—public or private—to threaten to use disciplinary procedures against employees whose child care falls through or for whom transport is unavailable or unsafe, is a completely inappropriate response in the current situation?

The First Minister: If Patrick Harvie furnishes us with detailed examples, we will take whatever action is required. However, most of the information that is coming to us reflects exactly the opposite situation. It shows that public sector workers—in particular those in the health service—are making exceptional efforts to get into work. Indeed, many health service workers, particularly in Tayside, have been staying in the hospitals during the past few days.

One of the assistant directors of Stirling royal infirmary walked 6 miles in heavy snow today to a ward at Falkirk community hospital. An accident and emergency consultant at Stirling infirmary gave up her whole house to let nurses from the hospital stay there while she went to stay with a colleague.

Across our public services, people are making exceptional efforts. If Patrick Harvie has details of circumstances in which people are being treated unfairly, the Government will take appropriate action. However, that should not deflect from our recognition of the snow sub-zero heroes and the heroism that is going on around Scotland.

Sectarianism

4. Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government has further plans for tackling sectarianism. (S3F-2761)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Government is committed to tackling sectarianism—and all forms of religious intolerance—wherever and whenever it arises. Sectarianism is never acceptable.

In Scotland this year we have seen some examples of good progress. The country united in welcoming His Holiness the Pope to Scotland, and the all-faith commemoration of the 450th anniversary of the reformation took place.

Those two events, and the reception of an overwhelming vast majority of the people of

Scotland to them, indicated that Scotland is perhaps beginning to win the battle against sectarianism, which people of good will are uniting to win.

Ian McKee: I thank the First Minister for his reply, which is particularly appropriate in Scottish inter faith week. Does he agree that the key to eradicating religious sectarianism is to influence the young? Does he agree that while it seems not to be possible to have Scotland's children share a common educational experience, all efforts should be made to encourage faith and non-denominational schools to engage in a wide range of joint activities? That will allow children of all faiths and none to work and play together, thus forming friendships across the religious divide that are based on familiarity and mutual respect.

The First Minister: Yes, I do agree with that, and that is happening across many of our schools, as indeed are anti-sectarian programmes on the ground. This week, for example, Fergus Ewing attended the launch of Nil by Mouth's project to address sectarianism in the workplace in Scotland, and a range of other initiatives are being supported by the Government, not just in education but across a range of areas of society. Those efforts are laudable. I agree with Ian McKee in the support that he expresses for them, and they will most certainly continue despite the financial pressures that are facing the Administration.

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Does the First Minister agree that it does little to douse the flames of sectarianism in football when chairmen of prominent Scottish clubs go on television to demand the sacking of individual referees?

The First Minister: I will shimmy or sidestep around the request to interfere in the internal affairs of the Scottish Football Association, except to say this: the Scottish Football Association, like every responsible organisation in Scotland, has rules and regulations covering such matters. Incidentally, I believe that, following due process, it has come to the right decision.

Physical Education

5. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister when the Scottish Government will meet the Scottish National Party's manifesto pledge to ensure two hours of PE in schools. (S3F-2757)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I know that Bill Butler would be the first to acknowledge that the number of schools delivering two hours of physical education in primary has gone up from 5 per cent under Labour to 55 per cent now. What is more, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education

reports that about 60 per cent of secondaries are delivering two periods of physical education, generally of 50 or 55 minutes each. That is a significant improvement, but we want to do even better. That is why we have embedded the physical education pledge within the new curriculum and made delivery of the curriculum part of the budget deal that we have struck—apart from with Labour—with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

Bill Butler: The First Minister might recall that the SNP's 2007 manifesto stated:

"we will ensure that every pupil has 2 hours of quality PE each week delivered by specialist PE teachers."

In reality, all that the SNP has ensured over the past three and a half years is that fewer children have two hours of PE than when it took office. In 2006-07, it was 43 per cent, which declined to 37 per cent in 2009-10. That decline applies across the school system with an especially deplorable fall in special school provision from 14 per cent to 10 per cent last year.

Given that, in his own back yard, Aberdeenshire Council stands 25th out of the 32 local authorities at primary level and is bottom of the league in respect of secondary provision, will the First Minister do the decent thing and apologise to parents and children throughout Scotland for yet another broken SNP promise?

The First Minister: First, I remind Bill Butler of the real figures and just a little bit of history. I was not in this Parliament, although Bill Butler was, when Labour's Peter Peacock, the then Minister for Education and Young People, made the pledge in 2004. The Labour Party then surveyed schools in 2005, which resulted in the finding that 5 per cent of primaries were allocating two hours to PE. Even by Bill Butler's arithmetic, he will surely come to the conclusion that 55 per cent now is 50 per cent greater than 5 per cent under the Labour Party. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: I forgot to mention another important point. In response to the 5 per cent finding, the Labour Party's dramatic action was to cease having any surveys.

I will mention just one more little bit of counting. In Labour's last year—2006—there were 1,963 physical education teachers in Scotland. Under the Scottish National Party, there are now 2,017, which is more than 1,963.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Notwithstanding and certainly not understating the serious consequences arising from the prevailing wintry conditions referred to earlier, does the First Minister share my delight at seeing Scotland's schoolchildren enjoying fresh air

and vigorous exercise in the snow? Does he agree that winter sports should be on the school curriculum and that that would undermine the resistance of some children to compulsory exercise?

The First Minister: May I always agree with Christine Grahame whenever I am able to, which is surprisingly often. Like me, she agrees that one of the key things happening now is that the active schools programme is continuing in Scotland, which is an extraordinary contrast with the attempt to abolish the schools sports partnership in England. Yet again, we see in that contrast real commitment to deal with these difficult times and to prioritise physical education in Scotland, whereas south of the border, the Con-Dem coalition seems to be in considerable difficulty on that and many other issues.

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): Does the First Minister agree that, as well as getting enough PE in schools, it is important that children are able to get it in their local communities? Does he further agree that it is important that decision makers such as Edinburgh Leisure, which is currently considering the future of Kirkliston leisure centre in my constituency, have regard to the medium and long-term health benefits of sport and resist the temptation to accept closures as a short-term fix? Will the First Minister support the work being undertaken across the community to try to secure that important sports facility for an ever-expanding village?

The First Minister: I agree with some of the tenor of that question, but I know that the member would be the first to recognise that public services in Scotland—this Government, local authorities and every public service—are under extraordinary budget pressure at present. As I recall, the source of that budget pressure comes from the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in London, which is handing down severe public sector cuts to Scotland that are a third greater even than the extraordinary cuts suggested by Alistair Darling when he was in office. Although I agree with the tenor of the member's question, let us recognise that every public authority is under severe budgetary pressure at present.

Police

6. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government supports the creation of a single police force for Scotland. (S3F-2756)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Government is considering reform options to ensure that we can protect front-line policing in the face of unprecedented financial challenges. We will continue to prioritise keeping police officers on the beat. The interim findings of that

work will be considered at the Scottish policing board meeting on 6 December.

Robert Brown: I am sure that the First Minister is aware that the report to that working group talks about the abolition of the current eight forces to

“provide the greatest platform to enable investment in front-line policing”.

Is he aware that that view is vehemently opposed by a number of the interests in the field? For example, does he share the view of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland that the findings for a single police force are

“based on flimsy evidence and focus too much on saving money rather than delivering better policing”?

Or does he share the view of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, that there is no

“robust evidence in favour of a single police force.”?

Will he now state clearly that the Government’s policy is not to have a single police force in Scotland?

The First Minister: I do not know whether I am correct, but the interim report should amplify Robert Brown’s remarks. It identifies four options: a single police force; a regional model of three or four forces; the existing eight forces with more collaboration; or a combined police, fire and ambulance service. That work delivers the analysis and evidence that will be the foundation of future decisions on police reform.

Robert Brown is entitled to set his face firmly against one aspect of potential change, but he should remember and reflect on why that thorough examination of the efficiency and delivery of public services is necessary. It is necessary in the face of extraordinary public spending pressure. Given that that pressure emanates from the Liberal Democrats, not in the comfort of Opposition but from the responsibility of Government, a little modesty and constructive engagement with those changes will be required from that party.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Does the First Minister agree that a single national police force for Scotland, structured correctly, could improve on the current arrangements for local accountability for policing decisions and better deliver sustainable community policing—police on the beat—at a local level? [*Interruption.*]

The First Minister: The Liberal Democrats encourage me to agree with Richard Baker, but I can do no such thing at question time. As we deliver necessary structural change, it is crucial that we take society and all social partners with us. The engagement process that the meeting in the next few days represents—and which the Christie commission will allow us to undertake—is a far

better way of making a considered move to reform than perhaps Richard Baker would allow.

I am tempted—but of course, I would not do it—to remind Richard Baker that, on 27 April 2010, he made a press statement about increases in racist crime in three of our seven police force areas. Of course, Scotland has eight police force areas. It might be useful to know how many forces Scotland has before he considers abolishing them all.

12:30

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Health and Wellbeing

National Health Service Boards

1. Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to reduce the number of territorial NHS boards. (S3O-12166)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Government currently has no plans to reduce the number of territorial national health service boards.

On the subject of NHS boards, I take this opportunity to thank all staff in all NHS boards for their exceptional efforts during the severe weather that we are experiencing.

Jeremy Purvis: I thank the cabinet secretary and, on behalf of my constituents in the Borders, I thank NHS Borders for the sterling work that its staff are doing in that area.

I note that the cabinet secretary said that there are currently no plans for the Scottish Government to reduce the number of NHS boards. We also know that another party in the chamber has plans to create a national quango for care, and that the Government has set up a commission so that it can pass on the responsibility for decisions about some health service areas and structures. The cabinet secretary will know that NHS Borders is one of the most efficient and best health boards providing services in Scotland. Its board is made up of individuals who come from the Borders and who are dedicated to services for the Borders. Can she give the categorical assurance that that board will continue in its current form?

Nicola Sturgeon: I value the independence and local accountability of NHS boards, including NHS Borders. When I visit the islands, I am often asked about the continued independence of NHS boards there, and the answer that I give then is the same as the answer that I have just given. I hope that Jeremy Purvis and those whom he represents will take some comfort from that.

That said, in the current circumstances, we need to make sure that structures are in place—not just for the health service but for the public sector in general—that ensure the efficient use of taxpayers' money. That is why we set up the Christie commission, and we will reflect on its recommendations in due course.

I take this opportunity to thank NHS Borders for the work that it does and I look forward to its continuing to do it.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): For the record, I say to Jeremy Purvis that he is incorrect. None of our proposals is about creating a new quango.

The eight special boards employ 12,500 staff at a cost of £2.5 billion. Does the cabinet secretary believe that any savings could be made if functions were merged? When money is tight, I am sure that she will agree that we want resources to be directed to the front line.

Nicola Sturgeon: Strange as it may sound, I agree with much of the sentiment behind Jackie Baillie's question. We should always be looking at the special health boards to see whether better working together and integration can release efficiency savings and redirect money to the front line, and work is being done in that direction at the moment. Let me give just one example: the Scottish Ambulance Service and NHS 24 are progressively working closer together, and they have a joint medical director.

Jackie Baillie will have perused the draft budget, which was published a couple of weeks ago, so she will know that we are asking special boards that do not deliver front-line or point-of-care services to meet more stretching efficiency targets. The money that will be released from that effort will be redirected to the front line. There is a great deal of work to be done, but we will continue to do it. Again, the Christie commission might want to make further observations on the issue in due course.

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I hope that NHS Highland will be retained or expanded in any review because it does a good job—witness the fact that it has decided to retain the Highland rheumatology centre in Dingwall. I thank the cabinet secretary for her support of that centre. Does she agree that NHS Highland deserves our plaudits?

Nicola Sturgeon: First, I reflect on the great praise that has been heaped on territorial health boards so far during this question time. That does not always happen, but I am sure that they will be delighted. They deserve that praise because they do a good job of delivering good services for patients across Scotland. I certainly echo Dave Thompson's comments about NHS Highland.

I welcome what Dave Thompson said about the rheumatology service. At his instigation, I had the pleasure of meeting some of the patients who use that service. They made their case strongly and powerfully, and I am glad that the NHS board listened to them.

Nurses (NHS Grampian)

2. Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how many newly qualified nurse graduates have been employed by NHS Grampian in each of the last six intakes. (S3O-12170)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Between 2008 and 2009, NHS Grampian employed a total of 402 newly qualified nurses. We are working closely with national health service boards, including NHS Grampian, to secure job opportunities for newly qualified nurses and midwives who have graduated in 2010. In the current financial context, that is clearly very challenging, but our commitments to the one-year job guarantee and to support the transition to employment remain as solid as ever.

Nicol Stephen: The minister has carefully not answered the question. The figures that I have been given for the previous five intakes, going back to 2008, are: 89, 132, 73, 108 and, in March of this year, five. I would be very interested to know what the figure is for October of this year. It should now be available to the minister.

The figures show an alarming reduction in the number of newly qualified nurses getting jobs. A probationary year of work is guaranteed for newly qualified teachers but not nurses. A constituent has raised the issue with me and said in a letter:

"The health ministers say they cannot guarantee newly qualified nurses jobs in their own locality. I am well aware of that, but having to go to England for a job I find is a bit much. Is this how they are trying to promote independence for Scotland? I have never known the morale amongst staff within the NHS to be so low"—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Mr Stephen, you have asked your question. I call the minister.

Nicola Sturgeon: Nicol Stephen raises an important issue, and it is important that it is treated appropriately.

Notwithstanding the welcome protection that the Government has afforded the national health service, the financial context that it faces is challenging, and it is reflected in the issue that Nicol Stephen raises. In the circumstances, it is absolutely right that we work with health boards—not just Grampian but all of them—to secure employment opportunities for newly qualified nurses and midwives. It is vital that we give them the skills and experience that allow them to take advantage of their training—training that is a result of the public investment that the taxpayer makes.

Nicol Stephen pointed out that the one-year job guarantee scheme does not secure employment in a nurse or midwife's own locality. I remind him that

that is not a change; it has always been the case under the scheme. We will continue to work hard to secure employment opportunities for people who will become a massive asset to the health service in Scotland.

The financial challenges faced by the health service and the rest of the public service are a direct result of the public spending cuts imposed on Scotland by the current coalition Government of which Nicol Stephen's party is a member and which no doubt he will enthusiastically support from his new place in the House of Lords.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): On the lack of employment opportunities for newly qualified nurses, can the minister give me any update on the number of agency staff who are employed by NHS Grampian? Does that have any bearing on the lack of jobs for new nurses?

Nicola Sturgeon: I will provide Nanette Milne with the detail in writing. She will be aware that in NHS Grampian, as in health boards across the country, the use of agency staff has dramatically declined in recent years. That is a thoroughly good thing and something that we should all welcome. I am more than happy to provide the specific numbers for NHS Grampian in writing.

