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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 24 November 2011

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Scottish Parliament

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

Maritime Safety and Coastguards

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S4M-01408, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on maritime safety and coastguards.

09:15

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): Scotland is a proud maritime nation that has 60 per cent of United Kingdom waters and about 60 per cent of the coastline of these islands, amounting to 18,000km. We have been very lucky to have so many men and women who are employed or who volunteer to keep our seas safe around the clock, to protect life and to keep our waters free from pollution. Of course, they deserve our full support and recognition for the valuable contribution that they make.

As, we now know to our cost, however, penny-pinching number crunchers in London offices have been busy slashing maritime safety under the guise of modernisation. Now our coastguard, our oil and gas sector, environmental organisations and many others, including members of this Parliament, are up in arms following the UK Government's decision to put at risk our mariners and precious marine environment for the sake of saving less than £4 million a year, which is equivalent to about three hours of the revenues that are generated in Scotland's waters from oil and gas.

Safety cover is being reduced and jobs lost across our maritime emergency services. For anyone who is concerned about keeping our seas safe, it is surely a worry that the UK Government's approach has not been properly co-ordinated or strategically thought through, but has instead been based on saving money, not lives.

Confirmed cuts to coastguard co-ordination centres and the withdrawal of funding for emergency towing vessels come, of course, on top of other cuts that are already compromising maritime safety, including taking Nimrods out of service, and there is on-going uncertainty about search and rescue helicopters and fire-fighting capabilities at sea. All five areas of maritime rescue services are currently either facing cuts or severe uncertainty.

UK ministers should have delivered a fully co-ordinated strategy for maritime safety instead of dealing with each issue separately and randomly. In addition, Scottish interests have not been adequately taken into account. The prime example with which we are extremely concerned and disappointed is the UK shipping minister's announcement this week confirming decisions to close the Clyde and Forth coastguard maritime rescue co-ordination centres. The Clyde station dealt with most call-outs in Scotland last year. UK ministers have also confirmed plans to downgrade the Aberdeen centre, which plays a vital role in relation to the offshore oil and gas sectors in the North Sea and west of Shetland.

Today's air accidents investigation branch report on the tragic accident involving the Super Puma helicopter in the North Sea, with the loss of 16 men, serves to remind us all that our seas and associated industries can be dangerous environments. I am, indeed, pleased that Labour's amendment raises that issue.

We do not have to look far for current examples of the work of the coastguard stations, along with their Royal National Lifeboat Institution and volunteer coastguard partners. On Tuesday this week—on the day that the UK Government announced that the network was to be cut—the Stornoway station dealt with the capsizing of a fishing boat off Barra. Thankfully, all those on board were rescued.

The need to ensure that we have the services available to deal with such incidents has led this Parliament to express concern over the UK Government's policies. The closures have previously been raised at members' business debates in the Scottish Parliament on 27 January and 23 June, and I welcome the universal support up to now for the coastguard service that emerged from those debates.

As Scottish ministers, we have made our feelings crystal clear in responding to successive UK Government consultations, and we will write in the strongest terms to the UK Government expressing our views on its latest announcements. We take some comfort from the fact that our previous representations, along with the co-ordinated campaigns by Western Isles Council and Shetland Islands Council among others, resulted in the retention of both the centres covering the remote areas around our islands. Confirmation of that sensible decision is, of course, welcomed. However, we obviously remain extremely concerned and bitterly disappointed about closures of other Scottish stations.

Throughout the process, we have strongly highlighted the case for all Scottish stations to remain open. The First Minister has met, along with Stuart McMillan MSP and Duncan McNeil

MSP, staff from the Clyde centre to hear their concerns, and I have visited the Aberdeen centre. We urged the UK ministers also to consider visiting the affected stations prior to making a final decision. However, Scotland's pleas largely fell on deaf ears, and we have still reached the position where the UK Government sees it fit to close two Scottish centres. Despite its claim to have recognised the importance of local knowledge, we now face huge areas of the west coast being covered by a combination of Stornoway, Belfast and Holyhead stations.

Under current arrangements the Clyde centre, which has responsibility for one of the longest and most complex areas of coastline in the UK, is set to go. It covers a variety of mainland coast, estuaries and islands, not to mention complex tidal conditions, within which a wide range of maritime activities occur. As I said, last year Clyde dealt with the highest number of incidents in Scotland—more than 1,300. It is difficult to see how the other centres could possibly build up and sustain the levels of local knowledge and expertise that currently exist. The removal of that local knowledge and the increased workload for other centres could well place lives at risk.

The Forth centre has also continued to show high levels of expertise and local knowledge in a busy waterway. The need for that will only increase as work on the Forth replacement crossing begins and with the deployment of offshore renewable energy infrastructure in the times ahead.

We also remain extremely disappointed about the plans for the Aberdeen centre, which reflects concerns that were raised directly with me by staff when I visited in September. The downgrading of the Aberdeen centre has significant implications for staff numbers and for the crucial relationship with the oil and gas industry in Scotland. The station will experience an overall reduction in its watch-keeping staff while it sees an expansion of the coastline it covers.

It is also planned that any major incident involving a North Sea oil platform would be managed by the maritime operations centre based in the south of England. It is absurd and potentially dangerous to downgrade the Aberdeen station, which sits cheek by jowl with Europe's biggest offshore centre, and to transfer responsibility for dealing with major North Sea incidents to a location hundreds of miles away at the other end of the country. That will be an unjustified and mistaken departure from existing procedures, which have been tried and tested in Aberdeen. Those procedures, which ensure a co-ordinated local response to major incidents, must be retained, so we appeal to the UK Government to think again.

If we look at the reasoning behind the decision, it is clear that the UK Government is not taking Scottish interests into account.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I am sorry about the complete negativity of the cabinet secretary's speech so far. Does he recognise that the UK minister said in his statement that

"no centres will close before the robustness of the system is demonstrated."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 22 November 2011; Vol 536, c 166.]

Does he acknowledge that that assurance in some way addresses his concern that, if the proposed closures lead to a downgrading of the system—which I entirely deny—it would not happen because its robustness will be fully tested before any centre closes?

Richard Lochhead: I hope that the UK Government keeps an open mind on those very important issues. I recognise that Scotland is being used as a guinea pig, because my understanding is that the Scottish centres are to close before those in the rest of the UK.

The focus is, from the UK Government's point of view, very much about links between the UK Government and agencies down south, in terms of the centres that it wants to keep open. Surely the focus should be on what can be done locally for an incident that takes place in Scottish waters. Scotland, with some 60 per cent of the UK seas, and some of the busiest in terms of offshore oil and gas development and planned renewable energy development, would be left with only a third of UK coastguard stations.

The UK Government has decided that there will be no maritime operations centre in the maritime nation of Scotland—the only one will be located in the south of England. If ever evidence was needed that the coastguard should be devolved to Scotland, this is it. Decisions on an issue that is as important as the safety of our seas should be made in Scotland, with Scottish interests to the fore.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary accept that, in fact, the potential for Scottish coastguards to play a major role in maritime safety around the whole British coast is a strong argument for maintaining the integration of the service and ensuring that the best service is provided for seafarers, wherever they are?

Richard Lochhead: Devolution of the coastguard would give the best of both worlds—it would give the best protection for our seas in Scotland, and we would have the ability to work with the rest of the UK. For instance, devolution would take account of the need for an appropriate level of cover for cross-border areas such as the

Solway Firth. It would ensure that Scottish centres co-ordinated with their counterparts in the rest of the UK and that the RNLI and volunteer coastguard teams were fully supported within that structure.

Although we welcome any moves to strengthen the support for the front-line service, our view is that it should not come at the expense of the established co-ordination structure. That is especially true when other parts of the structure that help to provide our maritime safety are under attack. That takes me on to the threat to emergency towing vessels in Scottish waters. It is difficult to find anyone who supports the UK Government's view that funding for them can simply be withdrawn. Last winter, we had some high profile call-outs for the Scottish ETVs—including, of course, the call-out by the Ministry of Defence to rescue the grounded submarine HMS Astute off Skye. The loss of the ETVs would take us back to the situation that existed prior to the sinking of the MV Braer. Lord Donaldson's subsequent inquiry recommended the need for ETVs in areas where adequate towage cannot be provided in any other way.

If other aspects of safety and navigation have subsequently improved enough to negate the need for ETVs, the UK Government needs to clarify that, but it certainly has not done that so far. I am not reassured that the need has been negated.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Does Mr Lochhead believe that the current contract for the ETVs is as it should be?

Richard Lochhead: Tavish Scott makes a good point. I have said all along that renegotiating the current contract is a good option to pursue. However, that is not where we are. The UK Government has cut the contract without consultation of the Parliament and without having a long-term alternative to put in place.

It might seem that the Braer incident was a long time ago, but Lord Donaldson's recommendations should still be treated seriously. There is a strong concern that the measures relating to that aspect of maritime safety have, again, been led simply by a wish to cut costs and not by a wish to improve the safety of Scottish waters for those who use them, or to protect our environment.

I say to Tavish Scott that I am encouraged by the three-month reprieve for the two Scottish ETVs, which is a departure from the original proposal to cease funding when the original contract ended on 30 September. I welcome the Scotland Office's constructive approach in reconvening the ETV working group after the UK Department for Transport washed its hands of the issue. The working group, of which Marine

Scotland is a member, aims to bring about a long-term solution, and we will continue to work constructively with it.

I very much appreciate the Scotland Office's efforts to keep the Scottish ministers up to date on progress on the issue. However, as the UK shipping minister, Mike Penning, has stated in correspondence with the Scottish Government, the issue is reserved. That is the main reason that was given for the lack of discussion on the issue with the Scottish Government prior to the announcement to end the contract. Therefore, it is the UK Government's responsibility to identify and resource alternative provision.

The three-month reprieve appears to be an overambitious timescale. We press the UK Government to introduce a further extension to the contract to allow the work of the ETV group to be carried out in a more realistic timescale. I am sure that the Parliament will agree that there should not be a further break in provision and that we certainly should not be left without cover in the winter months when the current contract comes to an end in January.

It would be remiss of me not to mention two other areas of concern that relate to a downgrading of maritime rescue services and, in particular, of search and rescue capabilities in Scotland. Those are the withdrawal of the Nimrod aircraft and the on-going uncertainty over the future provision of search and rescue helicopters. Although the Nimrod service was primarily for military incidents, Nimrod aircraft attended many civilian emergencies and provided a valuable addition to maritime safety resources. The removal of the aircraft from service without any certainty about how the capability will be delivered in the future again demonstrates the UK Government's lack of a strategic approach.

That lack of strategic thinking is further demonstrated by the removal of funding from the maritime incident response group. The issue is best summed up by the Westminster Transport Committee's report on the matter, which notes the significant intervention of the response group and recommends that the UK Government continue to fund the resource in a more cost-effective manner. The Scottish Government is considering responses to our consultation on the future delivery of fire and rescue services in Scotland.

The Scottish Government is committed to the future of Scotland's seas and coastlines and to protecting them from any further dismantling of services by the UK Government and Westminster cuts. I hope that we will continue to have support from members from across the Parliament in making the case for the Scottish coastguard stations and ETVs to carry on doing the valuable work that they do in protecting Scottish waters. I

hope that the Parliament agrees that the UK Government's financially driven and piecemeal approach is totally unacceptable and cannot deliver a proper strategy for marine safety in Scotland. I call on the Parliament to unite behind the cause, to condemn the UK Government's action and to support the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament notes with concern the potential impact of a number of UK Government cuts affecting maritime safety in Scotland's seas, including the review of Coastguard Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres and the withdrawal of funding from the Scottish Emergency Towing Vessels, alongside other reductions in maritime safety provision, and agrees that this piecemeal approach driven by a cost-cutting agenda cannot deliver a proper strategy for maritime safety in Scotland.

09:30

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): This is a timely debate, for two reasons: first, because of the ministerial statement in the House of Commons on Tuesday on the outcome of the consultation on the future of the coastguard service, and secondly because of the publication this morning of the report by the air accidents investigation branch into the crash of the Bond Super Puma helicopter on its way back to Aberdeen from the Miller platform on 1 April 2009, which cost the lives of everyone on board. Both of those relate directly to the responsibilities of the UK Department for Transport for the safety of vessels, aircraft and offshore installations around the British coast.

The debate is also timely in that it comes so soon after our debate last week on oil and gas. In that debate, Labour argued that health, safety and environmental standards should have the highest priority in the next phase of offshore energy development. That message is particularly relevant today. The AAIB report is clear that warning signs of imminent technical failure were not recognised in time. Today, we call for urgent action in line with the report's recommendations, while also recognising the efforts that the industry, trade unions and regulators have made over the past two years to improve the safety of people who travel to and from work offshore.

The coastguard proposals that were announced on Tuesday are part of a package of budget cuts that the Maritime and Coastguard Agency has been instructed to make as part of the current UK spending review. The agency has been told to save £20 million of its £97 million programme budget by 2015. That is a big slice by any standards, with only £2 million to be achieved from efficiencies, and much of the impact of the service cuts will be felt in Scotland.

Some £10 million of savings are supposed to come from ending the contract for emergency towing vessels. Two of the four vessels under contract are based in Scottish waters, in the Western Isles and northern isles, and the cost of one of the others is shared with the Government of France, so the majority of the saving will be at the expense of services in Scotland. More than £7 million of savings are meant to come from the coastguard modernisation process, which concluded on Tuesday. Two of the nine maritime rescue co-ordination centres that are scheduled for closure are in Scotland, in the Firth of Forth and the Firth of Clyde, and they are intended to be the first to close, not at some dim and distant point in the future, but within 18 months. The balance of the planned savings are to come from withdrawing support from the maritime incident response group. Three of the 15 fire brigades that will thereby cease to receive MCA funding for firefighting at sea are Scottish, namely Strathclyde Fire and Rescue, Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service and Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service.

Those are all serious steps to take. As has been said, the first two emergency towing vessels were introduced following Lord Donaldson's report into the Braer tanker disaster in Shetland in 1994, and the number was increased to four following a further review in 2000. The contract cost of £10 million to £12 million a year pales into insignificance compared with the cost of a single incident that the tugs might otherwise have prevented; cleaning up the Braer oil spill, for instance, cost some £100 million at 1990s prices. Conservative and Liberal Democrat ministers would like someone else to help to pay for that contract, which is understandable, but as the House of Commons Transport Committee said in June:

"The Government is the guarantor of last resort for the protection of our marine and shoreline environment, and for the lives of those in peril on our seas."

Ending the contract might be a reasonable way to save money if an equally effective alternative were to be put in place, but without such an alternative, it is simply reckless to go back to the situation as it was before the Braer oil spill.

Modernisation of the coastguard service, on the other hand, is a good idea. Indeed, it was Labour ministers who first asked what might be done to make the service more effective and efficient. The service still pays its staff less than their skills deserve and it lacks the sophisticated communication network that it needs. Putting that right would have required significant restructuring under any Government. The problem is that the review agenda has moved from effectiveness and efficiency to simple cash savings of millions of

pounds a year. That means that some bad decisions have been made.

The first draft plan contained some good ideas and some bad ideas, as did the first revision of the plan earlier this year. Closing the Stornoway or Shetland centres was always a bad idea, and the suggestion that any coastguard station in the north of Scotland might operate only in daylight hours was, to be frank, ludicrous.

However, the idea of co-ordinating the whole coastguard network from two maritime operations centres at either end of the island of Great Britain was good. Having only one such centre would risk the whole operation being jeopardised by a single failure. A second centre in Aberdeen makes a lot of sense, given the key role of the station there in supporting the offshore oil and gas industry for the whole country.

Alex Fergusson: I accept that that idea made a lot of sense under Labour's original proposals, which would have been consulted on, as Labour proposed that the rest of the United Kingdom's coastguard centres would be part-time centres. Does Lewis Macdonald accept that the position has changed, as the current proposals would make all the centres full-time centres?

Lewis Macdonald: The proposal to co-ordinate British maritime rescue from Scotland has certainly been dropped. Conservative ministers have decided instead to use two locations in the south of England—one will be the main MOC and the other will be the back-up.

What an opportunity has been missed to demonstrate a union dividend—the benefit to Scotland of addressing a need that all the UK's nations share. According to a question-and-answer document that the Department for Transport issued on Tuesday, saving money was the motive for missing that opportunity. It said:

"Why ... Dover rather than Aberdeen? ... Dover was already planned to have a slightly higher level of manning ... because of its responsibilities for managing the Channel Traffic Management Separation Scheme and this makes it a cheaper option".

That is absurd, especially as Aberdeen is responsible for liaison with the offshore oil and gas industry, which is entirely comparable with Dover's responsibility for the English Channel, and it also has "a slightly higher level" of staffing as a consequence.

Tory ministers who claim marginal savings while concentrating what is left of public services on marginal Tory seats in the south of England do a disservice to Scottish seafarers and to the idea of a single coastal safety framework for the whole of Great Britain. It is as if they have learned nothing from previous Tory Governments' mistakes in the 1980s and 1990s.

A rethink is a priority. Why Aberdeen and not Dover? It is because the network would be more secure from system failure from whatever cause and more capable of dealing with major incidents if it had hubs at either end of this island rather than two just a few miles apart, and because the coastguard is there to serve Scotland, too.

Closure of the Forth and Clyde stations is not inevitable and the case for saying that they must go has been made for no reason other than cutting costs and their being in the wrong part of Britain. There are concerns about those closures and about the closure of Liverpool coastguard centre, which is responsible for both shores of the Solway Firth. UK ministers say that they have done a risk assessment of their proposals as a whole. They also need to assess the impact of their proposals on individual coastal areas and to drop closure plans if the assessment finds that they are unsafe. We reject the proposal to close the Clyde and Forth stations.

The MCA is looking to save money by pulling out of the maritime incident response group, which was set up in 2006 to support fire brigades in training and equipping firefighters for fighting fires and dealing with chemical hazards at sea. It is bizarre that, in this case, the MCA commissioned an independent risk assessment last year, which found that there was room to make savings but that closing down the MIRC would be a false economy. However, that is precisely what might happen. Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service has pulled out, while Strathclyde Fire and Rescue and the Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service are maintaining capability at their own expense to the end of this financial year.

The Fire Brigades Union believes that the expertise and infrastructure that have been built up for offshore firefighting could be lost altogether unless a commitment is made to maintain an offshore capability as part of the proposed new Scottish fire and rescue service. A clear responsibility is on Scottish ministers, from whom I hope we will hear a positive response this morning. Will they legislate to give the new Scottish service powers and duties for firefighting at sea, as the FBU suggests, and give firefighters the resources to do the job, or will they allow the Westminster Government to get its way and the existing capability to wither away?

Likewise, I am interested to hear what the Scottish Government will do to ensure that emergency towing vessels continue to operate in Scottish waters, despite UK ministers' recklessness. Will the Scottish Government join us in calling for a rethink on locating the maritime operations centre and its back-up centre in the south of England, and for urgent action to

implement the AAIB's recommendations on helicopter safety?

If Scottish ministers address the issues on which they can take action to secure and protect the safety of seafarers and Scotland's coastline, they will make a positive contribution rather than simply condemn others' failures. I would welcome a response from the minister on all those matters at the end of the debate.

I move amendment S4M-01408.3, to insert at end:

"and the rest of the UK coastline; regrets that the modernisation plan for the coastguards has prioritised cost over other considerations, including the decision to have both the national Maritime Operations Centre and the standby Maritime Operations Centre on the south coast of England rather than to have one of these in Scotland; calls for urgent action to improve helicopter safety at sea following the crash of the Super Puma helicopter on 1 April 2009; recognises the importance of coastguard co-ordination in responding to emergencies in the offshore energy industries, and calls on the UK Government to carry out an individual assessment of the impact of the closure of individual coastguard stations, such as Forth and Clyde, and to reconsider how best to ensure maritime safety for the whole UK coastline."

09:39

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I am pleased to take part in this debate, although I am left with little choice other than to say that I rather regret the tone of both the Government's motion—

Alex Johnstone: Hear, hear.

Alex Fergusson: I have support for that. I also regret the tone of the Labour amendment.

The Government's motion represents what we are slowly getting used to in this session of Parliament: a blind denial that any change or review is ever needed or worth while unless, of course, it is sponsored by the Scottish National Party. The Labour amendment's attempt at a more constructive approach is welcome, but it is let down by its assertion—as in the Government motion—that the modernisation plan has

"prioritised cost over other considerations".

I prefer the stance that was taken by Lewis Macdonald's colleague in the House of Commons, who said—and I agree—that he has

"no doubt that these proposals are at least partly driven by financial constraints."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 22 November 2011; Vol 536, c 164.]

I simply do not accept that costs were the overriding factor in announcement of the plan, because I do not know of any review that has been undertaken by any Government of any country in the world that does not take the opportunity to consider more cost-effective ways

of delivering the services that are under review. I argue that it would be a dereliction of duty not to do so. Although I do not doubt that the cost of delivery is a factor—as Lewis Macdonald's Westminster colleague acknowledged—I reject any notion that it is the top priority.

Lewis Macdonald: Would the member offer any other explanation for the decision to locate the back-up maritime operation centre at Dover, rather than Aberdeen?

Alex Fergusson: That was all perfectly clearly explained in the statement that was made by the minister in the House of Commons, to which I refer Lewis Macdonald.

We in the Conservatives totally recognise the continuing concerns over the closure of individual coastguard stations such as the Clyde and Forth stations. The closure of the Clyde station is of immense concern to my constituency, which is covered by it. As was recognised by Lewis Macdonald—and slightly belatedly by the cabinet secretary—the Liverpool station also covers that area and both are to close. As an aside, it might be of interest to note that the Scottish Government is apparently so blinkered by what happens only within Scotland's boundaries that its response to the UK Government's consultation on the planned closure of the Liverpool station said that that was not an issue that concerns the Scottish Government. Given that that station covers a large area of the waters off south-west Scotland, which has been referred to, I gently suggest that the matter should have concerned the Scottish Government. Apparently it did not.

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): We wrote subsequently to the UK Government, especially in relation to Liverpool, but our fundamental point is that had the Clyde coastguard service been retained, it would not have been necessary to comment on what was happening in Liverpool, because we would have retained that service, but that is not happening.

Alex Fergusson: The point is summed up by the minister's use of the word "subsequently". Initial representations might have been helpful.

There are, of course, serious local concerns that that extensive area of Scotland's coastline is about to become the only part of the UK's coastline not to be covered by a station in its own region, with the potential loss of vital local knowledge. I do not think that anybody would argue about the importance of local knowledge. I want to see what level of resourcing and upskilling of personnel will take place at the Belfast station, which will now cover the area, before I can be convinced that this is the right move.

I am quite sure that similar concerns must exist around other stations that are to take on the work

of those that are to close. Local knowledge is a precious resource, which is not easily transferable simply from one station to another.

Richard Lochhead: Will Alex Fergusson at least accept that it makes no sense whatever for major oil and gas incidents to be handled and co-ordinated hundreds of miles away in the south of England, when we have the expertise and knowledge at the Aberdeen centre, which is where such incidents should always be handled?

Alex Fergusson: I absolutely accept that there is a concern there, but it depends on the transfer of that local knowledge, which is so important. I will come to a reason why I think it can be done later on.

In among all the doom and gloom that appears to be being spread by the two major parties in this Parliament, the first thing that I want to do is acknowledge the UK Government's willingness to act on the 1,800-plus submissions to the first consultation that were received. It was launched in December 2010 on proposals that were, effectively, those of the out-going Labour Administration. It is worth repeating that the majority of those submissions agreed that the service was in need of change and modernisation. As a result of the further consultation—I welcome the fact that the UK Government undertook it—part of that change and modernisation is to increase the number of regular officers in the coastguard rescue service by some 50 per cent and the number of locations from which those officers operate by 80 per cent, from 10 to 18, including new locations in the Moray Firth, Strathclyde and Oban.

I greatly welcome the fact that the increase will bolster support for the fantastic work of the 3,500-plus volunteers who make the rescue service possible in the first place. I am slightly saddened that neither Labour nor the Scottish National Party seem to have it in them to welcome the change, which—just for once—heralds the introduction of fewer chiefs and more Indians; usually, it is the other way round.

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Fergusson: With due respect, I say that have taken three interventions already and I have only six minutes, which are just about finished.

Furthermore, as the Liberal Democrats' amendment rightly points out, the regular staff will benefit from enhanced terms and conditions. I think that that is good news, and Tavish Scott thinks that it is good news, but it seems that we are alone in taking that view.

In conclusion, there are, of course, concerns about the modernisation programme, and we

share some of them. Change does not come without concern for its consequences, and these changes are no different in that regard. I remember visiting the coastguard station at Stornoway two summers ago, and being hugely impressed by the set-up there. I found it almost impossible to believe that the complexity of the seas and coastline could be effectively covered by the station, but I came away utterly convinced that, through the professionalism and dedication of the staff whom I met, those who sail those treacherous waters are in the safest of hands. I remain convinced that that same professionalism and dedication will successfully take on the challenges that are presented by the plan. I cannot wholeheartedly welcome it at this stage, but I have complete faith in the coastguard service to deliver it.

I move amendment S4M-01408.1, to leave out from "with concern" to end and insert:

"the UK Government's announcement on coastguard modernisation; recognises that concerns remain over some local aspects of the announcement but that a significant number of the 1,800 responses to the December 2010 consultation acknowledged the need for change and modernisation; welcomes the UK Government's decision to undertake a second consultation in light of those responses; further welcomes the commitment to increase the number of regular officers in the Coastguard Rescue Service by 50% and the number of Coastguard Rescue Service locations by 80%, including locations in the Moray Firth, Strathclyde and Oban, and believes that the outcome is a genuine attempt to provide a coastguard service that is fit for the 21st century."

09:46

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Ours is a maritime nation, rich in the heritage of the sea and of seafarers from the Vikings to the modern superstructures that float across the globe. But so, with the passage of international trade that is moved by shipping, go the ravages of accident, weather and incident that can put the lives of those at sea at risk. There was no coastguard when 58 men were lost in the 1881 Gloup fishing disaster, a tragedy that left 34 widows and 85 orphans. Shetland had coastguards when the Braer oil tanker went aground at Garths Ness on the south coast of the island on 5 January 1993.

Out of the Braer disaster—in which, thankfully, no loss of life occurred—came the seminal study of safety at sea in modern times. The late Lord Donaldson's "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas" is still compulsory reading for this generation of seafarers, as it should be for every policy maker and legislator who is interested in nautical matters. Since Donaldson, UK waters have witnessed the Napoli and HMS Astute incidents, which others have mentioned this morning, and there will no doubt be more.

Safety around our coasts needs an inclusive UK approach—gales, radar outages and wrecks do not obey constitutional referendums or overblown ministerial pronouncements. This Parliament should consider carefully what is being proposed for the country's essential coastguard services and the role that they play in relation to the emergency services across Scotland in co-ordinating rescue, where that is needed.

The original UK Government proposal would have seen either Stornoway or Lerwick coastguard station close, with the other being downgraded to a 12-hour operation. After Tuesday's House of Commons statement, both will continue on a 24-hour basis. That is the right call. I want to thank and congratulate the campaigns that were persuasively conducted across the islands. People from all walks of life, with islanders' connections to the sea, along with many who have been part of the voluntary coastguard network for generations, won the argument. This is their win.

The changes are difficult and I regret the closure of the Forth and Clyde stations. I well understand why local members are angry about that—I would be, if I were them. However, the savings that are being ploughed back into the service achieve a significant and positive improvement to the terms and conditions of employment for the men and women of the coastguard service. Just two years ago, they were on strike. The then UK Government imposed a pay deal. Today, instead of taking strike action, staff will rightly gain improvements, which they have long deserved. It is a matter of regret that the minister and his Labour shadow could not bring themselves to mention, either in their speeches or in their motions, the terms and conditions of the staff for whom we work.

Richard Lochhead: The member refers to staff terms and conditions. Why are the unions up in arms at the announcements that were made by the UK minister this week?