Private Rented Housing (Scotland) Bill

3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what impact the Private Rented Housing (Scotland) Bill is expected to have on the level of supply of rented housing. (S3O-12157)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): The bill is part of my strategic approach to enabling the private rented sector to play its full part in building mixed, sustainable communities and offering flexibility and choice in housing options. By strengthening the enforcement of regulation, the bill will assist local authorities to identify and target landlords who cannot meet acceptable standards. Improving the standards and reputation of the sector will enhance its standing as a housing option and increase the confidence of landlords and potential investors, thus creating the conditions that will encourage future growth and the supply of quality homes to rent.

Patrick Harvie: I very much hope that many of those objectives are realised through the bill.

There are a substantial number of empty homes in Scotland. A more assertive approach from the Government could make those available for the social rented sector and, through incentives and penalties, bring them back into supply in the private rented sector. Does the bill offer the opportunity to take that kind of approach? Would the minister be open to amendments that would

lead an approach that would bring some of those homes back into use so that we can meet the aspiration that we all share of eradicating homelessness?

Alex Neil: I hope that Mr Harvie noted our announcement with Shelter last week. We have funded a secondment to Shelter to deal specifically with the issue of empty homes and to engage in the activity that he validly points out is needed.

The rate of vacancies and empty homes in the private sector is about seven times that in the social sector. Mobilising the use of empty homes in the private sector is much more difficult than doing so in the social sector, but we are determined to try every possible way of making greater use of empty homes in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Parkinson's UK

5. Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what recent discussions it has had with Parkinson's UK. (S3O-12152)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): We met the Scottish branch of Parkinson's UK on 1 September 2008 and on 15 May 2009. We discussed preparations for the world Parkinson's congress, which was held in Glasgow this September, at which the chief medical officer delivered the opening address. We also discussed the organisation's get it on time campaign and specialist services for people living with Parkinson's.

The Scottish Government is committed to helping people to live well with long-term conditions such as Parkinson's. Parkinson's UK in Scotland was fully involved in developing the clinical standards for the condition and the Scottish intercollegiate guidelines network guideline 113 on Parkinson's.

Margaret Mitchell: I thank the minister for that comprehensive answer. She is obviously aware of the Parkinson's UK get it on time campaign in Scotland. Can she confirm that she recognises the benefits of ensuring that hospitalised Parkinson's sufferers receive their medicine on time, both on medical and compassionate grounds and in terms of the economic benefits of ensuring that the strict timing of medicine is adhered to, thereby preventing more serious medical problems from developing? More important, if so, what steps has she taken to ensure that national health service boards in central Scotland and elsewhere are complying with their equality duties and are equality impact assessing the spending decisions that are associated with the issue?

Shona Robison: I acknowledge what Margaret Mitchell says about the get it on time campaign. The issue has been discussed on a number of occasions in the chamber. It is an important issue, and we have made sure that NHS boards are aware of their responsibility to ensure that the right practice is happening on the wards.

As Margaret Mitchell outlined, it is very important that those who work on the front line understand that and that patients get their medication on time, as they should do. We will continue to make sure that boards continue to deliver that service, and I am happy to keep Margaret Mitchell abreast of any developments on that front.

Homoeopathy

6. Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that homoeopathy has a role to play in health care. (S3O-12177)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Government recognises that complementary or alternative therapies, including homeopathy, may offer relief to some people suffering from a wide variety of conditions. It is, however, a matter for national health service boards in Scotland to make such services available on the basis of an assessment of needs within their respective areas. The treatment of individual patients is always a matter of professional judgment.

Rhona Brankin: The cabinet secretary will know that NHS Lothian is planning to close the general practitioner-run homeopathy clinic in Dalkeith, in the face of huge opposition. Can she confirm that her department is developing an integrative care strategy that is being headed up by Dr David Reilly, one of Scotland's leading homeopathic practitioners? Does she agree that it would be inappropriate for NHS Lothian to cut homeopathic services, which are so important for many patients, especially those with long-term conditions, at the same time as the Scottish Government is developing a national integrative care strategy?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am sure that Rhona Brankin would want the Parliament to have the full information about the case, so it is important to stress that NHS Lothian has taken no decision about the Midlothian community health partnership's proposal concerning the Dalkeith health centre.

The proposal is still subject to consultation, and the outcome of the on-going discussions will be reported to the community health partnership subcommittee at its next meeting in January. I

encourage Rhona Brankin, as the local member who has, rightly, raised this issue, to engage with that consultation, as I am sure that she is doing, to ensure that her views and those of her constituents are heard.

On the wider issue, I repeat what I said in my initial answer. We recognise that, in some circumstances and in relation to some conditions, complementary or alternative medicines and therapies can have a role to play. However, decisions about the provision or otherwise of those services in particular areas are, rightly, for local health boards. That is why I have stressed that Rhona Brankin should continue to discuss the matter with NHS Lothian.

Mental Health Problems

7. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made since 2007 in the early diagnosis and treatment of people with mental health problems. (S30-12154)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government recognises that prevention of mental ill health and timely diagnosis followed by appropriate intervention are key to improving treatment and outcomes for patients.

Although we believe that there has been no change in the number of people who are ill, the number of people registered with their general practitioner with a diagnosis of depression has increased from 6.2 per cent in 2006-07 to 8.6 per cent in 2009-10. The number of people registered with a diagnosis of dementia increased from 29,761 in 2006-07 to 35,816 in 2009-10, and we expect to meet the health improvement, efficiency, access and treatment—HEAT—target in advance of March 2011.

Mary Scanlon: Given that 54 per cent of new courses of antidepressant treatment last for more than 90 days, and that 36 per cent of the new patients are on antidepressants for more than 180 days, is it not time to ensure that patients with mild and moderate depression are given access to appropriate talking therapies as soon as possible, to reduce the likelihood of their condition becoming severe, chronic and enduring?

Shona Robison: I acknowledge the member's long-standing interest in these matters—she has raised the issue in the chamber on a number of occasions.

The Public Audit Committee was right to recommend that we review the antidepressant target, given that the research showed that, in 98 per cent of cases, people on a prescription are receiving medication appropriately. We are

committed to ensuring that their needs are met in an appropriate way, as per the clinical diagnosis.

However, the member is right to talk about the need to look at the issue from the other end of the telescope, as it were, and to ensure that people can get access to psychological therapies. That is why we committed ourselves to developing a target for access to psychological therapies for inclusion in the HEAT targets in 2011-12. This is the first time that such a target has been established, and I think that it will be important in ensuring that people, particularly those with more mild depression, anxiety and low mood, get access to those talking therapies and a range of other therapies that can help to reduce the likelihood that a more serious mental health problem will develop.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I thank the minister for the further information that she has given. Of course, the antidepressant prescribing target, which we hoped would lead to prescribing stabilising and then falling, has been summarily dropped by the Government without being immediately replaced by the alternative, although I acknowledge that the minister has just confirmed that the alternative is being considered.

In England, 3,000 new therapists have been trained. How many new therapists have been trained in Scotland? In light of the earlier discussion about nurse graduates, would it be sensible to train further therapists who can apply these therapies, and then replace or backfill them with new graduates?

Shona Robison: I am sure that Richard Simpson will be aware of the amount of new work that is going on with the boards and NHS Education for Scotland. I hope that he will recognise that, despite the rather unfortunate comments that his party made about disbanding NES, it is doing a really important job in ensuring that the education is in place that will enable us to reach the target to improve access to psychological therapies, as well as other important work.

NES is funding psychological therapies training co-ordinator posts in boards to provide the educational infrastructure that is necessary to ensure that the training and supervision are well organised and sustainable, and that the therapies have maximum service impact.

NES is also funding a psychological interventions team to co-ordinate work, particularly in relation to improving patient pathways and referral criteria to help to improve access to services. My concern is that Richard Simpson, in making his proposal, criticises NES and undermines the good and important work that it

does. Perhaps he will reflect on his party's comments in light of that work.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 8 has been withdrawn.

Tenants (Security of Tenure)

9. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on the announcement by the United Kingdom Minister of State for Housing and Local Government on removing security of tenure from tenants of social landlords and whether it is considering a similar proposal. (S3O-12156)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): Unlike the plans that were set out by the United Kingdom Government, we are committed to the future of social housing in Scotland, which includes building new social homes with affordable rents. We will continue to have a social rented sector with security of tenure for tenants at its core.

This summer we launched a discussion on the future of housing policy. As part of the debate, some stakeholders have pointed out that additional flexibilities would be beneficial—for example, removing the restrictions on social landlords that prevent them from providing properties for mid-market rent. We will publish a paper on the future of housing policy early in the new year.

Robin Harper: I thank the minister for his answer. However, if he is opposed—as he is—to the direction that has been set by his equivalent in the Westminster Government, will he explain why the “Housing: Fresh Thinking, New Ideas” paper that he published in the summer raised the possibility of ending security of tenure for social tenants in Scotland? Can he now say, unequivocally and with complete clarity, that he will guarantee security of tenure for Scottish tenants, which the majority of respondents to the paper argued for?

Alex Neil: I can guarantee that we will continue with security of tenure. The two main aspects of the new English housing policy are to increase rents to 80 per cent of the market value and to restrict tenancies to a minimum of two years. I believe that both measures will be very unfair, will hit the most vulnerable members of the community most and will lead to the destabilisation of the housing system and communities south of the border. We have no intention of going down that Conservative-Liberal Democrat route.

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): Will the minister confirm that it is not just a Conservative-Liberal Democrat route that he has articulated? The first proposals for removing security of tenure actually came from Caroline Flint when she was

Labour's UK housing minister. I am sure that we all welcome the assurances that the Scottish National Party Government has given today.

Alex Neil: I have in my file a copy of the statement that was made by Caroline Flint when she was housing minister in which she first mooted the idea that the Tories and the Liberal Democrats are now implementing. It is interesting that we have had no input or ideas from the Labour Party in response to the discussion paper that we published six months ago. Perhaps we should ask it whether it will still adhere to Caroline Flint's Tory policy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Questions 10 and 11 have been withdrawn.

Violence Against Women and Children (Funding for Services)

12. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the violence against women fund, the Rape Crisis specific fund and the children's services Women's Aid fund will be maintained in 2011-12 and, if so, at what level. (S3O-12179)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): Funding for work to tackle violence against women remains a top priority for the Scottish Government. The equality budget for 2011-12, from which violence against women funding is allocated, has been retained at its 2010-11 level. We have done that because we believe that in the current economic climate, it is crucial to continue to promote equality, protect front-line services and support our families and communities. We will continue to support work to tackle violence against women, but we have not yet made decisions about the precise allocation of the equality budget. We will do so as soon as possible.

Malcolm Chisholm: I thank the minister for that answer, although it is regrettable that he could not say anything more definite today. Will he assure us and, more important, those who work in the field that, given that the budget line has not been cut in cash terms, the funding levels for violence against women work will also not be cut in cash terms? Will he remember that important violence against women work is also done by local authorities? Will he try to raise with his colleagues the issue of ensuring that violence against women work and funding are built into the concordat with local government? Unfortunately, at present, that is not the case.

Alex Neil: As I said, we are still to take decisions on the precise allocation, but we will be maintaining the overall budget in respect of violence against women, which of course incorporates a number of programmes. As I said,

there is no cash cut in the budget for equalities and we intend to maintain our commitment to tackling violence against women and to the programmes, funding for which has been doubled in the past three years or so.

We are in constant touch with local authorities and, through the national violence against women group, which I chair, we are discussing how to ensure that throughout Scotland the right levels of support and funding are made available for services.

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I thank the minister for that reply. I am overjoyed that we can go back to our constituencies and tell the people who have been asking us about the issue that their funding is protected. As the letter from the minister states, the area is an important priority. Does the Scottish Government intend to sponsor a debate on violence against women as it and previous Governments have done in the past? If so, does he have a date for that?

Alex Neil: We do not have a precise date at the moment, but there is usually a Government-sponsored debate on violence against women at about this time of year. If we are not able to hold such a debate before Christmas, we will suggest to the Parliamentary Bureau, which schedules these matters, that we should do so early in the new year. It would be helpful if the debate was held once we know what the precise budgets are for each of the programmes under the banner of violence against women.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I welcome the minister's comments on the funding. Will he clarify that he is continuing the dedicated funding for the services that Malcolm Chisholm mentioned in his question? A degree of anxiety has been generated that the funding might be rolled up in the local government settlement, which would put the services at risk. I would welcome clarification of that.

I also raise the critical issue of the provision of services at the local level through single outcome agreements. The minister will be aware that analysis of single outcome agreements suggests that there is not a commitment at the local level to specific funding on the issue of violence against women. Will he clarify the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth's intention to provide an analysis of the implementation of single outcome agreements for 2009-10? Thus far, he has simply said that he has not yet decided. I understand that the decision remains with him. If we had that analysis, it would give confidence to those who seek to deliver services locally.

Alex Neil: First, I was hoping to get congratulations for the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, because he

published an equality statement simultaneously with the budget for the first time ever—that was never achieved in the first 11 years of the Parliament. I am sure that everybody will want to join me in welcoming that.

Secondly, I absolutely confirm that we will continue with our dedicated funding and that it will not be incorporated into the local government settlement. It remains within the direct control of the Scottish Government.

Thirdly, there is no specific reference to the area of work in some of the single outcome agreements, but the agreements do not cover every area of work that is done by local authorities, so that in no way suggests that local authorities are not committed to what we are trying to achieve. Through the national group, we are looking at the picture across Scotland to ensure that the requisite levels of services and support are being provided.

Air Ambulance (Orkney)

13. Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions ministers have had with the Scottish Ambulance Service regarding the future provision of air ambulance services in Orkney. (S30-12161)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): At the annual review of the Scottish Ambulance Service in September, I was given an update on the extensive consultation process that will inform decisions about the future provision of air ambulance services across Scotland. The consultation is in its concluding stages; final comments were sought from stakeholders by the beginning of this week. Scottish Government officials will remain in close dialogue with the Ambulance Service as the procurement exercise continues.

Liam McArthur: As the cabinet secretary knows, I have been raising the issue for three or so years. The Ambulance Service's final report on the consultation on the air ambulance procurement project says:

"There was ... a strong voice from Orkney favouring a locally-based Islander aircraft, as it is felt that local knowledge of weather conditions and landing sites would allow the service to make better use of short windows of opportunity and respond more quickly."

Will the cabinet secretary assure me and my constituents that she will use all her good offices to persuade the Scottish Ambulance Service to continue to work with NHS Orkney and the Orkney Islands Council to ensure that a locally based aircraft solution is put in place as quickly as possible?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Liam McArthur for again raising an issue in which he has shown a consistent interest. I assure him on behalf of the Scottish Ambulance Service that the service will reflect on and take seriously all the feedback from the public consultation. I understand that the views of more than 450 people throughout Scotland were fed into the review.