Tavish Scott: The unions are rightly up in arms about the proposed closures, not about the changes in terms and conditions; they sought those changes, and Mr Lochhead should welcome them. Many of those members of staff in my constituency have approached me because they have been calling for changes to their conditions for some time. I dare say that if Mr Lochhead had listened to their counterparts in Aberdeen, he would have heard the same. They have got what they wanted, which is a significant improvement in their terms and conditions. Instead of denigrating that, the cabinet secretary should welcome it.

Lewis Macdonald: Does Mr Scott acknowledge that I said in my opening speech that Labour ministers commissioned the review in the first place to address the terms and conditions of

skilled coastguard staff? That was the right thing to do. The question now is what decisions we should make in implementing the review's recommendations.

Tavish Scott: I accept that and stand corrected on Mr Macdonald's point.

I am disappointed that the Scottish Government motion is factually inaccurate on the issue of ocean-going salvage tugs. If the contract had ended as the motion says, how come the Anglican Sovereign is in Orkney coastal waters at this very moment, and the Anglican Monarch is in the Minch right now? People want salvage capability for the future and they are working hard on that. The cabinet secretary was gracious enough to accept the Scottish Office's role in that. However, it is unfortunate that the Scottish Government has brought nothing to the table. It wants to control everything but it never wants to work in partnership with local interests, industry and the UK Government to achieve a better outcome for the taxpayer than the terrible deal that we get at the moment.

Richard Lochhead: Will the member give way?

Tavish Scott: I will finish my point first. I would think a lot more of Scottish ministers if they could bring themselves to support a sensible contract that helps mariners around our coasts instead of showing their desperate need to grandstand constantly.

Richard Lochhead: Is it the case that the Liberal Democrat member is not content with defending the cuts to the Scottish budget that were made by his Government in London, but is now suggesting that the depleted Scottish budget should start paying for reserved issues as well as devolved issues?

Tavish Scott: If Mr Lochhead wanted to illustrate his approach to the relationship between his Government and any other Government, he just did so. We have just seen a classic example of Mr Lochhead's attitude. It is no wonder that his officials are behaving in the way that they are in the negotiations.

Our coastline needs rescue services that work, that stand up to modern challenges, and that use modern technology to deliver a modern service. We need salvage tugs around the Northern Isles and on the west coast of Scotland where the shipping market will not deliver a commercial alternative. We need the men and women who work for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency to be properly treated and given better terms and conditions. That is the future that I want for the next generation of shippers, fisherman, salmon farmers, the oil industry, and people who just like mucking around in boats, and that includes me.

I move amendment S4M-01408.2, to leave out from “with concern” to end and insert:

“that the coastguard modernisation proposals announced on 22 November 2011 are fundamentally different from the original proposals; welcomes the retention of the coastguard stations in Shetland and the Western Isles, one of which would have been closed under the previous plans, and that coastguard staff will now benefit from enhanced terms and conditions of employment; regrets the proposed closure of the Fife Ness and Clyde stations; recognises the importance of retaining the Emergency Towing Vessels in order to provide ocean-going salvage capability off the west coast and Northern Isles, and calls on the Scottish Government to play a constructive role in that provision.”

The Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Members should speak for up to six minutes. We have a wee bit of time in hand, so if you wish to take interventions, I will compensate you.

09:53

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): I speak in this debate with a heavy heart. This week, campaigners for the Clyde maritime rescue co-ordination centre at Greenock heard the news that they and the Inverclyde community have been dreading: the Greenock base is to close.

Parliament has debated the coastguard modernisation proposals on two separate occasions. The first time was a members’ debate led by Alasdair Allan in January, and the second was my members’ debate in June. I am glad that every party and every MSP who spoke supported maintaining coastguard facilities across Scotland. We all realised the folly of the proposals, because the coastline and Scotland’s internal waters are of paramount importance to the Scottish economy. More than that, we all know that no one can put a price on the saving of a life. I welcomed that unanimous support from Parliament and I hope that, come 5pm today, we can still speak with one voice to let Mr Penning and his department know that this Parliament values safety over coastguard cuts.

I whole-heartedly support the 31 men and women who work in Greenock to deliver the full range of coastguard services. Their skill, expertise, understanding and local knowledge that cover 2,500 miles of Scottish coastline will be hard to replicate. It is vital to maintain the local knowledge of the men and women who serve at MRCC Clyde. Not until one considers the area and the population that MRCC Clyde serves does one realise how indispensable a first-hand understanding of the region and its coastline is to effective co-ordination.

Some key facts need to be highlighted about the Clyde base: it covers some 2,500 miles of coastline in the west of Scotland; the area that it covers includes the UK’s busiest ferry routes,

which carry 6.4 million passengers every year; it is on the flight paths for two of Scotland’s major airports, not to mention those of many smaller ones; and it covers the UK’s nuclear submarine fleet and weapons, which are based on the Clyde. MRCC Clyde is the busiest coastguard station in Scotland and the third busiest in the UK.

Given that the nuclear submarine fleet is based on the Clyde, and given the growing number of cruise liners, which bring thousands of visitors to the west of Scotland every year, and the increase in the number of onshore and offshore renewables projects, added to the fact that approximately half the marinas in Scotland are located in the area that is covered by MRCC Clyde, we can only assume that the trend of rapid expansion in river traffic is set to continue.

To render MRCC Clyde inactive would leave Scotland and, indeed, the UK without a mainland maritime rescue co-ordination centre between Holyhead and Aberdeen, with responsibility for the vast distance in between being distributed between Belfast and Stornoway. I welcome the fact that the Belfast and Stornoway centres will remain, as there were legitimate arguments for that, but I cannot understand why the Clyde base is to close.

After listening to Mike Penning’s statement and his answers to questions on Tuesday, I was of the impression that he was totally out of touch with Scotland. Given that the Tories have only one member of Parliament for Scotland, he may think that he does not have much to lose in Scotland, and very little to lose in the north-west of England from the closure of the Liverpool centre. I would like to be wrong in making that assumption, and I hope to be persuaded that that is the case. I have listened to what has been said so far, and I will continue to listen.

My support for the saving of MRCC Clyde has been resolute. I sent in a submission to the consultation, I attended the public meetings in Greenock and, at the march and rally in Greenock, I shared a public platform with the leader of Inverclyde Council, the newly elected MP for Inverclyde and a member of the Clyde coastguard staff who is a Public and Commercial Services Union member. Along with Duncan McNeil MSP, I met the First Minister and Greenock MRCC workers. In addition, I wrote to the First Minister of Northern Ireland to seek his support for the Clyde centre.

The Northern Irish First Minister and our First Minister cannot both be wrong. They fully understand the importance of local knowledge and understanding in dealing with this vital public service. Saving MRCC Clyde and saving MRCC Belfast are not, in my opinion, mutually exclusive. The arguments to save both are absolutely sound.

The additional burden that will be placed on the staff in Belfast will pose massive challenges, and I have every sympathy for them. They have not asked to be put in a near impossible position, but I believe that that is what they will find themselves in. I do not believe that the people of Northern Ireland, let alone the people of the west of Scotland, will receive the same quality of service that is currently provided.

The dangers of the proposed closures are clear: they threaten to leave us with too few co-ordination centres, too few staff and a lot less local knowledge. In straitened times, certain cutbacks can be explained, but there is no reason to compromise safety and people's lives unnecessarily. This Scottish Government has prioritised front-line services, wherever possible, above all else, and I am astounded that the London Government will not support a similar course of action.

Ensuring the safety of our coastline and our inland waters is of paramount importance to save lives and to provide a strategic economic direction. Mr Penning's decision underlines the fact that the UK Government does not consider our coastline to be of strategic importance, and it is now imperative that responsibility for the coastguard services is devolved to the Scottish Parliament with immediate effect. That way, we can work to provide the safety of Scotland's people and its coastline that is required.

09:59

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

This morning's debate comes on the back of the bitterly disappointing decision by the UK Government to go ahead with the closure of the Forth coastguard station at Fife Ness and the Clyde station at Greenock.

It has been a drawn-out process. The UK Government was forced to go back to the drawing board following the outcry over the initial proposal to leave just one full-time base in Scotland and to reduce the number of coastguard sites across the UK to five. For many people, the second consultation was disappointingly narrow in the areas that it was willing to address.

Alex Fergusson: Will the member at least have the grace to accept that the original proposals were Labour's proposals?

Claire Baker: As Lewis Macdonald made clear in his opening contribution, we recognise the need to modernise—I will go on to highlight that in my speech—but there are real worries about the proposals that are coming forward.

The second proposal came under criticism for being flawed, and the Government was criticised

for not being prepared to listen to the strong evidence about the needs of Scotland's coastline.

The final decision to retain both Shetland and Stornoway is welcome, but the combination of the downgrading of the Aberdeen site with the closure of Fife Ness and Clyde leaves real concerns about whether the balance of risk has been safely reached. The decision to reduce the number of coastguard sites from 18 to eight across the UK continues to cause concern and is potentially damaging. Indeed, when the announcement was made this week, Charles Kennedy described the decision as having

"a considerable element of gamble".—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 22 November 2011; Vol 536, c 166.]

The members here who represent the parties that are involved in the UK Government must recognise that there are concerns on their own benches about the decisions that have been taken.

Our coastguards play a vital role in safeguarding the communities and industry that use our coastline and seas. In recent days, Fife has had a terrible reminder of the dangers that our sea and coastline can present. The tragic death of three-year-old Eryk Cieraszewski, who was swept off Kirkcaldy promenade, deeply shocked the community. I, along with everyone across Fife, send our sincerest sympathies to his family at this incredibly difficult time.

Although in that awful case the response of the emergency services did not lead to the outcome that we all hoped for, in such circumstances the coastguard service plays a vital and pivotal role in co-ordinating responses, and we must be confident that changes to the service will not threaten its ability to deal with life-and-death situations.

I recognise that there is a need to modernise, improve and enhance the coastguard service. I agree that a coastguard service fit for the 21st century should operate as a single national network, but there is little doubt that the dramatic cuts initially proposed were overly driven by finance. Although I welcome the changes that have been made in response to the widespread public concern, there are still fears that finance is too dominant a driver for some of the proposed changes. We need to be confident that, while we recognise the financial challenges that all Governments face, safety and service are not put at risk.

The UK Government says that it is trying to address problems of co-ordination and communication, but the centralisation of services is not necessarily the answer. The closure of the two stations in Scotland will lead to the loss of detailed local knowledge that staff have built up in

dealing with a range of potentially life-threatening incidents.

There is still a great deal of uncertainty for staff with the announcement that stations will close by March 2015. What kind of service do they deliver until then? Fife Ness and Clyde have been timetabled for early closure. That must be questioned when there has still been no individual assessment of the impact of the closures of the stations. As Lewis Macdonald highlighted, the FBU, which is raising concerns about the future provision of the maritime incident response group, also states that the closure of the Forth and Clyde stations will have implications for the provision of water rescue and maritime safety—an area that the Government is looking to address through the legislation for a single fire service. I would welcome the cabinet secretary's comments on that.

The closure of Fife Ness is of real concern to Fifers and Scotland. I support the strong case that was made for the retention of the Clyde, and I agree that the closure of the Clyde station leaves real challenges for the west coast. However, on the east coast the provision in Fife and the further coastline is being underestimated. Fife Ness covers 344 miles of rugged coastline, from Montrose to the north of England. In the past three years alone, the 14 staff there have dealt effectively and professionally with more than 1,400 incidents, and the number of reported incidents has increased year on year.

The stretch of coastline that is served by Fife Ness is varied and demanding. Last year, the lifeboat stations in its area were the busiest in Scotland. In the retention of Shetland and Stornoway, there is a recognition of the importance of local knowledge and expertise in ensuring safety and responding to emergency situations, and yet that does not receive the same attention when the importance of Fife Ness is under consideration. The closure of that station and the loss of the staff will mean the loss of expertise that cannot be replaced.

Fife has been described as

“a beggar's mantle fringed wi gowd”.

It has a rich coastline with thriving fishing fleets and valuable trading links and ports. Our use of the coastline has changed in recent years. Although it is still an area for commerce, there is an increasing use of the shoreline for leisure and recreation, as well as congested shipping lanes with tankers travelling to and from Grangemouth.

The decision to close Fife Ness is shortsighted. The UK Government recognises that the offshore renewables sector is contributing to the increasing demands on the coastguard service. Fife has an energy park in Levenmouth, the potential for

greater offshore development, Rosyth dockyard and the ferry port. As the cabinet secretary mentioned, it will also have the new Forth crossing in forthcoming years. It has a busy coastline with potential for growth and development. I strongly believe that we need a coastguard service that matches that potential and I am concerned that the proposals fall short of that ambition.

10:05

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands (SNP)): Scotland is a maritime and seafaring nation. Our smallest and biggest industries have been, and are, on the sea and are situated around the entire coast of Scotland. Shipbuilding, trading by sea, transportation, Ministry of Defence activities, fishing, fish farming, ferry transport, recreational sailing and renewable energy developments are all on the sea.

All that activity, which is vital to the economy, cannot and must not be put at risk as a result of Westminster Government cost cutting. It is not even a cost-cutting exercise—that would imply interest and concern, resulting in proper investigation and risk assessment before a decision could be made about savings.

Other members will speak about the outrage of the closure of coastguard stations in the south of Scotland that work from the Clyde and the Forth. I will highlight a few facts about the ETVs—emergency towing vessels, hitherto known as tugs.

I compare the Minch to the M8 with extra-heavy loads travelling regularly—as they do, sometimes with police escort. Like the Pentland Firth and other sea lanes, the Minch is known to be difficult water to navigate. It is important to understand the work that the tugs do. Between 2006 and 2010, the two tugs that cover the Northern Isles and the Minch carried out 562 taskings—that is, escorting commercial vessels through the Minch—answered 42 distress calls and were involved in seven commercial tows.

What about the ones that do not make it—the accidents in the Minch? In 2003, the *Jambo*, a Cyprus-registered vessel, sank after hitting rocks off the Summer Isles near Achiltibuie, spilling a cargo of zinc concentrate—3,300 tonnes of the chemical. Several sources that I looked at while doing some research for facts about the incident state that the zinc concentrate was removed from the sea bed, but it was not. It is still there, as is the wreck of the *Jambo*.