I am encouraged that the specific proposal that Liam McArthur talked about is being considered in detail by the three organisations. We support and encourage on-going partnership working in that respect, to ensure that the communities of Orkney get the best service, which is best tailored to their needs. I hope that that assurance satisfies Liam McArthur.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Questions 14 and 15 have been withdrawn.

Older People Care Services (Mansionhouse Unit)

16. Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what the timescale is for the replacement of the care services for older people currently delivered by the Mansionhouse unit. (S3O-12186)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has confirmed that inpatient services will transfer from the Mansionhouse unit to the new south Glasgow hospital in 2015, in line with the board's acute services review plans.

Charlie Gordon: The unit is located in my constituency. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's original plan was for the services that are delivered by the Mansionhouse unit to be replaced by 2009-10. Can the minister explain the reasons for the delay and the change to the strategy?

Shona Robison: I understand that the plan has been part of the acute services review plans for some time and that a timeframe of 2015 was laid out around the plans and is on-going. As the member knows, the south Glasgow hospital project is an important, flagship project, which will allow first-class beds to replace some of the very old provision at the Mansionhouse unit. I would have thought that the member would welcome progress on that.

Bedblocking (Dementia Patients)

17. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to reduce bedblocking for dementia patients in Glasgow hospitals caused by the need to obtain orders under the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000. (S3O-12158)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Section 13ZA of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 was commenced in March 2007, to clarify to local authorities when they can provide community care services for someone who lacks capacity, when a guardianship order is not in place. To assist further, guidance was issued on when the powers may be used, to ensure that there are no unnecessary legal barriers to adults with incapacity receiving the services that they need.

The Scottish Government also published a good practice guide in June 2010. Glasgow City Council, in partnership with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, has developed the guide for use locally and will implement a performance framework to ensure best practice.

Further work is under way, as part of the national dementia strategy, including development of a skills and knowledge framework for staff and common standards of care for dementia, both of which tools are designed to help to improve service response in those and other care settings.

Robert Brown: The central point of the question relates to the time that is taken to process applications and to obtain orders under the 2000 act. Am I right in saying that such delay, which keeps dementia patients in hospital—perhaps in the Mansionhouse unit to which Charlie Gordon referred—does not figure in Scottish Government statistics on bedblocking? Will the minister give an indication of the problem's extent? I am told that the issue is significant and costly and that unnecessary delays in processing and obtaining guardianship orders sometimes approach a year. Will she confirm that? Is that exacerbated by any rationing that Glasgow City Council has imposed on the availability of free personal and nursing care?

Shona Robison: Robert Brown needs to understand that the process can be complex. The courts and local authorities, including Glasgow City Council, do their best to expedite the process when guardianship orders are applied for. Detailed decisions about individuals are involved, which sometimes take time. Safeguards are built into the process, which can also take time to work through. I am sure that Robert Brown recognises the importance of ensuring that the correct procedures are followed.

As for the relationship to delayed discharge and the delayed discharge census, dealing with cases of adults without capacity takes time and the local authority and the national health service board can do nothing while the cases go through the legal process. It would be unfair to include such cases in the delayed discharge figures, because local authorities and NHS boards can do nothing about cases that are in the court process. Of course, it is

important to keep delays to a minimum. We expect that to be the position.

I hope that I have explained to Robert Brown why some cases take time. Once the court process is complete, I am sure that local partners do everything in their power to put people into appropriate care settings.

Preventive Treatment (Glasgow City Council)

18. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how the money for preventive treatment announced for national health service boards in the draft budget will help support Glasgow City Council in looking after vulnerable citizens. (S3O-12218)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government will allocate £70 million in 2011-12 in the NHS budget to a change fund for NHS boards and partner local authorities, together with the third and independent sectors, to redesign services to support the delivery of improved care outcomes for the growing older population. The change fund will be used as bridging finance to lever improvement throughout older people's spend in health and social care and will provide an opportunity to make better use of the total resources that are available in health and social care, in recognition of pressures on older people's services across Scotland.

Bob Doris: Does the minister agree that it will be vital in Glasgow for the NHS and the local authority to work closely together? That has not always been easy, given the problems that have existed with the community health and care partnerships. Will she encourage those bodies to work as closely together as possible and to ensure that the voluntary sector has a role in the delivery of services in the community, to promote preventive health spend?

Shona Robison: Absolutely. I recognise the previous difficulties to which Bob Doris refers. We have made it clear that the partners must work closely together. Only with the partners' agreement will any resources be released. If the resources are to go to the local partnership, it is vital that the partnership works as one to receive the resources.

As for the voluntary sector's role, I have made it clear that the voluntary sector must be around the table at the start of the process to decide on the priorities for which the resource should be used. It is clear that the voluntary sector will be key in delivering some of the more innovative services in the community. We have made it clear to local partners that the voluntary sector has a key role in that.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Will the minister explain why funding for social care has dropped from £3.2 billion in 2007-08 to £2.8 billion in 2009-10? That is a reduction of £400 million, which has been taken from our most vulnerable citizens.

Shona Robison: Despite the fact that Jackie Baillie is trying to scaremonger, she will appreciate the difficulties in which the Scottish Government budget is operating. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Shh.

Shona Robison: Two thirds of the cuts to that budget were planned by Alistair Darling. Rather than scaring the most vulnerable people in our society, we are taking direct action to deal with the difficult situation that faces us and ensuring that the resources tied up in the acute sector are released to support people in the community.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Come on!

Shona Robison: Instead of sniping loudly from the sidelines, as Richard Simpson does so well, we are getting on with the job in hand and ensuring that services for vulnerable people are protected.

Forensic Science Services Modernisation Programme

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Kenny MacAskill, on the forensic science services modernisation programme. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement and there should therefore be no interventions or interruptions.

14:56

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Forensic science services are a vital part of the fight against crime in Scotland. Following a debate on the matter in September, I made a commitment to come back to the Parliament to make a statement on the future of forensic science services in Scotland. I have given due consideration to all the options presented to me and I will now inform the Parliament of my decision.

Since forensic talent was brought together in the Scottish Police Services Authority in 2007, there has been a remarkable improvement in the standard of service delivered. Outstanding cases have halved, and more than nine out of 10 criminal justice DNA samples are now placed on the database within four days, compared to one in 10 in 2007. However, challenges remain and the service needs to modernise in order to meet the needs of its customers and cope with the difficult financial situation that we face.

Let me stress, though, that in reaching a decision on this matter I have been determined to reflect as far as possible the will of the Parliament. I have met union representatives and members of the Parliament from various parties and have given careful consideration to their views. For the benefit of the Parliament, I begin with a reminder of the process that brought us here today.

Following an initial proposal by the SPSA to close the Aberdeen forensic science laboratory in 2008, I asked the SPSA to work instead on a national service model for all forensic science services. That modernisation programme led the SPSA to publish four options for improving the speed, consistency and cost effectiveness of forensic analysis in Scotland.

Option 1 was to retain the current laboratory configuration and introduce new service standards to improve effectiveness and efficiency. Option 2 was the same as option 1, with the addition of an information technology system known as an evidence management solution—EMS. Option 3 was to reduce the laboratory configuration to two

laboratories, at Dundee and Gartcosh, and to introduce the EMS. Option 4 was to create two high-volume processing units to service four local satellite laboratories based in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen, and to introduce the EMS. The SPSA board wrote to me on 30 September recommending the implementation of option 4. The SPSA is publishing that information on its website today.

On 23 September, the Parliament supported a motion in favour of option 2. While I see many merits in option 4, as recommended by the SPSA, I recognise the value of retaining some of the vital elements of local expertise that would be delivered under option 2. That is why, as a result of my decision, the Aberdeen and Edinburgh labs will not only remain open, but retain 20 scientific and fingerprint staff, compared to the 12 to 15 anticipated in the SPSA board recommendation.

However, in the face of the toughest financial settlement from Westminster that the Parliament has ever faced, the need for greater efficiency is clear. That is why I have decided on an enhanced service option that is as close to option 2 as can be afforded in the current economic climate. This will see serious and urgent local biology and DNA analysis retained in each of the four laboratories. Under the SPSA recommendation, all DNA analysis would have been centralised to a high-volume processing unit. My approach recognises the value of local expertise that was central to the Parliament's support for option 2.

I will explain how I came to my decision. First, I looked at what the SPSA's customers want. They said that they want greater consistency and resilience to provide fast results for day-to-day crimes as well as expert support on serious and violent crimes. My decision recognises the fundamental importance of creating a greater separation between serious and volume crime processing. Dedicated volume crime teams will bring consistency to volume crime management and ensure a continuous flow of work that is not affected by serious crime cases.

Secondly, I looked at forensic drug services. Relatively few drug cases need an urgent turnaround and the recent legislative changes in the Cadder case have further increased the time window for tests. The compelling case, therefore, is to migrate volume crime drug analysis to a high-volume processing unit while retaining some scientific staff for urgent drug analysis within each service centre.

Thirdly, I looked at DNA. In considering the board's recommendation it was clear to me that, although there is a case for centralising volume DNA casework, there remains a strong argument for retaining at a local level urgent DNA analysis

and biology examinations, including for sexual offences.

This enhanced service option will enable the SPSA to move to a new forensic science services model that has scene examination embedded within the eight forces as they are today. It will also see the creation of two volume processing units in Glasgow—later to be at Gartcosh—and Dundee, and four strong and sustainable scientific satellite laboratories in all four current locations to provide expert local scientific support. The services that will be delivered from the local satellite laboratories will now include serious and urgent local biology analysis, including for sexual offences; local DNA analysis; limited mark enhancement; footwear intelligence; urgent fingerprint analysis; and urgent police drug analysis cases.

National specialist services will remain local, with hair and fibres in Aberdeen, firearms in Glasgow, documents and handwriting in Glasgow, and toxicology in Edinburgh. The two high-volume processing units will now process general chemistry services such as paint and glass analysis and fire debris analysis; footwear comparison; full mark enhancement examinations; fingerprint identifications for non-urgent crime cases; biology and DNA analysis for volume crime cases; and drug analysis.

As a consequence of the new structure, the SPSA will streamline management posts across Scotland by up to 50 per cent as part of an overall reduction of 74 posts. The reduction in posts will affect all forensic services across Scotland, not only Aberdeen and Edinburgh.

The implementation of option 2 would have cost the SPSA an additional £1.4m in the next financial year compared to the cost of option 4. The enhanced service option that I am announcing will cost £580,000 more than option 4. Option 2 would therefore require the SPSA to find even greater additional savings—over £820,000 next year—from its other vital services such as training, police information and communications technology, and vital criminal justice information systems. That is a bridge too far. I believe that the option that I have outlined strikes the right balance between achieving efficiencies and retaining valuable local scientific expertise. However, in acknowledgement of the potential for structural change in Scottish policing as a whole, I have decided that a review of the effectiveness of implementing the model should be undertaken in 18 months' time and reported on to the SPSA board, so that it can monitor progress and success.

To underpin the enhanced service option, I am pleased to announce a £600,000 investment in the procurement of an evidence management IT solution, which is vital to the successful delivery of

the forensic science services modernisation programme. That investment comes on top of the nearly £50 million of investment in forensic science services that is already in train through the new state of the art laboratory in Dundee and the Gartcosh crime campus.

I recognise that this has been a long and difficult journey for many and regret that my decision will have consequences for individuals in the forensic science service. However, modernisation is necessary. The model that I propose will enable the SPSA to deliver a more efficient and consistent service, while ensuring that the existing laboratories remain open. I am confident that the structure will deliver the best possible service for Scottish policing and the criminal justice community and look forward to working with the SPSA on its implementation over the coming months.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I intend to allow 20 minutes for that before we move to the next item of business. I remind the chamber that a considerable number of members have indicated that they wish to contribute, so members should make their question a question, not a story followed by a question. If they tell a story first, I will cut them out.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for making a statement to the Parliament, as we requested. However, his announcement leaves us with significant concerns about the future of the forensic services that both the Aberdeen and the Edinburgh labs provide. I remind him that option 2 in the SPSA consultation paper would have not only retained an excellent network of labs in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow but saved £2 million a year. Given that that is the case, why has he departed from the clearly stated will of the Parliament in favour of option 2 and instead chosen to remove key services, including volume drug analysis, from the labs in Edinburgh and Aberdeen?

We need resolution and a clear, sustainable plan for the future of the labs and their staff, who have endured so much anxiety and uncertainty during this process, so why has the cabinet secretary decided that there should be a review of his decision in 18 months' time? I am afraid that that gives rise to concerns among Labour members that the labs are receiving a stay of execution for the convenience of elections, rather than being saved. Can he guarantee that, after the review, the labs in Edinburgh and Aberdeen will definitely remain open and that the services that have been removed from them today will be returned if it is shown that that has been detrimental to solving crimes in the areas that they

serve—communities that are safer today thanks to the efforts of staff who, under the plans, will no longer be based in Aberdeen or Edinburgh?

Kenny MacAskill: Richard Baker made several points in his question. I remind him that earlier today he challenged the First Minister on cuts to back-room services in the police and the difficulties that some face as a result.

As I pointed out in my statement, implementing option 2 without the amendment that I propose would have cost an additional £820,000. I did not hear Mr Baker suggest from where that money should be obtained. I also indicated that implementing the EMS IT system that he supports and on which option 2 was predicated will cost an additional £600,000 just in the coming year. We are providing that money from the justice budget. If we do not make efficiencies in the part of the SPSA where they have been identified, Mr Baker must tell us which part of the authority he wishes to reduce and where that stands in relation to the points that he made to the First Minister earlier today.

It is certainly my intention, if I am still in situ after May next year, not to make any variation pending the review that I have called for. Matters remain as they are in that regard.

There is something disingenuous in the member arguing—with crocodile tears—for something that would result in increased costs without commenting on where he would make the savings. That comes on the same day that he has made criticisms about other aspects of funding where savings are being made.

The member's suggestion that there should not be a review comes as the Labour Party has decided on having one police service—without even considering the evidence that we are putting before a police board. To think that there is no relationship between forensic science and the configuration of the police service is equally disingenuous.

John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of his statement.

I will raise two issues. First, as we have heard, there has been much speculation about the number of police forces. Given that there has still been no decision as to which structure will be adopted in the future, does the cabinet secretary think that it might have been sensible to postpone any decision on the future of forensic science services until the structure of the police forces had been determined?

Secondly, I note that the review of the effectiveness of implementing the new model will be undertaken in 18 months' time. We do not

know whether the voters will allow the cabinet secretary to continue in his current job but, if he does, will he undertake to bring the conclusions of that review to the Parliament?