The crew was rescued by the Lochinver lifeboat, and all the emergency services were alerted. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency, the agent of the Secretary of State for Transport, set up an incident room in Ullapool. Up to 15 people—including

marine biologists, engineers, scientists, environmentalists, lawyers, accountants, insurance agents, coastguards and a myriad of others—were in that room at any given time. Officials from London and Bristol came, but they used local knowledge—which has been emphasised in every speech—in every aspect of their work. Several telephone lines, banks of computers, televisions and filming equipment were installed. After three and a half months, they left.

The cost of that operation is another bit of research that must be done, but I guess that it must be a matter of public record. Whatever it is, it far outweighs the cost of preventative measures. I am not saying that the agencies could have prevented the wreck of the *Jambo*, but such an incident may happen again unless we pay attention to the traffic in the Minch.

When the *Jambo* incident happened, Councillor Foxley and the late Councillor Fulton of Highland Council made strong representations to the Scottish Executive to improve and increase the cover on the Minch and were hugely supported by the Liberal-Labour Government. However, times have changed.

The sea around Skye and the island of Raasay is used as a training ground for the Royal Navy. The submarine HMS *Trafalgar* sustained millions of pounds of damage when it ran aground off Skye in 2002. More recently, the submarine HMS *Astute* ran aground in October last year. The ETVs—the tugs—came to their rescue.

We really cannot leave our busy shipping sea lanes unattended. The value of the fishing industry, the MOD sites at Loch Ewe and Kyle of Lochalsh, the passage of nuclear submarines through the Minch to the bombing range at Durness and the commercial traffic all indicate the need for a comprehensive safety policy.

With regard to the previous contract for the tug service, which came to an end at the end of September, Mike Penning has stated in a letter that it is simply not appropriate for the taxpayer to fund this provision.

However, that is another debate. In any case, the Government has clearly recognised that we cannot do without the tugs—after all, it subsequently re-established the contract, albeit for three months. Now that we are six weeks away from the end of the current contract, what work has happened in the meantime? I can tell the chamber that the people running the tug service have not been consulted. What investigation is taking place? Indeed, what of the modernisation that Alex Fergusson talked about? I do not think that anyone has any issue with that—all services need to be reviewed—but the present Westminster Government seems to be picking off

each of the services and looking at them in isolation when in fact we must look collectively at all the services: the coastguard, the tugs, the lifeboats and fisheries protection vessels. They all have to kick in, as indeed do the Royal Air Force and the air rescue service.

It is easy to look at parts of the whole and decide to strip something off. However, we cannot do that in this case. Now that the Westminster parliamentary recess is coming up, when will this work be carried out? Why was the service recontracted for three months if it is not needed? If it is needed, what evidence is the Government gathering to make its case?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

I would be grateful if the member could come to a conclusion.

Jean Urquhart: As for the reprieve for the coastguard centres in Shetland and the Western Isles and the claim that terms and conditions are secure, I point out that that only holds if the jobs continue to exist. Those centres have received no assurance that they will not face any staff reorganisation.

Of course I want control of the service around Scotland's coasts to lie where it should lie—with the Scottish Parliament, whose members know and understand the waters and realise that on this issue local knowledge means something, and not with Westminster and the current threat that it is making to the service.

10:12

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in this debate. Stuart McMillan has highlighted many of the issues regarding the strategic importance of Clyde coastguard and given that Clyde plays an important role in the coast of south-west Scotland—as far, in fact, as Scotland's most southerly point, the Mull of Galloway—I agree whole-heartedly with his comments.

Over the past six months, I have had a good deal of contact with local volunteer coastguard officers who cover the Solway coast and have real concerns about the UK Government's vision of the future of the service. It is important to emphasise that they are volunteers and, as such, have no vested interest in employment with or career prospects in the MCA. However, they care about marine safety and have seen two sets of proposals that they believe are ill conceived at best and downright dangerous at worst—not my words, but theirs.

The Solway highlights an issue that has not been properly addressed by either set of proposed structures. Operational responsibility for the

Solway is split between Clyde and Liverpool, with Clyde having responsibility as far south as the Mull of Galloway. Indeed, Clyde recently co-ordinated the response when Stena Navigator's engines lost power off the Rhinns of Galloway. Given that the Scottish coast from there to the east—as well as the whole of the English side of the Solway—is the operational responsibility of Liverpool maritime rescue co-ordination centre, there is an in-built cross-border issue to deal with. Moreover, the proposed closure of the Clyde and Liverpool stations gives rise to additional unwelcome uncertainty over the Solway. In the first debate on this subject, which took place in January, my predecessor Alasdair Morgan made that very point in response to the first set of consultation proposals.

Although we are eight months on, it seems to me that the issue of operational cover for the Solway remains unresolved. As a result, I welcome Keith Brown's actions in writing to Mike Penning to highlight the very specific issues regarding the Solway and await Mr Penning's reply with interest. I also welcome the cabinet secretary's comments that the Scottish Government will work to ensure an appropriate level of cover for the Solway.

Of course, Mr Penning has already argued that retaining half of each pair of centres should allay my concerns on the basis that local knowledge will be retained. That means the Solway being covered by Holyhead and Belfast rather than Clyde and Liverpool. He repeated that argument at length in the House of Commons on Tuesday. However, we should consider the extent to which that new arrangement will deliver as far as local knowledge is concerned.

The volunteers whom I spoke about earlier point to incidents in which local knowledge was preserved when one station was out of action by a member of staff being sent from that facility to man a desk at its paired station. Correspondence that the volunteers obtained for me states:

"Regional contingency planning sets out procedures for staff from an 'unavailable' station to proceed to the paired station in the event of a protracted outage."

If the pairing system enshrines local knowledge in the way that Mr Penning has suggested, why would that most analogue of solutions be necessary? Given that that is the situation right now, how will the retention of one of each pair preserve local knowledge in any way?

I invite members to compare the operational guidance that I have just quoted with a statement in the consultation document on the revised proposals. That document says:

"we should also plan on retaining one of each of the current 'pair' of stations where staff are already familiar

with, and frequently exercise, taking calls and managing incidents in an adjacent area."

The latter gives the impression of a well-oiled machine and a seamless transfer of responsibilities among staff who know each other's patch; the former is rather less persuasive. However, we are to believe that retaining one of each pair of stations—where the current contingency plan, we should bear in mind, is for an officer "to proceed" to the other station in times of crisis—will preserve local knowledge after the two stations that have direct operational responsibility for the Solway have both been closed. I remain to be convinced by that, and I am by no means alone in my scepticism.

Alex Fergusson: Will the member take an intervention?

Aileen McLeod: I want to get through quite a lot on the impact on the Solway.

The Irish Sea has a busy winter scallop fishery, which is, by its very nature, given the time of year and the prevailing weather, not without risk. Locally, Dumfries and Galloway Council wishes to market Stranraer as a destination for sailors and sea anglers, and to capitalise on its easy access to the Clyde and the west coast as a whole. There is a sizeable marina in Kirkcudbright and there are popular smaller anchorages, such as in Kippford. A popular trip is crossing the Solway to Maryport; the more adventurous may attempt going to the Isle of Man if the conditions are right. All of those things amount to varied use of a challenging and occasionally treacherous sea area. There are busy ferry routes from Ireland to Scotland and Wales, and from Liverpool to the Isle of Man, offshore wind farms, and the potential for tidal or wave power generation in the future. Therefore, there are ample reasons for maintaining the existing level of cover, but there is little reassurance that crucial local knowledge will be maintained.

One way in which cover might have been maintained and might still be maintained, of course, would be through responsibility for Scotland's coastguard being fully devolved to the Scottish Government. I accept that operational cover issues in the Solway would still have to be addressed, but I believe that the Scottish Government has a better assessment of the value of the coastguard service. Devolving responsibility for the coastguard and marine safety to Scotland would permit us to develop a service that meets the needs of Scotland's marine sector for the 21st century. Now that we have seen the UK Government's vision, I know which option I prefer.

I hope that colleagues across the chamber will support the Scottish Government's motion and make it clear to the UK Government that, as the motion states,

"this piecemeal approach driven by a cost-cutting agenda cannot deliver a proper strategy for maritime safety in Scotland."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give a wee bit of time back to members who take interventions.

10:18

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Where is Maclean's Nose? That might sound like a silly question or a reference to Sorley, the great Gaelic poet from my constituency of Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch, but it is a very serious question. It is exactly the type of query on which lives may depend following Westminster's decision to close two of Scotland's five coastguard maritime rescue co-ordination centres. Clyde coastguards will know the answer, as Maclean's Nose lies within the patch that they have covered for years. It is a promontory into the Sound of Mull opposite Tobermory, to be found on the southern edge of the Ardnamurchan peninsula, within my constituency, and about halfway between Kilchoan and Ardsignish. The precise location of Maclean's Nose is just one of the thousands of extra pieces of local knowledge that coastguards who take over Clyde coastguard's responsibilities will need to know immediately if mariners or coastal walkers who are in difficulty are to be assisted.

In its report on "The Coastguard, Emergency Towing Vessels and the Maritime Incident Response Group", which was published in June, the Westminster Transport Committee said:

"Our main concern about safety is the loss of local knowledge amongst coastguard officers that will inevitably occur under these proposals. Rationalising the number of MRCCs so drastically, in our view, will reduce the quality and rate of exchange of information, particularly at key points when information needs to be passed swiftly in order to save lives."

In addition to the huge number of ferries, fishing vessels and bulk-cargo vessels that can be found off our west coast every day, there has been an increase in leisure traffic, as a result of the area's justified reputation for stunning scenery and good sailing. There are also regular military manoeuvres. That gives an indication of how busy the coastguard is and how serious the implications of any shipping incident could be.

The announcement that Aberdeen, Shetland and Stornoway will remain as 24-hour co-ordination centres is good news and does credit to the hard-fought campaigns for the centres' retention. However, the centres have been left with a heavy burden and the daunting responsibility for providing maritime safety cover for dozens of islands and thousands of miles of

coastline that were previously the responsibility of the co-ordination centre at Greenock.

The Stornoway team's role increased as recently as 2000, when the last round of Westminster cuts resulted in the closure of coastguard centres at Oban and at Belfast, across the Irish Sea. The extra section of rugged Argyll and Clyde coast includes countless small islands, sea lochs and headlands, many of which have similar or identical names to features that are in the team's current patch. The challenge of picking up responsibility for a vastly increased area is made all the more difficult when we take into account that the Clyde coastguard at Greenock is Scotland's busiest. There is a huge volume of leisure craft in the area and there were more than 1,400 incidents in 2010.

The scale of the task that faces the reduced coastguard presence will be even greater as a result of Westminster's announcement of the scrapping of the RAF's fleet of long-range Nimrod search and rescue aircraft. Moreover, the contract to operate the emergency tugs that are stationed around our coast has been awarded only on an interim basis, as members said. Over the years, the tugs have helped to avert many catastrophes on a scale that can hardly be imagined, by coming to the aid of shipping when power was lost in the treacherous waters of the Minch.

The area is well known to me. I lived and worked in the Western Isles for 10 years and I have had many an interesting trip, courtesy of local ferries, local fishing boats and, occasionally, a small yacht. I recall one occasion—in the late 1970s, I think—when, on a near-perfect day, with a flat-calm Minch, the ferry hit the rocks as it came into Tarbert on Harris, tearing an 8ft hole in the hull. We were fortunate to get into harbour safely. However, every vehicle on the car deck, including mine, had been shunted, front and rear, and I ended up with an expensive repair bill—it had to be met by yours truly because the law back then allowed ferry operators to do what they liked with passengers and their property.

I think that that accident was caused by a navigation error, but the incident shows how easy it is for something to go wrong, even in near-perfect conditions. If on just one occasion a tug is not able to reach one of the hundreds of bulk tankers or nuclear submarines that might be in difficulty in the Minch, the consequences will be unthinkable.

John Hermse, secretary of the Mallaig and North West Fishermen's Association, told me this week:

"Our main concern is the loss of local knowledge. On the West Coast there must be ten or 12 different West Loch Tarberts and you have to know which is which. Another concern is that, with less resources, response times will be

even more stretched and that can have a huge bearing on the success of any rescue mission.”

We should listen to men like John Hermse, support our local maritime rescue co-ordination centres and—[*Interruption.*] We should back calls for decisions on such vital matters to be devolved to the Scottish Government, whose sole concern is to look after Scottish interests.

I have come in within my time, Presiding Officer. I was hoping to get one or two interventions, but they did not materialise.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Perhaps someone was trying to phone one in. I remind all members to ensure that their phones are switched off.

10:24

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): The UK Government’s decision to cut coastguard stations will impact on many areas, but I will focus on the decision to close the Clyde coastguard station and the impact that that will have on the west coast of Scotland.

As an MSP for West Scotland, I am fortunate to be familiar with the spectacular scenery and unique coastline that attract so many visitors to the region every year. There are more ferry crossings in the region than in any other area of the UK and there are a large number of coastal leisure users and maritime tourists. There are also more marinas on the Clyde than in any other part of Scotland, and their number is increasing with proposals for new marinas as far upriver as the centre of Glasgow. The Clyde is home to some of Scotland’s busiest holiday resorts and features the world’s last sea-going paddle steamer, the Waverley, which carries 140,000 passengers every year. From speaking to many constituents and people who are involved in the save the Waverley campaign, I know how valued the important work of the Clyde coastguard is.

In spite of that, on Tuesday, the shipping minister, Mike Penning MP, confirmed that the coastguard centre on the Clyde is to close. The decision will have a devastating impact on the local community, where 31 jobs will be lost in an area of high unemployment, and it will put maritime safety on the west coast at serious risk. As members have said, it was recently reported that the station in Greenock deals with more than 30 per cent of Scotland’s incidents. In 2010, the Clyde station was the busiest coastguard station in Scotland and the third busiest in the whole of the UK. Staff there assisted 2,357 people and rescued 539 members of the public—more than 10 a week.