Kenny MacAskill: I thank Mr Lamont both for his question and for the spirit in which it was asked. He is quite correct: there is a clear correlation between the number of police services that we operate in Scotland and the forensic science facilities. It is not an exact match, however, as Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary, Fife Constabulary and Northern Constabulary do not have their own forensic science facilities.

We have yet to decide whether there is to be a change, radical or otherwise, in police services. I know that that view is shared across the other side of the chamber and it is essential that we look at the evidence on that. The question is whether we could have postponed the decision on forensic science services. If we did that, it would not be possible to make the progress required to keep the forensic science services upgraded and maintain investment. We cannot provide the necessary level of investment without being aware of the sophistication of the equipment—drug analysis machines come at a significant cost. The investment in Dundee, and the investment that is wanted and welcomed by Labour, in particular, at Gartcosh, all come at a cost. Dundee is open and Gartcosh is under way. I do not think that we could have postponed that.

We require to make some progress to build upon a service that I accept is excellent—that is accepted by members around the chamber. We have to make progress in the climate that we find ourselves in. It will be for either me or anybody else who is in the position of justice secretary in 18 months' time to carry out a review. I can certainly give an undertaking that I will seek to be open and to publish the review. What I have said today is being published. The SPSA recommendation is on the web as we speak and it is engaged in discussions. We give an assurance that there will be a spirit of openness.

Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): The proposal does not retain the Aberdeen and Edinburgh forensics labs; it cuts and slices them until they are little more than outposts of the two centralised superlabs. Does the minister not realise that, any way we look at it, the Aberdeen forensic lab is to close in its current form and become a downsized, downgraded satellite lab? Is it 75 per cent closure or 85 per cent closure that we are getting today? We do not know. How many jobs are going? We are not told.

We know that there are more than 40 scientific and fingerprint jobs in Aberdeen alone. Edinburgh has significantly more, I understand. After the review, there will be a total of 20 between the

Edinburgh and Aberdeen labs. Can the minister tell us how many jobs are involved in each lab, now and after his review?

This is a major betrayal of Aberdeen and the north-east of Scotland from a minister who wants to centralise services. Why does the minister reject the will of the Parliament, ignore the cross-party views of local campaigners and leave the sword of Damocles hanging over both the Aberdeen and Edinburgh labs, which are now downgraded to local "satellite" centres, to use the minister's own word, which face a further review in 18 months' time?

Kenny MacAskill: The position is not as Mr Stephen puts it. Indeed, the Aberdeen laboratory retains its expertise in fibres and other matters. For the record, let me remind him that Edinburgh and Aberdeen will not be closing, despite what he suggested—

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): How many jobs are you keeping in Aberdeen?

Kenny MacAskill: As Mr Rumbles yet again comments loudly from a sedentary position, I reiterate that there will be 20 scientific and fingerprint staff at both Edinburgh and Aberdeen—14 biology, two chemistry and four fingerprint staff.

We must take two things into account. First, we are in this position because we face financial challenges, as well as the challenge of modernising forensic science services. It is gross hypocrisy for members of parties that are in the coalition down south, which is imposing the cuts, to shed crocodile tears.

Secondly, and perhaps more devastating, I think that I would have some sympathy for Mr Stephen if the Liberal Democrats down south were of the same view as he is. Down south, however, they have but six laboratories and the Liberal Democrat position in the Administration there is that they will privatise forensic science services. We are preserving forensic science laboratories in Aberdeen and in Edinburgh. The Liberal Democrats, where they are in power south of the border, propose to privatise forensic science services.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): We will try to get through as much as we can; it will help if we have short questions and short answers, cabinet secretary.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I commend the cabinet secretary for producing a set of proposals that is as close to option 2 as was possible in the straitened financial circumstances. Can he confirm that the 20 scientific and fingerprint staff referred to in his statement are in Aberdeen and that there are another 20 in

Edinburgh? Can he also confirm that the additional cost related to transfers of staff or other such matters have been taken into account in reaching his decision?

Kenny MacAskill: Yes, I can confirm that. Those are the job numbers. In addition, there will be, as I say, other jobs that are not of a scientific or fingerprint nature that will also be based there. Indeed, there are some costs, because there is a voluntary redundancy scheme, and we have factored in those costs. As I say, we have decided to ensure that we have the best possible forensic science service available at a time when there is a difficult financial climate.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary confirm what the staff have told me, which is that there will be a loss of 20 scientific and fingerprint staff at the Lothian laboratory, with the remainder having the axe hanging over their head for 18 months as a result of this shabby compromise? Will he also confirm that the loss of volume drug analysis in Lothian will hamper drug operations such as operation erase in East Lothian, which caught 50 drug dealers? As a result of his statement, Lothian drug dealers will be laughing all the way to the bank.

Kenny MacAskill: There are two aspects to that question. First, I have made it clear that there will be a loss of 70 jobs. As I say, management jobs will be streamlined by 50 per cent. That will be dealt with by voluntary redundancy. The precise figure in each location will depend upon the configuration, which the SPSA is working out with members of staff.

The point raised by Lord Foulkes would have some substance were it not for the fact that, far from championing Lothian and Borders Police, he has already decided that the force should be abolished and become part of the greater Scottish police service, with the consequences that we all know will follow. Yet again, we have crocodile tears from the Labour Party.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): Although I understand that when the cabinet secretary made his decision he had to take into account all the relevant factors, including the parliamentary vote on 23 September, he should be aware that some staff in the SPSA will be concerned that he has not chosen the most cost-effective option. Can the cabinet secretary give the staff some reassurance about the finances available to the SPSA in the draft budget?

Kenny MacAskill: Yes, I can. Obviously, I discussed the matter earlier with Vic Emery, the SPSA's convener. Over the next few weeks we will discuss a budget with the SPSA. I have confirmed that we will meet the initial £600,000 that is required for EMS.

Mr FitzPatrick is correct to say that the option is not the optimum saving that the SPSA sought, but we think that it best meets the will of the Parliament in the current financial climate. Those who suggest that there should be greater saving should realise that any additional expenditure on the forensic science service would be at the expense of the budget for other aspects of policing, which budget Mr Baker and others deeply lamented earlier today.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): What effect will the cabinet secretary's announcement have on the capacity and staffing levels of the excellent 24-hour drug service in Edinburgh? That service allows charging within the required time period, a rapid turnaround for test purchasing and other purposes, and analysis of the percentage purity of drugs in all seizures of more than 1g, compared with 250g in Strathclyde. In a recent letter to me, the cabinet secretary referred to a national services standard agreement. What are the principles of that agreement? Will it limit the number of cases that are sent for analysis?

Kenny MacAskill: I do not believe that the agreement will limit the number of cases that are sent for analysis. Our service agreements are worked out in conjunction with the police and the Crown. It is not only the police in Scotland who are involved; the Crown is required to produce the evidence and base its case on the analysis. We have borne in mind the requirement to deal with urgent matters. We recognise that improvements in technology are coming through, which is why we have retained four local satellite offices.

Equally, there is a clear understanding that, where there is no great urgency with respect to crimes, the equipment, given its sophistication and cost, cannot be spaced out among each of the local satellite offices. There will have to be some element of centralisation, but that will provide what the police and the Crown require to continue to make Scotland safer.

Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): I, too, thank the minister for giving us an advance copy of his statement, and I thank him for listening to Margaret Smith and me putting the case for Edinburgh. However, I am not sure that he took on board my concerns about future crime statistics when the labs in Edinburgh and Aberdeen are downgraded.

Does he think that it is right that the review that he announced, which will take place in 18 months' time, leaves the retained staff in limbo? Many of the Edinburgh staff have worked in the lab for many years and have built up huge expertise. I want the minister to be absolutely clear. Will 20 scientific staff be retained in Edinburgh and 20 be retained in Aberdeen? It is clear that we are all

confused by page 6 of the cabinet secretary's statement. He has assured me that there will be no compulsory—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have had the question, Mr Pringle.

Kenny MacAskill: I confirm that there will be 20 scientific and fingerprint staff in both Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): The cabinet secretary indicated that redundancy costs had been factored in—I think that that was the expression that he used. I presume that some relocation costs have also been factored in. Can he give us an indication of the Government's estimate of the redundancy and relocation costs associated with the new service configuration?

Kenny MacAskill: I cannot, because, as Mr McLetchie is well aware, redundancy costs are predicated on the length of an individual's service. However, it is accepted that, with 74 posts going, there will be costs. Some people will go through natural wastage, and some posts will go through the recruitment freeze that is currently being implemented. There is a cost factor, and a reduction in efficiencies, and I confirm that we have factored those in.

It is clear that we are investing £600,000 initially in the EMS IT system that members, including Mr McLetchie, want. It is also clear that, if we do not make the changes to the position that the Parliament voted for in September, that would cost an additional £820,000. It is incumbent on those who want that to tell us where we should acquire that money.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): How will the level of forensic services and the configuration that the cabinet secretary has described contrast with the services and provision available in other parts of the United Kingdom?

Kenny MacAskill: Northern Ireland has only one laboratory, and, as I said earlier, the forensic science service that is operated by the Home Office in England and Wales has only six laboratories. Sadly, it appears that the Liberal-Conservative coalition will privatise that service.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): Can the cabinet secretary tell us whether the Aberdeen forensic laboratory will continue to have the bench work facility for processing DNA samples as they come in?

Kenny MacAskill: We have said that DNA analysis will be retained locally in Edinburgh and Aberdeen. How that service is configured is an operational matter, but we are retaining the urgent DNA analysis that the police sought and which was part of where the Parliament wanted to go,

back in September. We are delivering what we can. The operational matters are for the SPSA.

Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-7484, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill.

15:26

The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham): I thank the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee for its careful consideration of the bill and for its extremely helpful report. The committee has been assisted by the evidence and insight of a great many people from a variety of sectors and walks of life. The range of people and organisations that have been involved shows just how far reaching the impact of the bill is.

The committee's report highlights two watchwords for the bill: balance and compromise. Those are absolutely right. The bill is about balancing competing demands on the Scottish countryside, whether we are talking about land managers running a business, conservationists seeking to protect species and habitats, deer stalkers and grouse shooters, or walkers and birdwatchers. All those people make legitimate calls on the resources of the countryside. The bill seeks to ensure that the law in relation to the countryside acknowledges those competing demands and applies compromise and balance in dealing with them.

I am pleased that the committee has recognised that practical approach. We certainly share the more visionary aspirations that have been articulated by others, but the bill is intended to be about the nuts and bolts. It will create a number of criminal offences. We need to be careful about the language that we use when people might be prosecuted. There are no general statements and duties in the bill, in part because the possibility of unintended consequences looms large, particularly regarding the legal and judicial interpretation of such statements. The committee has recognised that but, rightly, it has questions on how we are addressing the wider issues. I am happy to write to the committee in more detail about that work. There is not enough time today to do real justice to the committee's report, so I will limit my comments to some key areas—wildlife crime, snaring, invasive non-native species and deer. The Government's full written response to the committee will be published next week.

I turn first to wildlife crime. When we set out to draft the bill, we regarded the legislative framework as being robust and we believed that

what was needed was effective enforcement of the law. I remain of the view that enforcement is key and I agree with the committee that wildlife crime should be vigorously pursued by the police and the Crown. However, as members know, I cannot direct the police or the prosecution service as regards their operational decision-making processes.

The committee recognised the strength of feeling that wildlife crime generates, in particular the poisoning of Scotland's striking birds of prey. A year ago, I wanted to be able to stand here now telling Parliament that the persecution of birds of prey had become a rarity and that poisoning statistics showed a marked decline. Sadly, I cannot do that, because 2010 is set to be one of the worst years on record for poisoning of birds. The committee has recognised that something more must be done, and I agree. I looked long and hard at a range of options, including all those that were put to the committee and those that were raised in the report "Natural Justice: A Joint Thematic Inspection of the Arrangements in Scotland for Preventing, Investigating and Prosecuting Wildlife Crime" and through the partnership for action against wildlife crime—PAW—Scotland.

There are many interesting ideas about how best to tackle the problem. It is my view that any further measures must be carefully thought out and, crucially, must be specifically targeted so that the whole of the rural sector is not penalised because of the criminal actions of a minority. I have therefore indicated to the committee that I intend to lodge an amendment that will introduce vicarious liability, which was one of the options that were mentioned in the "Natural Justice" report. It will target criminality and ensure that employers whose employees are involved in persecution of wild birds will be forced to shoulder responsibility for the actions of those employees. There will, of course, be a defence of due diligence, as there must be, but turning a blind eye will no longer be an option.

There is a proposal in the report that we take a power to introduce a licensing scheme for shooting businesses. Such a move would undoubtedly be a severe disincentive for people who contemplate committing offences, but the fact that it would be such a significant step suggests to me that it is not appropriate for an enabling power. If it looks to be preferable that we go down that road, I would very much prefer that we carry out a proper consultation and legislate in the normal way.

With that in mind, I should add that I have no plans to try to take over the newly launched wildlife estates initiative and to make it part of a compulsory scheme. I recognise that that scheme

is a genuine attempt by the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association, the Scottish Estates Business Group and others to embed sustainable management in sporting estates, and that any attempt by Government to hijack it would kill it stone dead.

I am interested in ideas on how to improve enforcement against wildlife crime. The proposal that we provide the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals with additional powers is worthy of consultation, but I am concerned about including enabling powers in a bill before even initial discussions have taken place. Consultation should come first.

I turn to snaring, which has long been a controversial and emotive issue. This Government recognises that pest and predator control is necessary to protect livestock and crops and that, in some circumstances, snaring is the least bad option. I thank the committee for agreeing that snaring is

"a vital part of land management".

Our intention in introducing further regulation in this area is to ensure that snaring is carried out by trained operators, working to the best standards of animal welfare.

I draw the chamber's attention to the comments of Dr Hal Thompson, the eminent wildlife pathologist of the British Veterinary Association, who told the committee:

"What is in the bill is excellent. If the bill is adopted and its provisions put in place, that will provide for very effective use of snares."

He went on to say that the bill would introduce sensible and reasonable controls that

"present a balance between the people who require snares and the people who are interested in the protection of animals and animal welfare. I do not have any problems with what the bill contains in that regard. It is a commendable piece of proposed legislation."—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs and Environment Committee*, 6 October 2010; c 3234.]

However, I recognise that we cannot rest on our laurels, so I am content to agree to the committee's recommendation that a further review of snaring be carried out in five years to assess the effect of our proposals.

At this stage, I am not clear on what the committee's proposal for individual identification numbers for each snare would deliver. It seems that it would lead to a burdensome system of record keeping for the police, which would only add considerably to the cost of administering the scheme.

I agree with the committee that we need to keep abreast of technological developments, especially those that protect animal welfare, and I advise the

chamber that the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 contains an order-making power that will allow us to update regulations as required.