Currently, the coastguard station at Greenock co-ordinates rescues from as far north as Fort William and as far south as Stranraer. As

members have noted, under the new plans, emergency calls from the west of Scotland will be directed to Belfast and Stornoway. That would be laughable if it were not so serious. Concerns have been raised that, with reduced manning levels, those coastguard stations will not be able to cope with the increased workload. I know, from speaking to at least one person who is currently employed at the Clyde coastguard station, that on more than one occasion the team in Belfast has contacted the Clyde station to ask for assistance due to insufficient staffing levels there. The statistics for 2010 also show that the Belfast station was the quietest coastguard station in the whole of the UK, which raises concerns and questions about how prepared it is to take on the workload of the Clyde coastguard station.

In his statement on the UK Government’s proposals, Mike Penning MP said:

“They will make much better use of the talents and skills of our Coastguards”.

In issuing that statement, the shipping minister failed to take into account the vital role of local knowledge, which many members have mentioned. The coastguards to whom I have spoken insist that such knowledge can make the difference between life and death. As members will know, the west coast has a unique topography. Many areas have limited infrastructure, which can often make communications difficult if not impossible. When that happens, there is no substitute for the local knowledge of the experienced staff at the Clyde coastguard station.

Members may have read in the press that the Clyde coastguard recently responded to two divers who got into distress while exploring a sunken wreck. Sadly, one diver died in the incident but, thanks to the knowledge of the responding team, the other was rescued. After the rescue, Calum Murray, from the Clyde coastguard station, said:

“The divers got into trouble in Whiting Bay, which is not well known. There is another more famous Whiting Bay near Arran. If it had been Belfast handling the call they would have called out the wrong coastguard, losing vital minutes. We could have been facing two fatalities.”

That is a prime example of the importance of the local knowledge that will be lost when the Clyde coastguard station closes, potentially making the difference between life and death.

There are numerous examples of the outstanding work that is carried out by the Clyde coastguard team. As has been mentioned, earlier this year a Stena Line ferry carrying more than 100 people experienced difficulties after leaving Stranraer and started drifting around 4 nautical miles west of Corsewall Point.

Dave Thompson: On the point about local knowledge, does the member accept that the local knowledge within the Scottish Parliament about Scotland and Scotland's needs is probably superior to Westminster's knowledge of Scotland's needs? That being the case, does he not agree that decisions relating to coastguards would be far better informed and would be different if they were made by the Scottish Parliament rather than by Westminster?

Neil Bibby: I understand that some members taking part in the debate are keen to use the closure of coastguard stations in Scotland to call for more powers for Scottish ministers. I am certainly not against more powers being devolved to the Scottish Parliament, but it would have to be for the benefit of the people of Scotland. The coastguard is a prime example of a service in which we benefit from pooling resources. After all, we share the coastline with our neighbours south of the border and even the Scottish National Party's greatest efforts will not change that. What we need is for the UK Government to exercise common sense by not cutting busy coastguard stations and stretching those remaining to the point where lives are put at risk.

The incident involving the ferry drifting off the Mull of Galloway is an important example of the Clyde coastguard station taking swift action. It received the call from the vessel at 12.50 am and sent two tugboats to the area to tow the vessel to Belfast. The vessel arrived in Belfast at 4.30 am, with everyone on board safe and well.

Alex Fergusson: The member raises understandable and justifiable concerns about the closure of the Clyde centre. If he listened to my earlier speech, he will know that I share some of those concerns. However, how can he say categorically that the decision to close Clyde and strengthen Belfast would have led to a different outcome in the Stena Line ferry incident to which he refers, given that the incident took place an awful lot closer to Belfast than to the Clyde? It is not to do with proximity; it is everything to do with technology. How can he say that there would have been a different outcome?

Neil Bibby: As I said, I have raised serious concerns about Belfast's ability to cope with the extra demand and the busy workload that will be taken on from the Clyde coastguard station. As we know, Clyde is the busiest coastguard station in Scotland and the third busiest in the UK.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if you would come to a conclusion now.

Neil Bibby: Make no mistake about it: the coalition Government's decision is about saving money. The UK Government is putting saving money before safety. I sincerely hope that it does

not take a tragedy off the west coast before the UK Government starts to listen to the very real concerns about future maritime safety in Scotland.

10:32

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I spoke in the chamber in June in a members' business debate on this issue. I spoke then about my experience of being rescued by the coastguard following the loss of our boat in storm conditions one dark night in September 1977. I owe my life to the coastguard service, which co-ordinated the search and rescue that ended successfully when I was airlifted off a wave-swept, tiny rock at 8 o'clock the following morning.

In particular, I owe my life to the local knowledge of the officers of the Oban coastguard station, which is now closed. Through that local knowledge, they were able to focus the search on the small area of sea where they knew I was most likely to be. They were able to do so because of their intimate understanding of the particular wind and tidal conditions that prevailed that night, because they had a close relationship with the other boats and individuals who participated in the search and because they were able to collaborate with and trust the knowledge of the crew of the fishing boat that found me.

I come from a family with the sea in their blood. My grandfather was a ferryman and fisherman. My great-uncle was a ferryman and my uncle was a puffer skipper. With members' indulgence, I will just pay a quick, affectionate tribute to that fine man, John MacFadyen of Lismore, who was the personification of Para Handy and who taught me all I know about the sea and an awful lot about life.

I also have cousins who are currently fishermen and ferrymen. I worked as a fisherman as a schoolboy and a student and I have spent much of my recreational time kayaking and sailing on the beautiful but sometimes treacherous waters of the west coast. Like all who spend much time on the sea, I have a profound respect for it. It has at different times filled me with awe and with fear. I have lost good friends to the sea and witnessed and lived through the mourning of our community when our young men have been lost to the sea. The sea has no hard shoulder where you can pull over when things go wrong. There is no handbrake on a boat. When things go wrong, it is often the only hope of the mariner that we have a first-class search and rescue service.

Some of the most dangerous waters in the world are found between the Mull of Kintyre and the Point of Ardnamurchan. The Sound of Islay is littered with wrecks. The proliferation of lighthouses built by the Stevenson family—at Skerryvore, Dubh Artach and elsewhere—

indicates the profound dangers of those waters. The Corryvreckan whirlpool is said to be the third largest in the world—believe me, it deserves its fearsome reputation. Strong and sometimes perverse tides dominate large stretches of the coastline, which is littered with rocks and hazards. It is only with skill, experience and local knowledge that those waters can be navigated safely. Imagine the difficulties of co-ordinating and carrying out a rescue in those waters, almost always in bad conditions, often at night. There are radio blackspots; there are huge gaps in mobile signal coverage; and there are magnetic anomalies. Our technology, clever though it is, sometimes just does not work—as we know, even in this chamber. Thankfully, our lives do not depend on it.

The late Baroness Michie, many years ago when she was the Lib Dem MP for Argyll and Bute, fought and lost a campaign to save the Oban coastguard station. She did so knowing, as I do, the importance of local knowledge. She fought the fight with integrity and a passion for what was right. She was rewarded by re-election, and perhaps more important, by the respect and warm support of her constituents, which crossed the party divides.

The coalition in Westminster knows nothing of the hazards of the sea. It cares nothing, it seems, for the value of human lives. At a time when recreational usage of our coastal areas is increasing, and when we are at the start of the offshore renewables industry—with tidal generators planned for the Sound of Islay, and offshore wind turbines planned off the coast of Tiree—it is truly perverse that we should be cutting our coastguard service. I urge Lib Dem and Tory members to reflect on all of this, to follow the example of Ray Michie and to support the Government motion without reservation.

10:39

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): Last week, when I spoke in the debate on Scotland's oil and gas framework, I was a rare speaker from the central belt amid a sea of speakers from the north-east. I am getting much the same feeling today. I may not be the only one of today's speakers who is based in the central belt, but I think that I am the only speaker so far without an obvious constituency interest in the coastguard.

Tavish Scott said that he understood that members are angry about changes affecting their areas. I, too, understand that anger—and it is a concern that is shared by many of us who do not represent the areas most directly affected. Unlike Mike MacKenzie and his family, I do not have the sea in my blood—although there has been the odd

ferry trip to Brodick, Millport or Dunoon—but some of the people whom I represent work in the maritime industries, and many more of them will use our coastal areas, especially the Firth of Clyde, for the purposes of recreation. That is the area on which I will focus most of my remarks although, if I have time, I will speak about other areas also affected by the UK Government's decision.

I welcome today's debate and hope that it will offer cross-party support for the Scottish Parliament's opposition to the changes that the UK Government proposes. The debate is timely, coming as it does so soon after Tuesday's coastguard announcement.

It might be difficult to get consensus. Tavish Scott and Alex Fergusson seemed to feel that the Government and the main Opposition party were unduly negative in their approach. I find it hard to be positive because there is not much to be positive about. If those members can explain why closing two coastguard stations in Scottish waters and reducing the number of personnel are positive steps, perhaps SNP members will have something positive to contribute.

Tavish Scott: As I said in my speech, I entirely appreciate the concern that is being expressed by members, including Alex Fergusson, about the loss of coastguard stations in their area. However, Stornoway and Shetland are staying open on a 24-hour basis and the terms and conditions for staff are being enhanced rather than cut back. None of those positive steps is in the Government motion. If Mr Hepburn's position is that he wants no change, that is fair enough, but if his position is that he wants an improvement on what we have got, he must acknowledge those positive steps.

Jamie Hepburn: I do not think that there is an improvement on what we have got. What we have got is a reduction in the provision of coastguard stations. Arguably, the proposals were more draconian before, but let us not use that as our starting point. Let us use the current situation as our starting point. If we do that, we can safely say that it is hard to be positive about the changes that are being introduced. Our concerns are based on the risk to life and limb and the dangers to the marine environment as a result of those changes.

It is not just the Scottish Government that is concerned. The Scottish Wildlife Trust has contacted us to set out its concern about the potential negative impact of the changes on Scotland's marine environment. The concerns go wider than just the political sphere.

Once more, Scotland is being used as a test bed for changes. I see Tavish Scott mouthing away as if I am saying something wrong. Closures will happen in Scotland first. Why is that? Scotland

has a significant proportion—18,000km—of the UK's coastline. A significant part of Scotland's economy is based on maritime industries. Why is Scotland being hit first with these negative changes?

Keith Brown: Somewhat perversely, Tavish Scott has seen a Lib Dem cut as an opportunity to attack the Scottish Government. Before Jamie Hepburn gives up on the idea of cross-party support, I ask him to note what other former Lib Dem leaders have said. Charlie Kennedy said that the proposals

“flew in the face of all common sense”,—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 22 November 2011; Vol 536, c 166.]

Jim Wallace said that it is too important an issue

“to let the local knowledge and expertise ... be lost”,

and Ming Campbell said that the proposals are “profoundly mistaken”. There is Lib Dem support for our position.

Jamie Hepburn: That is a fair point.

Alex Fergusson: Would the member like to take a genuine intervention?

Jamie Hepburn: In a moment, Mr Fergusson.

The minister's point builds on what Mike MacKenzie was saying about Baroness Michie's position in respect of her former constituency. I hope to see cross-party support for the motion at decision time. Perhaps Alex Fergusson can tell me whether we will get it.

Alex Fergusson: I would like to make two brief points. First, will the member accept—as the cabinet secretary did not seem to—that the UK minister has said clearly that no centres will close before the robustness of the system is demonstrated? Because of what the UK minister has said, I do not accept the member's criticism that Scotland is being used as a guinea pig.

Secondly, I would have liked to have a motion that I could support this evening. I cannot vote in favour of the motion because of its tone. If the member is so keen to achieve consensus, perhaps he might have a word with the cabinet secretary about lodging a more consensual motion.

Jamie Hepburn: I did not use the term “guinea pig”—I said “test bed”—but I take the point on board. It would be far better if we could get consensus on protecting Scotland's coastline, which is, fundamentally, the position that is being advanced by the Scottish Government. It is for other members to justify their position; it is not for me to have words with the cabinet secretary. I would have thought that Alex Fergusson was big and bold enough to have his own words with the cabinet secretary.

How much more time do I have? I have taken three interventions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you another minute.

Jamie Hepburn: You are very generous.

I want to talk about the Clyde area because it is the most pertinent to my constituency. The point has been well made, and I congratulate Stuart McMillan on his assiduous campaigning on the issue. I recognise that it has been done on a cross-party basis, as Duncan McNeil and others have also campaigned on the issue. When we consider that the Clyde station is the busiest in Scotland and the third busiest in the UK, given all the activity on the Firth of Clyde, its closure cannot possibly be justified, so I am very concerned about the decision. I am similarly concerned about the closure of the Forth station and the downgrading of the Aberdeen station. However, I do not have enough time to go into that.

I hope that the UK Government will see common sense and that, at decision time, the Parliament will unite in sending a loud and clear message to the UK Government that we do not want the closures to go ahead. If the UK Government refuses to listen, that will add weight to the argument that the Scottish Parliament should have responsibility for Scotland's coastguard service.

10:45

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): On Tuesday, I heard about the UK Government's final decision to close the Forth maritime rescue co-ordination centre, which is in my constituency, with a mixture of anger, frustration and worry. I felt anger because the decision seems to be based largely on financial grounds, with the centre being another victim of the coalition's cuts dogma, whereby the need to reduce the deficit takes precedence, whatever the cost. I felt frustration because I believe that the consultation was little more than a sham in relation to Fife Ness and that it failed to take account of the interests of the workforce, the strong views of the local community and the importance of local knowledge. I felt worried because I fear that the UK Government's decision jeopardises the wellbeing and safety of all those who work in dangerous maritime conditions on our temperamental Scottish seas, which other members have mentioned.

It is important to consider exactly what the changes entail and what impact they will have on communities. The Fife peninsula juts out into the North Sea on the east coast. My constituency encompasses the easternmost point of the Fife peninsula, Fife Ness, which is home to the Forth MRCC. One glance at a map of the east coast

tells us nearly all that we need to know about the importance of having an MRCC in Fife. The Forth MRCC is responsible for protecting those who work and serve on the seas and coasts for a stretch of more than 300 miles along the east coast. To the south, the Firth of Forth is a bustling waterway. Further south lies the varied coastline of East Lothian and the Scottish Borders, with its many fishing villages and harbours. To the north lies nearly 100 miles of Angus and Aberdeenshire coast before the northern limit to the zone at Doonie Point.