I welcome the committee's support for the Government's approach to invasive non-native species. Members will be acutely aware of the problems that they cause. As we know, red squirrels face a threat from their grey invasive non-native cousins, but there are also less well-known species that pose a threat, such as piri-piri burr, which is a plant that has caused considerable problems on Lindisfarne. If members are wondering what on earth it is, it is a New Zealand plant with small seed-heads that are covered in hooks that attach themselves to walkers and dogs. It outcompetes native species. Alarming, it has already spread to Harris and is also, unfortunately, appearing in my constituency.

Although much of the bill relates to rural Scotland, we know that invasive non-native species are no strangers to urban areas. Last week, we heard that American signal crayfish had been found in the River Kelvin in Glasgow. The cost of invasive non-native species to the Scottish economy is upwards of £200 million. The bill will allow us to be better prepared in the future for invasive non-native species, and it will ensure that action can be taken when it is the best thing to do.

The committee recommended that there should be a lead body for invasive non-native species and, in its evidence to the committee, Scottish Natural Heritage indicated its willingness to take on that role. I agree with the committee's analysis, and confirm that a lead body will be identified to co-ordinate responses to invasive non-native species. I will ensure that that is publicised and included in the code of practice.

The code of practice will be an important document and I am happy to accept the recommendation of the Subordinate Legislation Committee and the lead committee to make the code subject to parliamentary procedure. The best way to proceed is to propose that the code be subject to affirmative procedure when it is first introduced, and that any future revisions be subject to negative procedure. That will strike the right balance and allow flexibility for future changes in what can be a fast-moving area.

I turn briefly to deer. As with some other matters, the committee had to navigate through some conflicting evidence on the state of deer management in Scotland. I am pleased that the value of retaining the voluntary and privately delivered approach to deer management has been recognised. However, improvements can be made and the bill will do that. It will give SNH a better framework within which to work when the voluntary approach fails to deliver for the greater public interest. The Subordinate Legislation

Committee and lead committee also recommended that the code of practice on sustainable deer management be subject to parliamentary procedure. Again, I accept that recommendation, and am considering the most appropriate way to do it. I will write to the committees with further detail.

I thank the committee for recognising that the Government listened and acted in response to the consultation on deer and that, as a result, the deer provisions in the bill are acceptable to the Committee.

I look forward to hearing members' contributions in the course of this afternoon's debate.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill.

15:37

Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP):

Consideration of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 was a challenging and fascinating task for the committee. The bill contains a number of different subjects as part of its package of provisions, covering game management, wildlife crime, species licensing, invasive non-native species, protection of badgers, management of deer and the administration of designated protected areas, such as areas of special protection and sites of special scientific interest.

On the surface, the bill is largely practical and seeks to update and strengthen existing law to make it fit for the Scottish countryside of the 21st century. However, it also raised some fundamental questions that galvanised people across Scotland to make their views known to the committee. What should our priorities be in the countryside? What is the ideal balance between different management objectives, such as grouse moor management, protection of species, forestry targets and environmental concerns, and how can we achieve that balance?

When the committee visited the Langholm moor demonstration project, which is an experiment that is attempting to manage a grouse moor with a sustainable hen harrier population, it became clear that what could appear on first sight to be a vast natural wild moor, is actually a piece of land that is extensively managed. Foxes are being controlled, birds are being fed and heather is being burnt. As much as the bill is about the natural environment, it is also about how land is managed.

All committee members engaged with the bill from the outset, and I thank them for their dedication. I also thank all those who gave evidence to the committee, and those who

assisted the committee with our external meeting in Langholm, Dumfriesshire, and with our informative visits to the Langholm moor demonstration project, Alvie estate near Aviemore, and the RSPB Scotland-managed Loch Garten and Abernethy reserves in the Cairngorms national park.

I also take this opportunity to thank the committee clerks and the Scottish Parliament information centre for their support during stage 1.

As I am sure that members will appreciate, there was no shortage of strongly held views on issues such as snaring, species licensing, game and deer management, and wildlife crime. I will come to each of those shortly. I should also say that, although the committee was not in complete agreement on how to take forward some of the issues, we were unanimous in agreeing that the bill is necessary and important and that the Parliament should support it at stage 1.

On a general issue, it was made clear to the committee that wildlife law has become increasingly complex and difficult to follow. How can we expect everybody to understand the law when there is such confusion and lack of clarity? When the committee heard that respected legal experts struggle to make sense of it, it realised that consolidation of the law was overdue. The committee believes that that should be a priority for any future Administration.

Let me now turn to the various issues in the bill, starting with the provision on game law. The committee supported the Government's intention to modernise archaic game laws and to bring game birds under the auspices of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The committee also supported the creation of a single poaching offence, which should prove to be more transparent and effective. On the topic of ground game—brown and mountain hares, specifically—the committee welcomed the proposed introduction of close seasons to protect dependent young at important times for their welfare.

Wildlife crime and single-witness evidence became a central issue in the committee's considerations, and a very lively session was held on the subject. The bill restates the current position that poaching offences and egg stealing can be prosecuted on the evidence of a single witness, but other wildlife crimes require corroboration. A majority of members thought that that position is not sustainable and that the law must be made consistent, either by extending single-witness evidence to all wildlife crimes or by abolishing it altogether. Members had different views on which route to recommend—I am sure that others will clarify their positions during the debate.

There was a great deal of discussion about the on-going problem of raptor persecution—a situation which seems, as the minister stated, to be getting worse, rather than improving. The committee agreed that the law is not working. We should be seeing more prosecutions for persecution of raptors and fewer reported cases, but sadly we are not. A majority of the committee therefore welcomed the minister's announcement that she intends to lodge an amendment at stage 2 to introduce a vicarious liability offence, which will target not just individuals who directly poison a bird of prey but landowners who direct them to do so. It is important that our laws can deal with the few who are tarnishing the reputation of the vast majority of estates, which do a great deal for Scotland both culturally and economically.

The committee unanimously welcomed the recent wildlife estates Scotland initiative, a voluntary initiative that is managed by the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association and the Scottish Estates Business Group, supported by the Scottish Government. It seeks to set and maintain the highest standards for our sporting estates.

Some committee members supported enabling powers being put in the bill so that future Administrations could introduce an estate licensing scheme if the vicarious liability offence and voluntary scheme were shown not to be making an impact on the problem. I note that I did not agree with that recommendation, but I am sure that other members will give their views on it, in due course.

Deer management is another important issue that the bill deals with. It proposes a series of amendments to the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 in order to realise fully the intentions of that legislation. There can be few finer sights in Scotland than a red deer stag standing majestically on a hill, and many tourists come to Scotland to see deer in their natural environment. However, as Scotland has somewhere in the region of 750,000 deer and they have no natural predator, deer numbers need to be managed to prevent significant damage to habitat and to ensure that any threat to public health and safety is kept to a minimum.

The committee agreed with the Government that the most effective method of managing deer across the country is to encourage co-operation and collaboration among all those who manage deer for a variety of objectives. However, the committee also heard persuasive evidence that the system is simply not working as well as it should be, and it therefore calls on the Government to re-examine the operation of deer management groups, which gather local landowners together to agree how to manage deer

numbers in a particular area, and to ensure that all those who are responsible abide by the proposed code of practice.

The committee supported the Government's proposed presumption against the release of invasive non-native species. In this country, we have seen many examples of non-native species becoming invasive and damaging natural wildlife and habitat, from the non-native grey squirrel, which the minister mentioned, and the rhododendron to the signal crayfish, which was discovered only last week in the River Kelvin. The best way of preventing future generations from having to deal with problems that are caused by non-native species is to have a presumption against the release of such species.

There were less contentious measures in the bill that the committee supported, such as bringing consistency to the laws protecting badgers; making changes to when and how muirburn should be practised; and the proposed streamlining of designations of protected sites, such as areas of special protection and sites of special scientific interest. The committee welcomes all those provisions, with some minor suggestions and recommendations.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, in many ways the fundamental question behind the bill is what our priorities should be in the countryside. How do we achieve a balance between public and private interests, between landowners and environmentalists, and between animal welfare organisations and those who shoot for sport? The bill has begun to answer that question and to better address the balance. I look forward to its being strengthened further at stage 2.

15:46

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): First, I thank the committee, the clerks and all those who contributed to the consultation process and the analysis of those comments in preparing the report that we have in front of us for the stage 1 debate. The bill is complex, with controversial elements and detailed proposals, but it is also wide ranging and, potentially, involves a huge number of stakeholders in rural and urban Scotland.

One of the key things that comes through from discussions in the Parliament on landscape, farming, crofting, recreation, access, tourism and human activity is the fact that balances must be struck. Decisions on how we use our land have a huge impact on our flora and fauna that pass us by, but which are crucial to maintenance of our biodiversity and the quality and health of our environment for the future. That means protecting

and enhancing our natural environment, and making sure that we have the right frameworks and interventions where that is appropriate.

One of the long-term challenges that comes from climate change is the fact that SSSIs may need to be reviewed. The Scottish Wildlife Trust makes powerful arguments about the need to take a wider ecosystems view. That may be beyond the bill, but it will become part of the backdrop of our future land use. Therefore, we very much welcome the provisions on SSSI amendment and restoration powers, which we think will make a positive difference.

The provisions on deer management are long awaited. The John Muir Trust is disappointed that the Scottish Government has stepped back from its initial proposals and asks about the extra costs to the public purse if the management action that is required by the code is not undertaken—for example, in relation to woodland planting targets. I wonder whether the minister would like to comment, in her winding-up speech, on those comments from the John Muir Trust.

Labour welcomes the proposals for a statutory code of practice for deer management. We also welcome the fact that SNH would have to have regard to that code in exercising its powers to secure sustainable deer management. Like the committee, we seek clarity on how that would work. We think that it is an important issue that needs to be clarified properly. The committee has asked the Scottish Government to clarify whether all landowners will have to abide by the code and what powers SNH will have for intervention if the code is ignored or breached. That is a fundamental point, so it would be helpful to all who are involved in deer management to have that clarified by the minister from the outset.

We support the committee's view that everyone needs to be around the table to ensure that the code is right from the start. So, we support the committee's recommendation to the minister that NFU Scotland and at least one environmental organisation be at the table at the start in order that we can make sure that the code has broad support. We also support the committee's suggestion that there be a review of deer management groups. In the light of the new provisions in the bill, that would be a very useful step.

There are suggestions in the report for further consideration of definitions. The committee has come up with a sensible recommendation that the Scottish Government use the term "damage" throughout the bill and remove the word "serious". That will be debated in the context of amendments at stage 2.

We also support the measures to improve action on non-native species. As the minister has said, where they are introduced, they can cause huge damage to biodiversity and bring about major costs, as well impacting on other species. For that reason, we strongly welcome the minister's commitments, which we will support at stage 2.

Since our Parliament was established, we have made progress on wildlife crime, and this bill provides us with an opportunity to enhance our law and give further clarity on its enforcement. There are still places in Scotland where species are illegally poisoned, but no one is ever prosecuted. Some excellent work is being done by the partnership against wildlife crime, which is pulling together people and agencies to give a sharper focus and greater co-ordination to work on wildlife crime.

The committee strongly supported new provisions on vicarious liability, so I welcome the minister's commitment to take that forward and we very much look forward to her official response to the committee's report next week. We think that the proposal will make managers and landowners much more focused on ensuring that there is best practice on their estates, and it will send out the right message.

We also support the rationalisation of poaching offences in the bill to support a single poaching offence.

The principle of single-witness provisions has worked well with regard to poaching, and we think that it should be extended to tackling other wildlife crimes, too. We also support the potential use of SSPCA inspectors to help to tackle wildlife crime.

As the minister said, the committee has heard divergent evidence on snaring and has attempted to deliver a compromise. Labour still remains unhappy about the current practice of snaring. We accept that there have been improvements through the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, that technology has changed, that monitoring has been tightened and that more is possible still. However, we remain faced with the fundamental problem that many animals still suffer.

Having chaired the last committee that considered snaring, I know that some people will argue that the new provisions will make the bill work. However, we remain to be convinced and we think that, as suggested by the committee, ministers should have the power, through the bill, to enable a ban on snaring. There are still animals suffering that were not intended to be caught by snares. I understand that OneKind has suggested that five years after the introduction of the provisions is too long to wait for a review, and so recommends a shorter timescale of two years. I

hope that the committee can consider that at stage 2. Certainly, a five-year timescale would see the issue kicked further into the long grass—it would not be considered even in the next session of Parliament. We suspect that there is no majority in Parliament for a ban on snaring, but that does not mean that we cannot take more serious action on snaring.

There is a need to support the bill tonight, as it contains important new powers. There is an opportunity for delivering clarity at stage 2. If improved, the bill could certainly deliver much-needed support to improve the quality of the environment and ensure its protection. We will try to amend the bill at stage 2, and we will work constructively with colleagues to try to develop majority support on what are extremely contentious issues, as the minister ably outlined earlier.

We are happy to support the principles of the bill, so that it can be taken forward to stage 2 for amendment.

15:53

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I declare an interest as a farmer, and thank everyone who has contributed to getting the bill to this stage 1 debate.

The Scottish Conservatives welcome much of this largely amending bill that deals with modernisation of game law, abolition of areas of special protection, improvements to snaring, species regulation, changes to deer management and changes to muirburn practices. We support most of the bill, while recognising that there is a need for consolidating legislation at some future date.

However, there will still be much to debate at stage 2, and the principal concern that I have is the Government's intention to introduce vicarious liability into the bill by amendment at stage 2 in an attempt to stop raptor persecution.

Let me state categorically that Scottish Conservatives utterly condemn those who carry out raptor persecution, in the same way that we condemn deer poaching and other wildlife crimes, and we want to make every attempt to stamp out these abominable crimes.

However, the scale of raptor persecution is the unanswered question. The case that is being made for the introduction of vicarious liability is largely predicated on the alleged disappearance of approximately 50 golden eagles in the north-east of Scotland each year, with the suggestion being that they have been poisoned or otherwise killed. However, that suggestion is simply not entirely credible, as Sheriff Drummond pointed out in evidence to the committee when he noted that

"Absence of evidence is not the same as evidence of absence".—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs and Environment Committee*, 15 September 2010; c 3092.]

Everyone who has lived and worked with livestock and wildlife in rural Scotland knows that if birds and animals are conceived in the first place and survive until birth, they can regrettably die for 101 reasons and from various combinations of circumstances that can include hunger, weather conditions and misadventure. That sad fact is worse in the wild and in wilderness conditions. We should look at this week's weather, for example. The unusual early snowfall will reduce raptor food supply and affect the success of next year's breeding of golden eagles. Those are simple but well-known issues that relate to the effect of available food supply on body conditions and, ultimately, on fertility.