We heard in Claire Baker's speech how busy the MRCC is, so I will not repeat that, but it goes without saying that the area concerned covers the site of the Forth replacement crossing, for which construction work is due to commence in the current parliamentary session. It represents Scotland's largest civil engineering project in a generation. There will soon be hundreds of builders, material deliveries and heavy machinery around the construction site. We need to ensure that the project is given the best possible safety provision in the form of a marine safety service that is fit for purpose.

In addition, the substantial volume of maritime traffic in the Firth of Forth and the adjacent waters is expected to increase enormously in the next few years in line with the expansion of offshore renewable energy developments. As for fishing, the east neuk is renowned for its fishing industry, which is vital to the local economy. In the past few years, Anstruther harbour has been upgraded to include a marina that caters for leisure sailing, which is rapidly growing in popularity. We should not forget that, as the Scottish Wildlife Trust has said, Scottish waters are home to internationally important numbers of breeding seabirds, many of which are in the Firth of Forth, and also grey seals, whales and dolphins. They all need to be considered.

The original UK Government consultation on modernising HM Coastguard was truly senseless. It proposed the closure of Shetland and Stornoway coastguard stations as well as the stations at Fife Ness and Clyde. I acknowledge the point that Tavish Scott made in that respect. Thankfully, the UK Government was made to see sense and to change the proposals, which would have left Scotland with only two coastguard stations. It elected to revise its proposals, but it still failed to recognise the vastness of Scotland's coastline and, as the Scottish Government stated in its response to the consultation, the expectation of increasing levels of activity in the Fife Ness area for the foreseeable future.

When the second consultation ran from July to October, we knew that it was likely to be academic for Fife Ness, and so it has proved. In effect, the

second consultation precluded any revision of the Government's initial proposal to close Fife Ness. Only time will tell what the impact will be of the decision to close MRCC Forth, but it is crystal clear after Tuesday's decision that Scotland cannot afford to allow Westminster to continue to make decisions that jeopardise Scottish interests, be they maritime or otherwise.

I will put the situation in perspective. Scotland has 60 per cent of the UK's coastline, but the figures in the second consultation document indicate that only 69 of the 324 staff will be based in Scotland. I reckon that that is just over 20 per cent, which speaks for itself. The UK leadership has proved to be insensitive, confused in its approach to modernisation and ineffective in addressing the coastguard provisions that need to be in place to ensure truly safe maritime activity in the 21st century.

The decision to close Fife Ness is yet another blow to my constituency, North East Fife, which is still coming to terms with the closure of RAF Leuchars and the continued uncertainty about the timetable for the Army's arrival. Once again, the coalition Government has proved itself to be a Government that does not listen—even to its own supporters, such as my namesake Ming Campbell. In July, he asked:

"Forth is a station offering value for money and increasingly busy because of the increase in leisure and commercial traffic—why on earth should it be a candidate for closure?"

Why on earth, indeed?

I deeply regret the decision that has been made and I hope that the Scottish Government will continue to press the case for reversing it. In any event, I hope that the Scottish Government will press for greater clarity on the timetable for closure and continue to press the case for devolving maritime safety.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): I thank Roderick Campbell for finishing well on time.

10:52

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): The consensus in the debate is welcome, but it is a bit disconcerting, because it makes it hard to find something to argue about or to say something that has not been mentioned already.

We obviously regret very much the announcement at Westminster by the shipping minister, Mike Penning. It is sad for my constituency and I hope that he does not come to regret it.

The consensus in the debate gives me an opportunity to highlight, despite its disappointing outcome, some positives from the campaign,

which I hope has not ended this week. We should never have had to fight the campaign, never mind lose it. The workers at Clyde coastguard centre are proud of their work, the knowledge and skills that they have acquired and the lives that they have saved. They have approached the adversity with great dignity. Although 31 jobs are under threat, that has never been at the centre of the workers' campaign. They are committed to their work and to what they have achieved over the years.

Stuart Atkinson, who is the PCS members' rep at the Navy buildings on Eldon Street in Greenock, has presented a compelling and forensic case for retaining the Clyde coastguard and has exposed many of the myths and the political posturing that are at the decision's heart. I am sad that it took the threat of closure before many people realised the importance and range of the work that the coastguard service does. The workers have got on with that quietly for many years and have delivered consistently. They have not looked for medals and have done a wonderful job.

Another positive is that the campaign has brought together levels of government—the Scottish Government and local authorities—and has gone across party-political divisions and local authority boundaries and rivalries. A year ago in the Parliament, I was pleased to gain the First Minister's support for the campaign. He made good on that. At my request, he met the campaigners at Bute House earlier this year, prior to the Scottish Government's response to the UK Government being submitted.

A year ago, when the announcement was made and we had a debate in the Parliament, I feared that it was already a done deal. Despite the compelling case that has been made, that has come to pass. Local knowledge has been dismissed. We have arrived at a decision that will ensure that traffic on the west coast of Scotland is managed outside Scotland—traffic that includes significant cargo traffic, MOD traffic, including nuclear submarines, 30 cruise liners a year with a large number of passengers, and significant ferry traffic with more than 4 million passengers, in waters whose dangers were vividly described by Mike MacKenzie.

The decision undoubtedly increases the potential for human, environmental—and, for Mr Penning and his Government, political—disaster. We now move to a new stage of the campaign—that of vigilance. Closure cannot be rushed; it cannot be taken forward—or taken for granted—without robust testing of the proposed network. The commitment to that has to be more significant and honest than the commitment to an open and transparent consultation, which we do not believe that we have had. I hope that the Scottish

Government will continue to work with the PCS members, the coastal communities and the wider emergency services to ensure that those networks are tested robustly and that the UK Government thinks again before it puts our coastal waters and the people who use them at further risk.

10:57

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): We have heard this morning about situations around the whole of Scotland's coastline, including Mike MacKenzie's gripping and compelling personal experiences. I share the frustration and deep disappointment that other members have about the decision to close the Forth and Clyde coastguard stations.

However, it is the future of the coastguard at Aberdeen that I wish to focus on, as there is perhaps no better example of the piecemeal and incompetent decision making that has been the hallmark of this process.

The original proposals that the UK Government first put on the table would have seen the coastguard's operation in Aberdeen upgraded to a maritime operations centre and staff more than doubled. However, at the end of this process the decision has been made that Aberdeen's watch-keeping staff should be reduced to the one-size-fits-all 23 members of staff that each maritime rescue co-ordination centre will have. Meanwhile, the single back-up maritime operations centre will be an unmanned station in Dover, which in an emergency will need staff to move from the main MOC located at Fareham, near Portsmouth.

I will not argue that the original proposals were in any way acceptable, given how much damage they would have done to coastguard provision in other parts of Scotland, but taking plans at Aberdeen from one extreme to another is extremely poor behaviour towards the staff there.

Placing both the primary and back-up maritime operations centre on the south coast of England is no way to build any kind of redundancy or resilience into the network, especially as it will take time to move staff to the back-up centre in an emergency, if that is even possible. The UK Government knows that full well, which is why the coastguard's two data centres are to be dispersed—one at the MOC on the south coast and one in Aberdeen. If there is an argument for dispersing the data centres—as there clearly is, to build resilience into the network—that should also apply to the maritime operations centres.

The valuable expertise that has been built up in Aberdeen as a result of the close work with the offshore industry cannot be overestimated. That expertise is a key component of safety in the offshore oil and gas industry.

Cutting staffing levels in Aberdeen will only reduce the effectiveness of the coastguard in co-ordinating offshore search and rescue and dealing with the unique challenges that it faces in relation to the oil and gas industry. A one-size-fits-all approach to staffing numbers is not appropriate when one MRCC faces additional responsibilities and challenges. Staff at Aberdeen have hard-won specialist knowledge that simply cannot be replicated by remote assistance from another station or the MOC. Oil and Gas UK has put its concerns about this move on record, and it is easy to see the major disruption to current incident plans that the proposals will cause.

The fact that Aberdeen's unique position in relation to the oil and gas industry means that more members of staff are required has been acknowledged by the UK Government, which has indicated that HQ officers will be posted there to liaise with the industry, in addition to the 23 watch-keeping staff. That is instead of building on the relationships that have already been established. However, it is the additional watch-keeping staff, who allow MRCC Aberdeen to cope with the safety demands of the oil and gas industry, that are to be cut. I have heard directly from those staff just how concerned they are about the impact that that will have.

Having the additional staff needed to maintain effective oil and gas incident co-ordination in Aberdeen would allow the site to operate as a far more effective and resilient stand-by MOC, without the inherent delays and drawbacks involved in using the site at Dover. That is the course of action that should have been taken in relation to Aberdeen, and the UK Government's failure to do that is truly baffling.

The entire process has been poorly handled, and it does nothing to put first the safety of people who use and work in the waters off our shores. With these changes coming so soon after the loss of the fleet of fixed-wing, long-range search and rescue aircraft, and with the future of the air rescue co-ordination centre at Kinloss still unclear, the UK Government seems determined to take extraordinary risks with people's lives in order to slash costs. That is why it is important to debate the issue in this Parliament and, at 5 pm tonight, to send a clear message to the Tories and Lib Dems in Westminster that their decision is unacceptable to Scotland. It has been interesting to watch Alex Fergusson and Tavish Scott defending their colleagues' stance. It is not difficult to see that both of them would have been on the other side of the argument if Labour had had an opportunity to take some of its proposals forward. We need the devolution of this responsibility, so that we can design a safety system tailored to the needs of Scotland's people, its industry and its coastline.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to closing speeches. We have a little time in hand for interventions. I remind members who are in the building but not currently in the chamber that they are expected to be present for the closing speeches.

11:03

Tavish Scott: Although Dave Thompson has temporarily left the chamber, I assure him that the next time that I meet Angus Robertson down in the lobby of the Parliament—he is often here—I will not tell him about Dave Thompson's suggestion that Mr Robertson and his SNP colleagues at Westminster are second best to all the SNP members here when it comes to representing Scotland. It is very important that I help Dave Thompson out with regard to what will be a tricky internal SNP argument.

Jamie Hepburn: Is that not a disingenuous representation of what Dave Thompson said? Was his point not that, fundamentally, 129 elected members of the Scottish Parliament are far better placed to make decisions for Scotland than 59 out of 650 Westminster MPs?

Tavish Scott: The member is absolutely right; my comment was disingenuous—indeed, it was deliberately so. I completely apologise for that. Further, because Mr Thompson is not here, I cannot make more fun of him, so there we are.

With regard to the broad theme that emerged during today's debate, I understand absolutely those who, like Duncan McNeil, wish to present the argument that, if something terrible happens and, in the worst case scenario, there is a loss of life, that will be a direct consequence of the decisions that have been taken or will be taken. I made that argument myself earlier this year when Shetland was under pressure. However, I counter it with a point that a couple of coastguard station staff made to me when I was on a visit to another part of Scotland during the election campaign. They reminded me that whichever coastguard deals with incidents, it will do so with the utmost professionalism and dedication. They gently asked me not to run the other services down when making a wider argument. In retrospect, I thought that that was entirely fair.

I suspect that we all have to tread glass on the issue, and we recognise that the proposals are by no means perfect. That is why I have repeatedly acknowledged the arguments of a number of members about Clyde and Fife Ness. I particularly recognise the local knowledge argument.

Of course, the local knowledge argument was every bit as relevant when Oban and Kirkwall were closed last time round. Claire Baker rightly mentioned the 344 miles of rugged coastline—

forgive me; that might have been Rod Campbell. The point is relevant and entirely fair, but the Parliament should look at some of the things that Mike Penning said on Tuesday. The argument is now being made that the investment in the local voluntary networks and the staff who support them will increase under the proposals, so a greater onus is being put on the local knowledge that I fundamentally believe in and that will support the response to the kind of incident that we all want to be tackled with the greatest professionalism.

Jean Urquhart: Given the member's emphasis on local knowledge, and in light of his amendment that

"recognises the importance of retaining the Emergency Towing Vessels",

what local knowledge did Mike Penning or the Conservative-Liberal Government listen to before they made decisions?

Tavish Scott: As Ms Urquhart should well know, the local knowledge that they listened to was that of Alistair Carmichael, who has been the local member of Parliament for the Northern Isles for a long time. He has made the case for the services, which is why Shetland will continue to have a base. [*Interruption.*]

I hope that members are not running down an MP who knows his constituency. That is exactly what Jamie Hepburn was doing—talk about disingenuous. That speaks for itself.

Jean Urquhart was right to raise the issue of the tug. It is a really important issue and her arguments were correct. However, I believe strongly that it is not in any Scottish taxpayer's interests to have a shockingly badly drawn up contract that costs a huge amount of money and serves only the interests of the salvage tug companies. If Ms Urquhart and others look closely at the contract, they will find out that the way in which it is drawn up does not mean that the salvage tugs will undertake the range of activities that could be achieved under a new and proper contract. I hope that Ms Urquhart and the Scottish Government will recognise that. An improved contract would gain much for the serving of the Minch, which Jean Urquhart rightly cares strongly about, the Western Isles, and the Northern Isles that Liam McArthur and I have the honour of representing.

I will also take up the point about Aberdeen. The minister and Lewis Macdonald made two or three eminently reasonable points about the importance of Aberdeen. First, my understanding is that, far from a diminution of the watches, the current watch structure will be maintained on a 24-hour basis. The minister and Mr Macdonald recognise that.

The minister and Mr Macdonald will know better than I do that the two oil and gas experts will be retained in Aberdeen. I appreciate that that is not as good as we might all wish, but surely it is positive that those two staff will still be there.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the member accept that, although he is absolutely right to say that the two specialists will remain in post, the decision not to upgrade Aberdeen to a maritime operations centre means that the chances are that the response to a major emergency in the North Sea will have to be co-ordinated from the only maritime operations centre in the country, on the south coast of England?

Tavish Scott: I have a little difficulty with that argument, because the recent BP exercise west of Shetland was co-ordinated from Shetland. If Maureen Watt had had her way, the Shetland station would have been closed—in effect, that is what she said—and all the staff would have been transferred from Shetland down to Aberdeen. That might have been great for her constituency, but it would not have been good for mine.

The serious point about that exercise is that it showed that some future oil and gas incident—which, by definition, we would wish to avoid—could be co-ordinated out of Shetland. It is important to recognise the ability of the Shetland and Aberdeen stations to work in harmony on such incidents, albeit that we would not wish that eventuality to arise.

Mike MacKenzie: Does the member agree that he might have taken an entirely different view of the matter if the Shetland station had not been saved?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if you would close soon, please, Mr Scott.

Tavish Scott: Unlike some others, I had every faith in my MP to get the job done. [*Interruption.*] SNP members whistle and boo, but Alistair Carmichael said that the Shetland station would stay open and it did. That is what is called doing your job as a constituency MP.

Maritime safety is an important issue. [*Interruption.*] SNP members can barrack as much as they like, but I will not accept Keith Brown's inference that I do not care about the sea. I have lived in the islands all my life. I do care about the sea, and I want the best solution for our seafarers.

11:11

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): The coastguard service is one of the most vital services that has been provided for our coastal communities over the years. It is obvious that the synergies that exist in the service mean that it can be delivered extremely effectively across large

areas and that it can, at times, be co-ordinated from areas that lie well beyond the area where an incident has occurred. I associate myself with Lewis Macdonald's argument that there is a good case for a service that covers the British isles and that devolution of control to individual areas is not necessary.

I pay tribute to the work that the coastguard service has done over many years, which has been a major factor in the avoidance of loss of life in many high-profile incidents. It is part of the way of life in our communities and no one would argue that the service that it provides is not vital. Therefore, it is disappointing that, at points during the debate, we have forgotten that we have a responsibility to work together to ensure that we deliver true representation for the communities concerned at this key moment.

I would like the cabinet secretary to have come to the debate with rather more of an open mind than he did, but the fact that he opened his speech with a remark about the "penny-pinching number crunchers" at Westminster is indicative of the positions that were drawn up at the start of the debate. Many speakers have made the criticism that the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats in the Parliament might be defending the interests of their Government in the south. That has done nothing to ensure that we find common ground at the end of the process.

The truth is that the proposals that were on the table had been there for some time. The earliest proposals predate the present Government entirely.

Lewis Macdonald: Will Mr Johnstone confirm that the proposals that began the process were published on 16 December 2010 and that they were proposals from Conservative ministers?

Alex Johnstone: I accept that publication date, but the proposals significantly predate it.

It is slightly disingenuous of the Labour Party, now that it is in opposition, to take the opportunist position of criticising the present proposals, even when they might be a significant improvement on the initial proposals, given that it pursued the same agenda when it was in government.

I would like to look in slightly greater detail at the nature of the Government's proposals. The changes will result in the loss of the Clyde and Forth centres. During the debate, we have heard a number of members defend their local interest by defending their local station. It is indeed the case that some local expertise may be put at risk by the changes, but I argue that the rearrangement that is taking place—particularly the strengthening of the centre in Belfast—will produce a robust and resilient service that will cover large areas of the Clyde.

Stuart McMillan: Does Alex Johnstone agree that closing the Clyde base, which is the busiest in Scotland and the third busiest in the UK, is not an acceptable proposal or the way ahead for the UK Government?

Alex Johnstone: As I was saying, we have seen a number of members defend their local interest, but the reorganisation of the service will not leave those areas uncovered. We will have cover in those areas but it will be co-ordinated from a different centre. We must remember that that is a key part of the proposal.

I must point out, as at least some have done during the debate, that the UK minister has made it clear that no centres will close until the robustness of the new system has been demonstrated. It is vital that that key condition is implemented.

Mike MacKenzie: How will the member know that the proposed new system is robust? If lives are lost at sea in future, how will he reconcile that with his conscience?

Alex Johnstone: The robustness of the new system is key to the proposal. In order to demonstrate that robustness, it will have to be demonstrated to the satisfaction of all members in this chamber. It is therefore vital that during this argument we do not allow wedges to be driven that will make us take predetermined positions that make it impossible to make progress in judging whether the robustness has been demonstrated.

Stuart McMillan: Will the member take another intervention?

Alex Johnstone: I have to make some progress before I come to a close.

We can see that point in, for example, the flexibility that has emerged on emergency towing vessels. The opportunity exists to make progress in that case during the three-month extension that has been granted.

Jean Urquhart: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his last minute.

Alex Johnstone: It is something of a disappointment to me that we have heard the SNP Government use the opportunity to drive a wedge between Scotland and England. Of course, that is the SNP's fundamental objective, and it was no surprise to hear the minister's opening speech. It is perhaps slightly more of a disappointment to hear a similar tone in some of the Labour speeches, albeit not quite so forcefully put.

We must remember that the coastguard service provides good-quality provision across the whole of the United Kingdom, that it is stronger working together than it is broken up into its constituent

parts, and that as a consequence of the reorganisation we will achieve a great deal that we set out to achieve, including improved conditions for staff in many cases.

The proposals are not ideal. They will require to be demonstrated to be successful, and there are aspects of them that may yet need to be subject to further review. However, the Government has taken the opportunity to deliver a service that will be robust, provide the service that we require and be the basis for a continuing, safe and reliable coastguard service in the long term in the United Kingdom.

11:19

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I welcome the debate. Although there has not been a huge amount of consensus, it is important that the Parliament sends a strong message that no savings should be made at the cost of lives.

Duncan McNeil talked about the campaign for the Clyde coastguard and how it had brought to the fore the level of service that we expect and, indeed, perhaps do not often recognise, from the coastguard service. Like others, I pay tribute to the service that we receive and to the men and women who deliver it quietly day in, day out.

I want to be clear that although Labour rightly brought forward a review, the current proposals have come from the Tory and Lib Dem Government. I welcome some of the proposals. Indeed, I welcome the changes in the terms and conditions of coastguard officers. Those are well overdue. I also recognise that the proposals have changed since they were initially published on 16 December 2010. I welcome the retention of the Stornoway and Shetland coastguard stations. The councils and the local people ran a strong campaign in those places. Local people took to the streets to fight for their local services. I pay tribute to their efforts, which reversed the decisions, and welcome the change that took place.

Many members talked about the tugs—the emergency towing vessels—that are available in the North Sea and the Minch. I welcome the extension of the contract to December, but we need to have more detail about what will replace it. Richard Lochhead previously asked the Westminster Government to allow time for a solution to be put in place. That time has been given, and I would be interested to hear what talks he has had with the UK Government on what can be put in place to guard our seas.

Jamie Hepburn talked about the Scottish Wildlife Trust submission to the Parliament, which mentions the cost of the Exxon Valdez clean-up operation, which was more than \$2 billion. Lewis Macdonald mentioned the clean-up operation for

the Braer disaster, which was £100 million. The saving from the proposal to cut the tugs is £34 million over four and a half years. I recognise that the contract may not be ideal, but why get rid of the tugs altogether? We need them, but perhaps we also need a better contract. If we were to unite around that, it would also send a strong message to our colleagues at Westminster.

We also need clarity on the changes in Aberdeen. On that point, I am not so happy about the changes from the earlier proposals, which favoured two marine operations centres: one in Aberdeen that would serve the oil and gas industries—and, indeed, the offshore renewables industries as those develop—and another one in Portsmouth or Southampton.

The UK Government has decided against that and is going for one centre at Fareham with a back-up in Dover. However, we really need a marine operations centre in Scotland and Aberdeen is ideally placed for that because of the expertise that it holds on the oil and gas industry. If the plan for the centre there goes through, it will be the only one with expertise on oil and gas, because we will lose Liverpool and Yarmouth, which also have knowledge in that crucial area. It is important that a marine operations centre have that specialised expertise, and I ask for the proposals to be reconsidered.

Many speakers talked about the Clyde coastguard area. I share those concerns. I am an MSP for the Highlands and Islands region. The busy passenger ferry services that run from Argyll use the Clyde coastguard service, so the closure of the Clyde station would be a retrograde step. Colleagues such as Neil Bibby pointed out that it is the third-busiest station in the UK, so we can only assume that the reason for closing it is the costs that are associated with relocation.

Keith Brown: Neil Bibby said that he would consider devolution of the coastguard functions only if it was in the Scottish interest. Does Rhoda Grant agree that the prospect of losing the jobs and expertise that she mentioned cannot represent a better service to the Scottish interest than would devolution of the functions to us?

Rhoda Grant: I fear that the minister misquotes Neil Bibby, who was clear that any devolution had to be in the Scottish interest. He also pointed out that a service that covers the whole UK—the sea does not stop at the border—had to be run at the UK level.

I do not agree with the Scottish National Party Government's call to devolve the functions. Like Neil Bibby, I say that we need the UK Government to provide an adequate and workable service rather than a devolved one. How can the SNP call for a centre in Aberdeen that would cover the

whole of the UK while asking for the service to be devolved? That does not add up.

What we need are proposals from the UK Government that work for not only Scotland, but the whole of the UK. I am as worried about Scottish boats getting into trouble in English seas as I am about English boats getting into trouble in Scottish seas. Any initiative has to be UK-led.

Jamie Hepburn: Will the member give way?

Dave Thompson: Will the member give way?

Rhoda Grant: I have taken a number of interventions and am now running out of time, so I will press on. I simply do not agree that the service should be devolved.

Many members have referred to the lives that could be lost with the closure of the Forth coastguard service. The Forth replacement crossing was mentioned in that regard but, as Claire Baker pointed out, we also need to take into account the effect of offshore renewables, the development of what we hope will be a busy ferry port that will bring more work into the Forth and the tankers at Grangemouth. Losing that service could have very bad consequences for the whole area, and we need to look carefully at the issue. Indeed, an impact assessment must be carried out on all centres, not just Scottish ones, before they are closed; after all, as we have heard, Liverpool MRCC covers the Dumfries and Galloway area. Given that the Clyde and Forth centres are due to be closed in March 2013, there is very little time to carry out such work and I urge the Scottish Government to prevail on Westminster colleagues to make this an urgent priority.

We need a marine operations centre in Aberdeen to cover oil and gas—and if there is to be only one such centre in the UK, the Parliament should fight for it to be in Aberdeen. The AAIB's recommendation on helicopter safety must be implemented as soon as possible and we need to find out what is going to happen to ETVs. We cannot do without them and getting rid of them is simply a false economy.

My colleague Lewis Macdonald talked about the firefighting at sea capability of certain fire and rescue services in Scotland. Given the plans to introduce a Scottish fire service, I ask the Government to confirm whether that capability will be retained.

With the use of marine, wind, wave and tidal energy hugely increasing marine activity, we need more, not less, protection at sea. Lives depend on an early response to major incidents and, given that people are unlikely to survive for any period of time in our really cold waters, delay can spell disaster. We must always review, update and change; indeed, no one is arguing that service

delivery cannot be improved. However, the proposals will make no such improvement and, unfortunately, might well cost lives.

11:27

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): I thank all members who have spoken in the debate. Whatever their political party, they have highlighted a number of key concerns; obviously some are more concerned about certain issues than others but, given their local connections, that is only natural. However, the fact that this is the third debate on this matter shows the strength of feeling in Parliament and the weight that it is giving the issue.

Maritime safety is a matter of great concern to me and my ministerial colleagues. Members will no doubt be aware that in October Richard Lochhead and I sent a joint letter to Mike Penning to draw his attention to our formal response to the coastguard consultation and to express our on-going concern over the future of emergency towing vessels. I take this opportunity to offer my continued thanks and admiration to all those involved in ensuring that users of our maritime environment are kept safe, whether they be volunteer coastguards, lifeboat and Royal National Lifeboat Institution teams or MCA employees. It is a tribute to MCA employees that they can continue to provide a professional, first-class response to incidents occurring around our shores at a time when their own future employment with the MCA is uncertain. Duncan McNeil, in particular, made that point, and I am sure that everyone in the chamber will agree that their attitude is very much to be admired.

On Rhoda Grant's response to my intervention, I accept that the Labour Party's position is that we need an integrated UK maritime safety network. However, now that that network has been put in such jeopardy, would she prefer to have those functions devolved to Scotland or to lose those jobs, services and local expertise? We would certainly prefer the functions to be devolved.

Jamie Hepburn: Does the minister share my perplexity? Surely the logical extension of the position—that the seas do not recognise borders—espoused by Rhoda Grant in response to his intervention is that there should not be a UK coastguard; rather, the UK coastguard should be merged with the French or Irish coastguard. That position is surely nonsense. Surely a Scottish coastguard could co-operate with the remainder of the UK coastguard.

Keith Brown: I certainly understand the member's point, but we have to face what is happening. A number of members have made the point that things will happen fairly soon. People's

safety and the security of people's jobs are at stake, which is why we have to take positions, and our position is that the functions should be devolved.

The Scottish Government values the important role that all the MRCCs that are located in Scotland play, and it recognises the important work of MRCCs beyond our borders, where there is an obvious overlap that covers complex areas of our seas. That overlap is natural, and such work happens between other countries. For the most part, we restricted our comments in our response to the consultation to the Scottish MRCCs, but we are extremely aware of the need to continue an appropriate level of cross-border cover. As I said, such cover exists in many places around the world.

Lewis Macdonald: Does the minister agree with Maureen Watt that the most appropriate place for a standby maritime operations centre for the entire UK coastline is Aberdeen rather than Dover?

Keith Brown: I was extremely impressed by the points that Maureen Watt made, which I will come on to in a few moments. I will cover that point if I can.

The Clyde station is in an existing pairing of UK stations, and it is difficult to see how the existing high level of local knowledge can be maintained under the new structure, particularly when we consider the complex combinations of traffic. For example, I think that it was Stuart McMillan who said that the west coast traffic includes ferries, commercial vessels and leisure and military traffic. I have often sailed recreationally in those waters, and I know that the military traffic is constant and that it has its own dangers. That is why we must have the cover and local expertise that have been mentioned. I stress that I am not in any way criticising the work and professionalism of the Belfast operation; rather, I am reflecting our concern that the revised structure that the MCA has proposed does not provide sufficient resilience.