It is simple animal husbandry, but those very real issues affect successful breeding patterns in all animals and birds; the science is well documented in that regard. We do not believe that poisoning and persecution is widespread. The great proportion of disappeared birds are simply not born, or else they die of natural causes.

We do not believe that the case has been made for the introduction of vicarious liability, as it is neither a proportionate nor reasonable response to a partly real and partly imagined crime. We do not view it as a positive way forward, especially given that it may be an active disincentive to land and estate ownership in Scotland.

Much more reasonably, we believe that police forces throughout Scotland should be strengthened by the creation of more dedicated wildlife crime officers to investigate all forms of wildlife crime, including raptor persecution, and by using existing legislation if and when evidence can be found to demonstrate that a crime has been committed. We also believe that police forces should be strengthened, where it is appropriate in remote and rural areas, by increasing the number of special constables.

On estate licensing, I welcome the wildlife estates Scotland initiative that the SRPBA has developed in conjunction with SNH, RSPB Scotland, the Scottish Estates Business Group, the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and others. It will raise the level of sustainable management of estates throughout Scotland and help to meet targets in biodiversity, sustainability and climate change, as well as delivering socioeconomic objectives. I agree with the minister that now is not the time—and nor is there a need—for estate licensing.

On deer management, we largely welcome the revised provisions in the bill. However, we still have concerns about how best to make deer management groups work successfully, given the

different priorities that different estates have in relation to managing a transient deer population that now—as Maureen Watt mentioned—numbers around 750,000. I welcome the minister's intention to consider that further.

I support the Government's intention to allow the continued use of snaring in a much more humane way than it has been practised in the past. I share members' concerns about catching wildlife other than foxes or rabbits, but I believe that snaring is still a very necessary tool for the control of foxes in particular. In that regard, I look forward to the further development of snares, which we should aim to use in the future as restraining devices with breaking strain releases and individual identities so that ownership of each snare can be established.

Finally, I will say a word on geese and the emerging problem of species that are now overwintering as a result of climate change in Orkney, other islands and northern mainland areas. I am sure that Liam McArthur will want to draw attention to that problem too, and he will perhaps support me in asking the Government to at least think about the issue before stage 2.

I also welcome the more relaxed provisions on muirburn and the greater flexibility that is proposed. We will support the bill, and we look forward to lodging appropriate amendments at stage 2.

15:59

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): It is a pleasure to be here, all the more so since I spent a large part of the past two days in Kirkwall airport waiting for Edinburgh airport to reopen. On the up side, that allowed me to read through a number of briefings for the debate and undertake an impromptu surgery with constituents, many of whom had been there a great deal longer than I had.

I start by adding my thanks to all those who helped in the production of the stage 1 report on the WANE bill—my fellow committee members, the clerks, SPICe and other support staff and, of course, the wide range of individuals and bodies who have given evidence in recent months. The fact that, at times, the evidence has been contradictory does not detract from its value to the committee in reaching conclusions on a wide range of often contentious issues. The visits to Langholm, Alvie and Abernethy proved particularly informative, and I thank those who hosted us, not least Jamie Williamson of Alvie estate, whose dramatic retractable window is surely worthy of a mention on the public record.

I also commend the minister for the way in which she has engaged with the committee. The

initial consultation process was clearly thorough, but we have welcomed her attempts to anticipate and respond to the concerns of committee members, be they unanimous or held by a majority. We have seen further evidence of that today. It has been helpful and I hope that it will continue through stages 2 and 3.

Although further improvements are undoubtedly necessary, and I will try to touch on some of those, the bill has generally received a broad welcome. Concerns that the reference to the natural environment in the bill's title underplays the extent to which much of what we are talking about is actively managed are understandable, but I am not sure what would be achieved by a name change at this stage. It is imperative to stress, however, the value that we attach to that activity. As the committee's report acknowledges up front, management of land plays a significant role in creating and sustaining the types of biodiversity and landscape that have come to be valued as typically Scottish. The economic, social and cultural importance of that activity is also recognised and highly valued, as the convener suggested.

Similar to the issues surrounding the title of the bill are the concerns that have been raised about the supposed lack of an overarching narrative. Although I am happy for the Government to give more consideration to how a coherent approach to safeguarding Scotland's biodiversity can be achieved, perhaps through a beefed-up land use strategy, I accept that the bill is essentially intended to tidy up the law in a range of areas. As such, retrofitting a narrative seems fraught with dangers. Indeed, I do not believe that providing a narrative is necessarily an integral part of legislation. However, it is an entirely necessary function of legislation to set out clearly what the law is. As Sheriff Drummond said, it is getting difficult for legal experts to

"find and see the direction in which"

the law

"is going."—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs and Environment Committee*, 15 September 2010; c 3078.]

Professor Reid said:

"having clearer legislation is so important to ensuring public access and understanding. It helps you ... ensure that it is understood and enforced."—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs and Environment Committee*, 6 October 2010; c 3222-3.]

In that regard, it is incumbent on any future Administration to embark on a consolidation of the law before, or at least at the same time as, proposing any further amendments to it.

That brings me to the changes that are being proposed at present. I do not want to diminish the importance of other issues in the bill, but I hope

that members will understand why I choose to concentrate my remarks on snaring, wildlife crime and deer management, in that order. Initially, snaring was widely considered the most contentious aspect of the bill. Those who advocate an outright ban on the practice have argued their case powerfully and, in most cases, constructively. There is little doubt that, despite the steps that have been taken in recent times to improve the design and placement of snares, abuses still occur, sometimes with deeply disturbing consequences.

However, on the balance of the evidence that the committee has taken, I am persuaded that the case for allowing snaring to continue as one tool in pest and predator management has been persuasively made. I believe that further safeguards are needed, as well as improved training in relation to animal welfare and better record keeping. It is also imperative that innovation in snare design and use continues to take place. That is why, in part, I accept the need for a reserve power in the bill. It will allow time for the changes to bed in, provide an incentive to make them work, and look to further improvements. I am also conscious that any outright ban would be unlikely to deter many of those who are guilty of malpractice.

I acknowledge the consensus that exists in condemning acts of wildlife crime. Sadly, despite efforts in recent years to tighten up laws and increase resources, the signs are that the problem persists and is getting worse, as the minister has confirmed. Raptor persecution in particular drew much of the committee's attention during stage 1 and I offer the following thoughts as we look ahead to stage 2. We need greater clarity on what constitutes a recordable wildlife crime if we are to achieve greater consistency between police forces, but we must also add to the potential armoury of those who are tasked with combating such crimes, which are not imaginary, as John Scott asserted, although I associate myself with his comments on geese.

The Government's willingness to introduce a vicarious liability is therefore welcome, although it is not straightforward, nor is it a silver bullet. Concerns about the potential for the power to be abused must be addressed in amendments, although due diligence will remain a defence and obtaining evidence will be essential to any successful prosecution. However, along with changes to offences relating to the possession of illegal poisons and "concerned in the use of" provisions, the change can help to shift the balance and provide a real deterrent.

On evidence, I have reservations about extending the SSPCA's powers, but I await with interest the outcome of further work on the

subject. In the meantime, I am coming to the view that single-witness evidence has illusory value and could safely be dispensed with, although current inconsistencies need to be addressed one way or the other.

On licensing, I note the concerns of the SRPBA and others about reserved powers. I sympathise with some of those misgivings and I welcome the wildlife estates initiative, but there could be value in keeping pressure in the pipe while we see how events unfold.

I share the Government's view that a pragmatic approach to deer management structures must be taken. The approach should be one in which firm and effective back-stop powers can and will be exercised if plans are not produced or implemented. In that regard, I want amendments to clarify when and how the powers will be triggered. It is essential that back-stop powers have teeth.

I welcome the bill's general principles and thank everyone who assisted the committee in producing its stage 1 report. I look forward to helping to ensure that further improvements to the bill are made, in the interests of our wildlife and managed natural environment.

16:05

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): I confess to some confusion. I see Roseanna Cunningham sitting on the front bench, but surely she is the wrong minister and it should be Adam Ingram for the wean bill.

In light of John Scott's comments, I say that vicarious liability is a tremendous idea, which is long overdue.

It is probably fair to say that single-witness evidence has vexed the committee. Currently, such evidence is acceptable for poaching and egg-stealing offences. I was initially very much in favour of extending the approach to wildlife crime but, after I understood that single-witness evidence means that an individual can be convicted without corroborating evidence, I began to have my doubts. Should it be possible to convict an individual solely on the word of another? Perhaps it is time to repeal the law. Whatever the minister decides, as a matter of principle, the law must be regularised. Either single-witness evidence is unacceptable and should be abolished, or it is acceptable for offences that occur in remote areas and it must logically follow that it should be possible to convict for wildlife crimes on single-witness evidence. As a point of principle, it should be one or the other.

We live in uncertain times. Climate change is resulting in the movement of species' ranges and

changes in ecological communities. If we are to meet our biodiversity targets, we must be prepared for such changes. That is what lies behind the recommendation for an ecologically coherent network of environmentally protected sites. Even if climate change were not occurring, simple island biogeography theory would predict a progressive loss of diversity from small, isolated reserves. Climate change can only exacerbate the situation. An ecologically coherent network need not exclude development; a wide range of actions could be taken that would have minimal impact. Furthermore, clearly defined objectives would benefit developers. A clear definition of where it is intended to leave room for species movement would assist developers in knowing what type of development would be appropriate.

I appreciate that the minister does not think that the bill is the appropriate place to introduce a duty in relation to an ecologically coherent network. I understand her logic. There are alternative vehicles, such as the land use strategy. A clear commitment from the minister to consult on the proposal for an ecologically coherent network, even if the measure were not to be included in the bill, would be a positive step.

On the whole, the muirburn code does not appear controversial, but there remains a concern that inappropriate muirburn might be causing significant soil damage in some parts of the country. The committee has proposed that there should be a mechanism that allows the withdrawal of Government money from landowners whose failure to abide by the muirburn code causes soil damage. I hope that the minister will consider the proposal.

The committee heard evidence that snaring might be an important tool in predator control. I should say that I believe the scientific evidence that foxes do not predate lambs to be clear and overwhelming. I am not a vegetarian and I have no inherent objection to killing an animal, but there are concerns about the ethics of snaring and about the specificity of the species that are targeted.

The bill will be the first piece of legislation on snaring to be passed by the Scottish Parliament. After some 12 years, that is a positive step, but we should go a little further. I hope that the code of practice will work, but if we are to know whether it is working we will need to examine the situation some years down the line. I am therefore delighted that the minister accepted the committee's recommendation that there be an independent study into the code's effectiveness. The knowledge that snaring will be re-examined five years down the line would reassure members and the country as a whole that we have not simply legislated and then washed our hands of the

matter. It follows that, if the code is shown not to be working and it cannot be made to work, Parliament should act. For that reason, I ask the minister to consider introducing the power to ban snaring via a super-affirmative instrument.

Having perused the draft code on the introduction of non-native species, I must say that it looks to be a positive step. However, I have one concern. Roadside verges are not defined as wild areas, which means that planting on them is not restricted. Of course, the draft code makes it clear that, should a non-native species be planted and then escape into the wild, the individual who planted the species can be held responsible. That is right and proper and should discourage the planting of non-native species on roadside verges, but that will not be prohibited. An individual could decide to plant anyway and hang the consequences.

I enjoy pretty flowers on roadside verges as much as the next person does, and the people who voluntarily plant our verges should be praised. I understand that concern will be felt about discouraging such individuals from a public-spirited act, although I do not imagine that many of them are doing it just now. However, the risk to our countryside from invasive non-natives is real. As the climate changes, which species are invasive is likely to change, so I urge the minister to consider altering the definition of roadside verges. However, those who plant our verges should not be discouraged, so perhaps the Government could create a website that recommends native species that are suitable for planting. That would have the additional advantage of enhancing our biodiversity.

Considerable concern is expressed about the decline in the number of bees. Native flowers on our roadside verges might help to halt that decline. Bees are educated consumers and are fussy about the nectar on which they dine. Foreign fast foods are not for them—we have no burger-and-chips bees; it is fine Scottish nectar that our bees seek. I urge the minister to support Richard Lochhead's campaign for Scottish foods: for the sake of our bee numbers and bees' delicious vomit, which we all like to spread on our toast of a morning, let us have roadside verges that are planted with native species.

The bill is excellent, but even what is excellent can be improved. I am proud to belong to the party that introduced the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Bill, which was aimed at introducing sustainable and environmentally friendly flood control, and the Marine (Scotland) Bill, which will create an ecologically coherent network of marine protected areas. The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill will add to the Government's excellent environmental record.

16:12

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

The bill has turned into a worthwhile document and I am happy to support its general principles. The bill provides the opportunity to tidy existing legislation and to clarify and tighten the law.

I will focus on raptor poisoning. If I have time, I will touch on deer, snaring and bees, which Bill Wilson introduced, although I will talk about bees in a slightly different context from him.

In talking about raptor poisoning, I make it clear that I am a member of the RSPB and of the Scottish Ornithologists Club. Devolution has brought many new opportunities to legislate, but legislation on some subjects is still comparatively rare. The bill is significant because it provides what is still a rare opportunity to consider its subject matter and to try to do something important—to right the on-going wrong of raptor poisoning, to send clear signals of intent from the Parliament about what we want to happen, to take the toughest actions that we can to eliminate the practice and to remedy an unacceptable set of behaviours that, sadly, not only continues but seems to be growing, as the minister said.

Our raptor populations, which include eagles, peregrine, hen harriers and—yes—buzzards, stand as a symbol of a magnificent natural Scotland. It is unacceptable that such beautiful and majestic creatures are still poisoned, shot, trapped and killed. We see that that is unacceptable to people in Scotland in general from the reaction to such crimes. Today, the Parliament has another opportunity to make it clear that such practices are unacceptable to the Parliament, too.

The bill provides an unrivalled opportunity to take actions against the perpetrators of such crimes against raptors. I warmly welcome the minister's intention to introduce a new provision on vicarious liability, which I am pretty confident—subject to seeing the detail—we will support.

That said, I am under no illusion about how difficult it will be to secure convictions under such a provision. I hope that its existence will be sufficient to create a climate whereby we bear down further on the crime of raptor poisoning. However, vicarious liability will not of itself go far enough. I urge the minister to consider other charges and offences, particularly one that would, figuratively and literally, capture those involved in raptor persecution, whether it is because they handled the poisons, the traps or the gun that shot the bird.

If the Government is prepared to keep single-witness evidence in law for the collection of bird eggs, I see no reason why it should not be extended to cover raptor persecution. However, I

agree with other committee members that it has to be one thing or the other—it should be either extended or taken out entirely.

Further, I urge the minister to make provision for the possible future—I stress “possible future”—licensing of estates to provide a potentially tough outcome for those estates on which persecution is shown to be continuing. The potential loss of the ability to continue activities as a result of the loss of their licence would have a powerful effect. As a society, we license all sorts of people and things, such as taxi drivers, window cleaners, social workers, lawyers, street traders, pubs, off-licences, gaming activity and betting. If, to protect the public interest, we can license people to do those things, it is entirely reasonable that we license to protect raptors. Although I would prefer that provisions on that were in the bill now, I accept that that would be a significant development of policy. The matter has not been fully consulted on, and it would be difficult to come up with a workable scheme in the short term. It is for those reasons that I consider that the recommendation of the committee for a reserve power is entirely appropriate. I stress that there is a variety of ways of doing that. I ask the minister to keep an open mind to the idea of working with others in Parliament to consider the possibilities, including a licensing scheme that would not cover all estates but would isolate those where problems are continuing.

I support the potential extension of the powers of the SSPCA—I stress “extension”, as the SSPCA already has significant powers in relation to the welfare of animals. It would be worth while to extend those powers to allow the SSPCA to investigate the persecution of raptors. I urge the minister to lodge an amendment at stage 2 to give ministers powers to do that, after the consultation that she has rightly said is still required takes place.

It is also important, in tidying up the law, that the minister clarifies once and for all—in the bill, I hope—which birds that are kept for release for shooting purposes are livestock and which are not. There is ambiguity about that and I hope that the minister will take the opportunity to correct that.

On deer, I support the principles that the minister has set out in the bill. Greater clarity is required on compliance with the code by landowners and to ensure that the complex provisions from the Deer Commission, which will continue under SNH, can be brought into play effectively. Further clarification on that is required, too.

I agree with the position that Sarah Boyack set out on snaring. More could be done on that issue and I support what Liam McArthur said in that regard.

Finally, on bees, the bill gives us an opportunity, if we think imaginatively enough, to give Parliament and ministers powers to protect various groups of bees in certain parts of Scotland that are not yet subject to disease. I urge the minister to keep an open mind on the issue and to consider it imaginatively—in due course I will give her some ideas on how to do that.

16:18

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I agree with practically every word of Peter Peacock’s speech. He has saved me a little time because I do not need to cover everything now.

I will pick up on two of Peter Peacock’s observations. I agree whole-heartedly with his comments on snaring. The proposals are a good start, but we need to ensure that, if the provisions do not work, we return to the subject, preferably within five years. We should still be able to consider an outright ban on snaring. That is my objective, and the objective of my colleagues in the Scottish Green Party and of many others from whom we have heard.

In response to what John Scott said about eagles, I point out that, if people are poisoning eagles, they hide the evidence of their crime as well as they can. There is good evidence of that practice from the Highlands, where someone was observed catching a buzzard in a crow trap and was then tracked to where he buried it in a rabbit hole; when the buzzard was pulled out, the corpses of another seven buzzards were also found. That kind of thing happens and, on that evidence, there is no reason for us to think that it is not happening in the Western Isles, too.

I agree with Liam McArthur that geese are a problem, but they are also climate change refugees. Surely we should be doing what we can within our powers to welcome them and, at the same time, control the problem in a reasonable and rational way.

Several mentions have been made of climate change. The bill has no overarching purpose in that regard. No member has mentioned Professor Sir John Lawton CBE’s supplementary evidence on the bill, which came as a late submission to the committee. He makes the strong argument for the backdrop to the bill being

“ecological coherence and habitat connectivity”.

He points out that

“These subjects were not originally included within the scope of the ... Bill as introduced. However, I believe the inclusion of provisions in the Bill relating to ecological coherence and connectivity will make the Bill a more complete package of measures and would genuinely further the protection and enhancement of wildlife and the natural environment in Scotland.”

Surely we are talking not just about a tidying exercise but about a bill that provides a complete package of measures to protect our wildlife and natural environment.

Sir John goes on to say:

“The Scottish Government has targets for improving the condition of designated areas ... However, there are currently no such targets for improving the connectivity of semi-natural habitats or ensuring new developments are located and designed in such a way as to minimise further fragmentation (or in fact *enhance* connectivity through good design) ... there are some notable ... policy initiatives (e.g. Glasgow Clyde Valley and Central Scotland Green networks)”.

Why do we not try to include Sir John’s proposal in the bill as a general principle across Scotland’s environment? Picking up on what Bill Wilson said, I think that doing that would be extremely good for bees and other insect populations that have to survive in sensitive areas that have become cut off from other such areas. We must minimise fragmentation. I would welcome a response from the Government on the general principle that Sir John outlines of

“a general duty within primary legislation on public bodies to have regard to further the ecological coherence and connectivity of existing protected areas, including the features outside those areas which contribute to ecological coherence.”

I hope that the committee will have time to consider that during its detailed consideration of the bill.

Deer management has been mentioned several times. I commend all the comments that have been made on that. There is concern about the absence of powers if non-participation continues and deer management groups do not produce deer management plans or landowners fail to introduce such plans. We need further measures under the bill to introduce powers of compulsion. The committee called for clarification on how to make landowners abide by the code of practice on deer management and, in particular, on how breaches of the code could lead to SNH intervention and how they could trigger sections 7 and 8 of the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996. I ask the minister to say whether the Scottish Government will support an amendment to make those processes clearer and more robust in the bill.

16:25

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Although I am not a member of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, I am delighted to take part in the debate, because I have had previous involvement with the subjects to which the bill relates and wish to contribute some remarks that will, I hope, be helpful.

Robin Harper cited Sir John Lawton’s remarks about ecological coherence, which are interesting, but the issue might be more suitably addressed through the land use strategy. We are talking about the management of land. By and large, the land of Scotland is highly managed—very little of it is wild—but its ecological coherence can be addressed in that context. As we know, ecologies change. At present, the rewetting of peatlands, which is a particular interest of mine, is improving habitats for many of our species. It also allows us to tackle some climate change issues by sequestering carbon. There will be changes in the way in which land is used, in the way in which certain ecosystems are developed and so on. It is difficult to address the issue of ecological coherence here, given that it was raised only following the bill’s introduction.

Robin Harper described geese as refugees. When people first began to live off Solan geese, or gannets, and other birds on islands such as St Kilda, I wonder whether they saw them as refugees, as likely to be food or—as someone has put it in more modern terms—as flying duvets. It might be suggested to people in North Uist, who are responsible for a lot of the correspondence on the problem that members in the Highlands and Islands receive, that there is an opportunity to make some new industries out of the excessive numbers of geese that are present. They find it difficult to get people to shoot the geese, but perhaps a new industry will come out of that.

I have a serious point to make about non-native species. We regularly have to pass secondary legislation on mink. That is an example of a long-running effort to remove a non-native species from our midst. It has always worried me that we do not get updates on record keeping about how well we are doing, except perhaps once a year, when the secondary legislation is considered. It is important that the bill should make more detailed provision in that area, if possible.

I note the moves to give beavers—a reintroduced species—protected status. I wonder what would have happened to the osprey, when it first came back in the 1950s, if we had treated it as a non-native species. We must be careful to recognise which animals and birds can live in our habitat and have been here before, and ensure that they are protected.

The issue of deer management, which is close to my heart, has been raised. I wish that deer management were practised to the full extent that it can be, but I believe that it is not. Although we recognise the great job that deer management groups do, I am concerned that the management of deer is tied up so much with the ownership and value of land, from which it should be somewhat detached.

We still have far too many deer. If there were an opportunity for them to live in a more natural habitat, which would include woodlands, they might grow larger; that would provide us with a much better stock of animals. We are hampered by the fact that the sale of estates is governed by the number of stags that can be shot. Careful consideration must be given to the issue of deer management. The Deer Commission for Scotland has just merged with SNH. We must see how that arrangement works out, but the voluntary principle must be kept under close scrutiny.

I turn to the issue of effective enforcement and the police response to wildlife crime. Other members have mentioned that illegal raptor persecution is still too widespread in various parts of Scotland. The recent incidents in my region this summer, at Skibo and Moy, illustrate the need for urgent efforts to be made to tackle such persecution, as raptors are a key part of our Highland natural heritage and are a major attraction for eco-tourists. It worries me that findings of eagle, sparrowhawk and buzzard carcasses were reported in May this year. The owners of Skibo castle said:

"The owners and management of Skibo Castle are committed conservationists and do everything they can to support the welfare of wildlife and birds and will co-operate fully with the investigation."

I am not talking about guilt or innocence here, but it is very difficult for estates to manage such incidents. It depends on their outlook and their views on what the estate is for. It is important that, under the bill, we will at last make some link with what gamekeepers do—perhaps, they think, in the best interests of their employers. We ought to know that the employers are quite clear on that.

I welcome the letter from the Scottish Estates Business Group and the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association, which have "repeatedly condemned such incidents". They suggest that a better way forward is possible.

Vicarious liability measures are absolutely essential for the bill, and I hope that they, along with many other measures, will strengthen our support for wildlife in this country.

16:31

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): We have had an interesting debate this afternoon, and I too start by declaring an interest, in hill farming. I took a particular interest in the section on muirburn.

There can be no doubt that we are fortunate to live in a country of such beauty. The scenery in every corner of Scotland is complemented by diverse wildlife. Indeed, I argue that our most profitable natural resource is our environment and

wildlife. It is not just profitable; it provides great enjoyment for everyone who goes into the country.

A report that was commissioned by SNH and published this year estimated that nature-based tourism was worth nearly £1.5 billion annually to the Scottish economy, and that it supported 39,000 full-time jobs. Wildlife tourism alone is estimated to generate £127 million each year, and it is the driving force behind more than 1 million visits annually.

The intentions behind the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill are good. It was appropriate to hold an extensive consultation to ensure that a wide range of stakeholders could help to shape the bill prior to its introduction. It seems rather ridiculous that there are still sections of game law that are derived from a piece of legislation that was passed before the US declaration of independence. I welcome the bill's attempts to provide a more modern legal framework for tackling wildlife and environmental issues.

There are a number of concerns in my region. Country sports play an important part in the economy there, with many hotels surviving only because of the winter visitors for game shooting and because of the environment. An independent survey from eight years ago estimated that 80 per cent of woods in the Borders were used at some stage for country sports. Many of them were planted solely for that reason. In one year there were up to 196,000 participation days in rural sports, and in the Borders alone an estimated £29.5 million was spent by providers and participants. We must be careful not to shoot ourselves in the foot with a well-intentioned bill. I also recognise the importance of pheasant rearing and release in that regard, and I would be interested to hear the minister's views on that when she sums up the debate.

Vicarious liability has been discussed, and no one here will wish to condone any land user giving orders to kill wildlife illegally, so the bill must tighten up that area. It must also ensure that land users cannot be prosecuted for a crime just because it happened on their land. I am glad to hear that the minister will lodge an amendment regarding due diligence to address that point.

The sections of the bill that seek to legislate on non-native species are of particular interest to me, because non-native species are of some relevance to me and others in the South of Scotland. American signal crayfish have become a significant problem in various areas of the country, with Loch Ken in Dumfries and Galloway being especially badly affected. It is estimated that the income that is generated by people who use the loch for boating and angling exceeds £740,000 per annum. That has come under threat from the

crayfish, which eat young fish and destroy their habitat. I understand that, in a five-month period last year, more than a million of the creatures were captured on the loch in a Government-funded pilot scheme, which highlights how serious the problem is. Such is their impact that the species was described by Colin Bean of SNH as

“the Steve McQueen of the invertebrate world”,

because the crayfish can escape from anything, probably due to their being amphibious.

That is only one example of the kind of economic and environmental impacts that an invasive non-native species can have when introduced into an alien ecosystem. It is therefore only right that we take a dim view of those whose actions, or inaction, endanger native animals and plant life, so I welcome the Government's efforts to tackle invasive non-native species. However, I am mindful of the number of organisations and members awaiting clarification on certain of the provisions, which I am hopeful will be provided at stage 2.

When we consider that Scotland possesses 80 per cent of the UK's blanket bog peat and that the amount of carbon currently lying underneath our soil represents about 190 years' worth of Scotland's total emissions, we get a sense of how potentially serious the degradation of our peatland is. The continued presence of about 750,000 deer in Scotland, many of which are located in peatland areas, is probably not helping.

With that figure in mind, as Liam McArthur said, it is worth looking at deer management. However, I am aware of the concerns about possible contraventions of the European convention on human rights by placing a legal duty on landowners to manage deer sustainably, and of the disagreements that became apparent during the consultation. I note the committee's belief that the deer management provisions in the bill have struck an acceptable compromise and I broadly support them.

I look forward to monitoring the bill as it progresses through Parliament, as it is important that we streamline and simplify the legislation in the areas specified in the bill.

16:37

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am delighted to sum up in this debate. It is vital that we get the bill right for those men and women who work in the hills and glens and keep them well managed, even when, as now, they are hindered by several feet of snowdrifts while we sit cosily in the chamber. They are straightforward, tough people—the very salt of Scotland's earth—and they deserve a fair deal.

The minister said that she had listened to many people from different walks of life. Well done to her for that, and well done also for recognising the importance of this sector of rural life. She has listened to people who do not often get heard and who do not get heard often enough.

I thank my friend John Scott and other members of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, as well as the committee clerking team, for a thorough stage 1 report, which has informed today's debate. Much of the debate has focused on wildlife crime and, as John Scott set out, we believe—like Bill Wilson—that the argument has not been made convincingly that single-witness evidence should apply on this issue. Rather, as Sheriff Drummond suggested when he gave evidence, the focus should be on the collection of solid evidence. Given that the evidence to the committee suggested that it was incredibly rare for someone to be prosecuted for an offence of egg stealing on the evidence of a single witness, it surely is illogical to extend single witness evidence to other wildlife crime. Such a move might even open up the door to frame-ups. Surely law is good only if it works to stop crime.

Likewise, the Scottish Conservatives have serious worries about the Government's intention to introduce vicarious liability at stage 2, because we again pay heed to the words of Sheriff Drummond, an expert on wildlife crime, who said:

“There are so many ways round it. Vicarious liability has been floated as some kind of answer. It is not an answer”.—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs and Environment Committee*, 15 September 2010; c 3104.]

Much legislation already exists, and we should surely concentrate on achieving better enforcement of current laws before adding additional measures to the statute book. In other words, we should tighten up existing laws and ensure that they work against wildlife crime.

Snaring is another subject that many members have raised. I am well aware of the strong feelings about snaring—indeed, I, too, have strong feelings about it—and I welcome the committee's balanced conclusions on it. Its report states:

“the Committee also acknowledges that pest control is a vital part of land management and that, if properly regulated and managed, limited and appropriate use of snares should continue to be an option for land managers in Scotland.”

As Bert Burnett of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association said this week, the majority of practitioners are already highly skilled, and they have welcomed the tightening of snaring regulations and demonstrated a clear willingness to meet modern expectations by signing up for detailed practical and written training in order to meet the highest welfare standards.

To many of my constituents in the Highlands and Islands, snares remain a vital tool in controlling escalating fox numbers, which can do much damage to our populations of rare waders and ground-nesting birds as well as to valuable game birds, not to mention the lambs on numerous sheep farms throughout the Highlands. At this point, I suppose that I had better refer members to my agricultural interests in the register of members' interests.

On game management, we are happy to welcome the modernisation of game law and the abolition of game licences. The bill will also repeal the restriction on selling game at certain times of the year by amending section 4 of the Game Act 1831, which was aimed at stopping the killing of game birds and hares during closed seasons. Refrigeration now means that game that has been killed in the open season can be kept and sold throughout the year. I hope that the bill will open up more marketing opportunities for those who wish to sell Scottish game in restaurants and shops all year round.

The SRPBA is right to argue that any future changes to the list of game species must be subject to full parliamentary scrutiny. I strongly support the committee's call for any proposed removals from the game species list to be subject to affirmative rather than negative procedure, which would mean that any proposals would be voted on.

More generally, I welcome the Government's and the committee's recognition that shooting and red deer stalking are of real economic importance to many areas of Scotland. That is especially so in the Highlands, where the income from country sports provides work for gamekeepers and numerous other jobs associated with them.

I want to put on record my support for the wildlife estates Scotland initiative, which I was pleased to see the minister launch at Colquhalzie in Perthshire on 23 November. Everyone involved in that initiative is to be commended. I know that those people will step up to the mark in showing to the public that our Scottish country estates are integral to protecting and preserving our natural environment. The pilot scheme will run in the Cairngorms national park area, and will doubtless be reviewed regularly. The scheme is not, as some have suggested, some sort of voluntary licensing scheme; it is a voluntary accreditation scheme in which the code of acceptable good practice that everybody should follow will be set out.

Finally, Bill Wilson referred to bees. He may know that the bees in many hives in Scotland stopped breeding in September because they knew that bad weather was coming. That shows

that a bee is better than the BBC at weather forecasting.

The Scottish Conservatives are happy to support the general principles of the bill, and we welcome the fact that many of the concerns that existed, particularly relating to deer management, have been dealt with.

16:43

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I thank everyone who provided written and oral evidence on the bill, the committee clerks, and our hosts at the meetings that we undertook.

When the bill was introduced, it appeared at first to be a rather random amalgam of different pieces of legislation, and I found it difficult to feel enthusiastic about it. However, during its progress I have, like Peter Peacock, learned to love it more and to become more engaged with it and enthusiastic about it, as it has enabled us to consider how to tackle issues such as wildlife crime and to tidy up some rather antiquated regulations, such as the game laws. As usual, the committee's recommendations offer opportunities to strengthen further the regulations.

Robin Harper and Rob Gibson referred to the overarching vision for the environment. During stage 1, some contributors have been disappointed that there is no overarching vision for the natural environment in the bill through, for example, strengthening the biodiversity duty or improving ecological coherence, and they have pointed that out that that was, however, achieved in the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010. Ecological coherence would provide corridors for the spread of wildlife should the conditions alter—through climate change, for example—and it would help to preserve biodiversity. I know that the minister feels that that is not appropriate in a bill that will create a criminal offence: I bow to her knowledge as a solicitor. I presume that the difficulty is because of possible ambiguities about the meaning of terms such as "biodiversity duty" and "ecological coherence" in a bill that will create criminal offences. That said, I am sympathetic to the need to make progress on those issues. If that cannot be done in the bill, we need to consider carefully how it can be done elsewhere.

Wildlife crime took up a lot of the committee's time and has taken up a certain amount of time in the debate. Scotland's natural environment and the wildlife that inhabits it are among our greatest assets, as many have said. A recent SNH study estimated that wildlife tourism is worth about £126 million annually to the Scottish economy, which compares fairly closely with the income of £137 million that is generated by all field sports. However, past practice has decimated some of

that wildlife, particularly raptors, as Peter Peacock and Robin Harper said. Some species were persecuted to the point of local extinction and have had to be reintroduced. An example is the red kite in Galloway, which is now a considerable attraction. The species had to be built up in the past 10 or 12 years through a reintroduction programme and now makes a significant contribution to the economy in the area.

Unfortunately, because raptors are predators, they are still targeted through poisoning and, in some cases, shooting. Despite all the outrage, the situation is not improving, as the minister said, and stronger action needs to be taken. I am afraid that John Scott appears to be in denial on the issue. We cannot shy away from the fact that some of that illegal activity appears to stem from shooting estates. Wildlife crime does Scotland's image no good at all and it is unhelpful to wildlife tourism and field sports.

John Scott: I am not in denial about the issue and I acknowledge that it exists. It is the comments on the scale of the problem with which I have difficulty. Vicarious liability is, to use the overquoted comment, a sledgehammer to crack a nut. I hope that the member accepts that that is my position.

Elaine Murray: There is a lot of evidence in terms of successful pairs of breeding raptors in particular habitats and so on. There is also evidence on the other side. We are broadly supportive of the minister's intention to lodge an amendment at stage 2 to introduce vicarious liability. Obviously, we have yet to see the amendment.

Current legislation allows the prosecution only of the person who actually carried out the crime, which is usually the gamekeeper, and does not recognise that the keeper might be under pressure from his boss to reduce the loss of his birds. Why should the guy on low wages in a tied cottage have to take all the responsibility? After the conviction of a 22-year-old gamekeeper in Karen Gillon's constituency just a few weeks ago, his lawyer stated that he had been trying to impress his boss. There is a precedent. Vicarious liability already exists in the licensing trade, as a pub landlord can be held responsible if his or her staff break the law. However, we received evidence that it might be difficult to enforce such a provision.

If vicarious liability does not work and if that stick is not successful, we will need another tool in the toolbox. We believe that we should give ministers the power to develop a licensing scheme and to introduce it under the super-affirmative procedure. I, too, welcome the wildlife estates initiative. Nobody intends to hijack that. We want it to work. If it works, and if vicarious liability works, there will be no need to introduce a licensing

system, but if those measures do not work, we will need to clamp down further on wildlife crime. Some of the provisions in the voluntary code could form the basis of a licence.

Labour and the SNP have been sympathetic to an outright ban on snaring; the issue has been discussed at both parties' conferences. I was happy with that position until I visited the Langholm moor demonstration project the summer before last—although I did not do so as part of the bill process. That project involves the SRPBA, SNH and Natural England. As members have said, it aims to manage uplands to support game birds, hen harriers and wild ground-nesting birds. There is a little part of me that cannot quite see an alternative to using snaring in that type of terrain. I am a bit anxious that, if we take away snaring, we might damage that type of project. There has been contrary evidence on the issue. Bill Wilson alluded to that and mentioned the question whether predation of lambs by foxes leads to significant losses. Bill Wilson thinks that it does not, but John Scott thinks that it does.

The contrary evidence is such that I think that I support the recommendation that the effectiveness of the regulations needs to be monitored, maybe after five years. It has been suggested that that needs to be done after two years, and perhaps we should look at that at stage 2. I would like that to be coupled with a power to introduce a complete ban, in the event that what is proposed in the bill does not work. In that sense, it is a bit like the situation with vicarious liability.

John Scott: Will the member give way?

Elaine Murray: No. I have already taken an intervention and I need to get on.

On deer management, as others have said, deer are an iconic species, especially the red deer, which, like the golden eagle, is strongly associated with Scotland. However, large numbers of deer are damaging to the environment, through overgrazing, and to biodiversity.

Some stakeholders have expressed disappointment that the compulsory approach that was suggested in the consultation has been replaced by a voluntary code. We believe that clarification is necessary on what measures will be taken if landowners do not participate in deer management groups, or if the groups fail to produce deer management plans. The code of practice is welcome, but what will happen if it is breached? What sanctions will SNH be able to apply? We might need to consider further whether a duty to comply with the code is required and should be added to the bill.

The provisions on non-native species are broadly welcome. The most contentious issue is whether pheasants and red-legged partridges

should be exempt. The issue is not whether they are native but whether, if they are released in large enough numbers, they can cause damage to the environment. If that is the case, we believe that it would be appropriate for reserved powers to be available.

Bill Wilson and Peter Peacock made important comments about native species, notably bees, which I hope will be looked at further at stage 2.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I must hurry you, I am afraid.

Elaine Murray: I conclude by saying that I welcome the bill. I am more enthusiastic about it than I was, and I look forward to further discussion of it at stage 2.

16:51

Roseanna Cunningham: There is broad agreement on the general principles of the bill, for which I am extremely grateful. I thank the members who have contributed to the debate, as well as the members of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, who have been involved in the process of getting the bill this far.

As is patently obvious, there are positions on some sections of the bill that will never be reconciled because one group of stakeholders wants more control in one direction, which is resisted by others. In some of those areas, there is no easy compromise that will satisfy everyone.

There is a tension between the idea of more centralised control of aspects of rural management and the continuing desire for things to be worked out voluntarily. It is clear that the Government has tended towards the voluntary approach, unless there has been compelling evidence that we should act to the contrary. I accept that we are dealing with a broad continuum, and that the tension that exists on those issues will not go away.

I will try in the time that is available to address as many as possible of the points that have been made, but it is inevitable that I will not be able to deal with all of them. Matters that I cannot deal with now will be picked up directly with the appropriate member or in the Government's response to the committee's report.

Maureen Watt and others mentioned consolidation. I do not believe that there can be any principled objection to the idea of consolidation, but the difficulty arises when one begins to consider the practicalities of it, because it is a highly resource-intensive exercise and there may be other pressing cases for consolidation that would take priority when it comes to parliamentary time. I know, for example, that the committee has already raised the prospect of consolidation of

crofting legislation. It is difficult to see how one could pursue too many bits of consolidation. I see that one member of the committee is shaking his head—I suspect that he is pleading, "No, no." Carrying out too much consolidation can be problematic.

Many members mentioned snaring. I understand what an emotive issue it is, but we must remember that not snaring would not mean that animals would not die. The control would still have to happen. Among the questions that members raised is whether we should hold a review in five years—which I point out is the committee's recommendation; it is not a timescale that I plucked from the air—in two years or at some intermediate point, as appropriate. We have to allow sufficient time for the new rules to come into play.

We already have the capacity to deal with snaring as we go along. We do not need any reserved powers; we have the powers already. Those powers could extend to a severe restriction on snaring that would respond to every concern that has been expressed: the powers already exist in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The power to move to the final step of an absolute ban should require very serious consultation because the implications for rural Scotland of doing so would be pretty serious.

Deer have been mentioned by a number of members. Again, in that area, we are sticking with the voluntary principle, and I make no apology for that. A number of questions have been asked about what will happen when the code fails. The bill will sharpen SNH's powers of intervention, including by bringing in clear time limits. We do not think that any additional powers are required to protect the public interest. The costs of the Government's proposals would pale into insignificance when compared to the cost of statutory deer management. I understood the committee to be content with the deer proposals. In this time of financial stringency, we want to consider carefully whether we should move into an area that would add cost.

The deer code will apply to all landowners, not just to private landowners, and it will set out examples of sustainable management. If landowners are not taking note, that will prompt SNH's intervention powers—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order. The only person I really want to hear is the minister. I can hear far too many other people.

Roseanna Cunningham: People rarely have difficulty hearing me, Presiding Officer.

On the more general issue of wildlife crime, I was rather disappointed by John Scott's remarks. The statistics that we have are about verifiable

poisonings, not about disappeared birds. We know that many disappeared birds will have died natural deaths, but that does not mean that we can ignore the poisonings and the appalling publicity that they generate.

I also remind people who talk about the licensing of shooting estates about the importance of shooting estates to the economy. The information that I have suggests that they are worth £240 million to the Scottish economy. It is estimated that 58,000 workers are paid by shooting, which amounts to the equivalent of 11,000 full-time jobs. That is an enormous contribution to our economy and we have to be careful that we do not damage it.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): Will the minister taken an intervention on that point?

Roseanna Cunningham: I do not have enough time.

We would move towards licensing shooting estates very carefully and gingerly.

Lots of issues have been raised, not so much about vicarious liability, which is generally welcomed, but about other potential changes that might be made, including single-witness evidence. We have looked at all those issues. Some people wanted single-witness evidence to be wiped out altogether, and some wanted it to be extended. We came to the ultimate view that, since there was no particular balance of opinion one way or the other, we would be as well sticking with the status quo. I accept that some people might feel differently, but I remind people that the broader justice review—the Carloway review—is considering corroboration in Scots law in a wider context, so it might be worth focusing on that.

Issues around invasive non-native species seem to be uncontroversial, and I welcome that. Other, smaller points have been raised and I will go back to individual members on them, if they will allow me to.

I am not a particular adherent of littering legislation with multiple reserved powers, as has been suggested for the bill. Some of the powers are absolutely appropriate, but others are not. I believe that the bill will make a fundamental and good change for the future of wildlife management in Scotland. That is extremely important: the natural environment is enormously important in Scotland. I am very glad that there is unanimous agreement on the bill, and I look forward to its subsequent stages.

Business Motion

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-7533, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to today's business to cancel members' business this evening.

17:00

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford): In moving the motion, given that there is a change to today's business, I should explain it and build on what you said, Presiding Officer. Obviously, weather conditions have made it difficult for the particular member to be here this evening. We fully understand that, and it is why business has been changed.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 2 December 2010—

delete

followed by

Members' Business

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S3M-7519.2.1, in the name of Gavin Brown, which seeks to amend amendment S3M-7519.2, in the name of Jim Mather, on the Scottish economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)

Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-7519.2, in the name of Jim Mather, as amended, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7519, in the name of Jeremy Purvis, on the Scottish economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (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)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)

Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 51, Against 40, Abstentions 0.

Amendment, as amended, agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-7519.1, in the name of David Whitton, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7519, in the name of Jeremy Purvis, on the Scottish economy, 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, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 28, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-7519, in the name of Jeremy Purvis, on the Scottish economy, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (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)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)

Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 51, Against 39, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that creating jobs and strengthening the economy is central to Scotland's future prosperity; further believes that for Scotland to meet a goal of being one of the most innovative and entrepreneurial economies in the world it needs to build sustainable economic recovery; notes the work already undertaken by the Scottish Government on reforming the Enterprise networks and decluttering the delivery landscape, reducing duplication and driving up effectiveness and efficiency; further notes the ongoing Inquiry by the Economy, Enterprise and Tourism Committee on the Enterprise Network and the contribution it is making, and calls on the Scottish Government to consider its conclusions; calls on the Scottish Government to pay particular focus to improving Scotland's record on exporting and internationalisation of businesses, and also calls on the Scottish Government to focus on improving the business start-up rate.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-7484, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:05.

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