I return to a point that Lewis Macdonald and Maureen Watt raised. There cannot be resilience by having the MOC function on the south coast of England, hundreds of miles away from the crucial area of the North Sea—Lewis Macdonald mentioned that—and especially oil and gas operations. If the back-up is a non-staffed function on the south coast of England, that is not resilience or the right way to serve those interests. That is why we are firmly of the view that the Scottish MRCCs should be retained. We have not said that there should be only one centre in the UK; rather, we have said that there should be one in Scotland, and it should be in Aberdeen.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the minister take an intervention?

Keith Brown: I would like to make a bit more progress. If I have time at the end, I will come back to the member.

A number of members have mentioned the Forth station. The Clyde and Forth stations play vital roles and cover vast and complex areas of coastline, and it remains the Scottish Government's view that they should be retained.

Unusually, two references were made to the constitution. Neither was made by Scottish National Party members. Tavish Scott made a somewhat limp reference to constitutional referenda. It is interesting to note the number of accusations that were made in the previous session about the SNP being obsessed by constitutional referenda, but such references are increasingly being made by the Lib Dems.

I completely agree with Lewis Macdonald that an MOC should be retained at Aberdeen, but he made the point that doing so would have been part of a union dividend. We must consider what that is if it is not a union dividend. The tax changes for the oil and industry and the loss of expertise from Aberdeen represent anything but a dividend to Scotland. We must consider whether such functions are best served by the involvement of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government, or by the involvement of the UK Government.

There is almost a former Lib Dem leaders club commenting on the issue. Charlie Kennedy said that the

"suggestions flew in the face of all common sense".—
[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 22 November 2011; Vol 536, c 166.]

Jim Wallace said that it is important to keep local knowledge and expertise—he did not just mean in the northern isles—and Ming Campbell thinks that the proposals that have been proposed this week are "profoundly mistaken". As far as I am aware, we have not yet heard from the current Lib Dem leader, Willie Rennie, on whether he supports the closure of the facility on the Forth, which is in the area that he represents.

We can contrast the comments of those previous Lib Dem leaders with what Tavish Scott said. As I have said previously, he really sees the matter as an opportunity to attack the SNP Government rather than take to task proposals that have been made by the Government at Westminster that he supports.

It is difficult to see how, in the structure that the UK Government has announced, the areas that I mentioned can be adequately covered without significant loss of vital local knowledge, as

members have said. I think that it was Alasdair Allan who, in a previous debate, made the point that even the mispronunciation of place names can cause confusion and potentially endanger vessels and lives.

The concerns that Lewis Macdonald expressed about the Aberdeen MRCC cannot be overstated. Although the MCA has assured us that it intends the current role in relation to oil and gas liaison to continue, it is difficult to see how that will be managed in the context of a significant reduction in staffing levels. As a number of members, including Rhoda Grant, said, although terms and conditions will be improved for the people in the service who keep their jobs, many people will lose their jobs as a result of the changes. That must be of concern to all members. We will continue to press the UK Government on that point and others, and we expect the MCA to provide early advice and support to staff at all affected stations, to ensure that people are aware of the options that are available to them in the new structure. We urge the MCA to avoid compulsory redundancies.

We welcome the three-month reprieve for the ETVs that was offered at the last minute and the attention that the Scotland Office is now giving the matter. Marine Scotland is formally part of the ETV working group, and officials from that agency and Transport Scotland have provided information and advice to the Scotland Office to help in the search for a solution that ensures that our seas continue to receive the required level of protection. Only last week, Richard Lochhead met David Mundell MP to discuss the matter with him and his officials. Richard Lochhead was able to press on Mr Mundell the importance of having adequate provision in place and of guaranteeing that there will be no break in cover prior to the implementation of a suitable long-term solution, which is crucial.

We are confident that that message was put across and that at that point the Scotland Office was in agreement with our view. It was also highlighted that the terms of the devolution settlement under the Scotland Act 1998 are clear. Funding for ETVs is a reserved matter and the Scottish Government cannot and will not provide funding to compensate for cuts that Westminster imposes. As members said during the debate, it is simply not sustainable for us to continue to pick up and provide funding for functions that were previously financed by Westminster. As I have said before, a much better and more sustainable approach would be to devolve the function and the budget.

In conclusion, I reiterate two key points.

Lewis Macdonald: The minister might intend to mention this matter in his conclusion. I remind him of the question that I asked during my speech

about whether the Scottish fire service will take responsibility for firefighting at sea.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Minister, you have until 11.40 am.

Keith Brown: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Lewis Macdonald knows that fire and rescue services currently have the power to respond to incidents, should they feel that it is necessary to do so, and that they can charge for their services. The Scottish Government is considering the future delivery of fire and rescue services in Scotland. It is unfortunate that the UK Government did not discuss its proposals on firefighting at sea with us in advance of making its announcement. That is an important point, given what was said last year about the respect agenda. It is important that we continue to consider the matter and we will do so in the context of our review of fire and rescue services. However, the primary responsibility and the responsibility for the withdrawal of funding lie with the UK Government.

It is clear to us that devolution of MRCCs to Scotland should take place, alongside devolution of the funding, by which I mean the funding that is currently in place rather than the post-cut funding. That is the only way of ensuring that the current structure is preserved in a way that will allow the people who use our seas and coastline to receive the level of cover that they currently receive.

As Richard Lochhead said, we estimate that the proposals would realise savings of about £3.6 million—a sum that is recouped in taxes from North Sea oil and gas in three hours of production.

Alex Fergusson: Will the minister give way?

Keith Brown: I am sorry, I am in my final half minute.

We must consider what we will lose in jobs and in safety for the sake of savings of £3.6 million.

Given the wide-ranging list of downgrading measures in relation to maritime and marine safeguards, whether we are talking about MIRC funding, aircraft provision—we heard about the Nimrods—or uncertainty over ETVs, it is clear to us that there is a lack of a coherent, strategic approach to the issues. I assure members that the Scottish Government will continue to press the UK Government and to work alongside all affected stakeholders to resist the cuts and push for joined-up thinking, to keep our seas as safe as they can be.

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:40

“Strategic Transport Projects Review”

1. Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will revisit the “Strategic Transport Projects Review” to prioritise the Aberdeen to central belt rail enhancements. (S4O-00389)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): The Aberdeen to central belt rail enhancements are included in the STPR recommendations. We have already seen improvements since 2008, including faster journey times and service frequency enhancements along the route. As I indicated in June, we have asked Network Rail to re-examine the proposals for the route to deliver additional incremental improvements. It will report next year.

Nanette Milne: As the minister knows, Aberdeen and the north-east is arguably the powerhouse of the Scottish economy, yet there is a feeling that, under the Scottish National Party Government, north-east rail commuters have not seen real improvements. I acknowledge that there have been some improvements in the timing of services between Aberdeen and the central belt. Following the positive news that the House of Commons Transport Committee has backed proposals for a high-speed line between London and Scotland, when can north-east commuters expect to see real improvements to the rail network between Aberdeen and the central belt?

Keith Brown: The member refers to the report of that committee, but I would like the same commitment to be made by the United Kingdom Government. Currently, the UK Government has given no commitment to have high-speed rail come to Scotland, although we are working with our colleagues in the Scotland Office and at Westminster to ensure that it does. The line could produce massive benefits not just for cross-border services, but for services right through to Aberdeen. As I said, we are seeking to improve the route; indeed, we have improved it already. However, further major improvements could come through high-speed rail, and I welcome the member's support for that position.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Does the minister share the view of previous transport ministers of all parties, both at Westminster and at Holyrood, that the east coast main line does not stop at Edinburgh?

Keith Brown: I do not want to prejudice any consultations that might be on-going, of which the member is well aware. The idea has been raised of whether stopping services there could improve services that are not cross-border services, so that we could have improved services between Edinburgh and Aberdeen. However, it would not be wise to downgrade an existing very good service in order to improve another service. I hope that that helps the member with the point that he is making.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):

What reassurances can the Scottish Government give to those who are concerned about the future of the Highland Chieftain and the Caledonian sleeper services following the publication of Transport Scotland's “Rail 2014” consultation?

Keith Brown: My guidance would be that they should read those parts of the document that refer to the possibility of enhancing the sleeper services. I reassure the member that patronage of the sleeper services has increased substantially in recent years, which shows that there is a demand for those services. Nevertheless, as I am sure he will agree, there are ways in which the services could be improved. We are equally open—perhaps more open—to the idea of enhancing the services through the consultation to which he refers.

Hunterston Coal-fired Power Station (Opposition)

2. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government whether it acknowledges the level of opposition to the proposed coal-fired power station at Hunterston. (S4O-00390)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson):

I confirm that, to date, 20,583 letters of objection to the Hunterston development have been received. Those will be taken into consideration in determining the application.

Kenneth Gibson: Given the level of statutory and public opposition, what steps can be taken to persuade Ayrshire Power to withdraw its application and save everyone the cost of a public local inquiry?

Stewart Stevenson: As it is an active application that the Government may have to determine, I cannot speak specifically to the question that has been asked. However, in general, it is important that, in relation to any planning application, those who feel that their interests would be disadvantaged were it to be approved continue to pursue their objections and ensure that everyone is aware of them.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

Will the minister confirm that onshore wind farms are productive for only around 25 per cent of the time and that, as the Institution of Civil Engineers stated earlier this week, coal-fired power stations will be essential to secure the energy supply in Scotland in the future?

Stewart Stevenson: It is interesting to note that even when the nuclear station on the west coast of Scotland was out of operation for a while it caused us no problems whatsoever. There has been much debate about the transmission of electricity across the Scotland-England border. It is worth making the point that in December last year, 97 per cent of electricity that crossed the border did so in a southerly direction. With the increase in renewable energy in Scotland, that percentage can only rise.

Smarter Choices, Smarter Places

3. Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it will report on the outcome of the smarter choices, smarter places scheme and the impact that it has had on encouraging active travel. (S4O-00391)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): Monitoring and evaluation of the smarter choices, smarter places programme are on-going. The impacts that the programme has had on encouraging active travel will be reported in the final evaluation by the end of 2012.

Jim Eadie: Has the minister had the opportunity to examine the research by cycling campaign group Spokes, which showed a 12 per cent increase in the number of cyclists across Edinburgh? Does he agree that the Scottish Government must continue to invest in cycling and walking? Will he meet me and representatives of Spokes and the Bike Station at Causewayside in my constituency to discuss what more can be done to support active travel, given the obvious environmental and health benefits that it brings?

Keith Brown: Yes, I am aware of the rising number of cyclists in Edinburgh. I take this opportunity to praise City of Edinburgh Council members and officers for their commitment and leadership in making the city such an active travel success story. I recently had the chance to cycle into the city on an excellent cycle route. To my mind, the other local authorities should look closely at what Edinburgh has done and try to follow suit.

Last week, I attended the Cycling Scotland conference in Glasgow and took questions on the draft budget from delegates, including one from a Spokes representative. However, I am happy to meet the member and the two constituency interests that he mentioned.

Agri-environment Schemes

4. Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it assessed the future demand for agri-environment schemes when developing the current draft budget and spending review. (S4O-00392)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): We took a range of factors into account, such as demand under the current and previous programmes and the views of key stakeholders. A key part of the process was to ensure that funding is available to deliver key benefits to Scotland's environment, such as biodiversity.

Funding continues to be available and results from the two previous agri-environment rounds show a consistent level of approvals. We have already announced that a full agri-environment funding round will take place in 2012.

Elaine Murray: Does the Government have contingency plans if there is a surge in applications towards the end of the round? The minister may remember that that happened with the rural stewardship scheme as it came to an end. Can he reassure members that demand will not be managed down by changing criteria or cancelling schemes?

Stewart Stevenson: We very much value the contribution that the schemes have made to date. For example, we have invested £33 million in hedgerows since 2008 and we have seen a significant improvement in biodiversity from that expenditure. We wish to ensure that in managing the issues that the member referred to, such as a surge in applications, we continue to deliver important benefits for biodiversity.

Prisons (Overcrowding)

5. Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it plans to tackle overcrowding in prisons. (S4O-00393)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): We are committed to building or renovating new prisons. HMP Low Moss will come on stream in March 2012 and later that year construction will start on HMP Grampian, which will ease overcrowding in the short to medium term.

The Scottish Government has also introduced a range of reforms that we believe will reduce prison overcrowding, including the introduction of the community payback order, a new approach to young people who offend—the whole system approach—and a presumption against short sentences. Those reforms will take time to have an impact on the prison population, but we are confident that they will do so.

Mary Fee: In a recent visit to HMP Barlinnie, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice said:

“We’ve got to make sure that prison isn’t used routinely for short-term prisoners where it doesn’t benefit them and it doesn’t benefit us.”

Can the cabinet secretary update us on progress in setting up the Scottish sentencing council, so that sentencing can be more consistent and transparent?

Kenny MacAskill: I am in discussion with the Lord President on those matters. There are cost implications. Work is on-going to make High Court decisions clearer and more available across the judicial spectrum and publicly.

We are committed to a sentencing council, which the Parliament voted for. I believe that it will be of benefit to the whole justice system. In the interim, matters have been taken up by the courts themselves to ensure we get greater clarity and consistency. In a time of financial austerity, taking the time to ensure that resources are used appropriately and taking appropriate steps to ensure that we improve matters is a balanced and appropriate approach.

Pibble Mine (Site of Special Scientific Interest Designation)

6. Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on Scottish Natural Heritage’s proposal to remove the site of special scientific interest designation from Pibble mine in Wigtownshire. (S4O-00394)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 grants Scottish Natural Heritage the power to denotify all or any part of a site of special scientific interest where it considers that its natural features are no longer of special interest.

In the case of Pibble mine, the importance of the sole natural feature of interest was reconsidered as a result of the British Geological Survey’s geological conservation review, and it was judged that the site no longer met the qualifying criteria for notification as an SSSI.

Alex Fergusson: The minister is correct, but the British Geological Survey’s review was published in 1998, some 13 years ago—one might have thought that action would have been taken by now. The same review recommends the removal of the designation of several other SSSIs, yet only Pibble mine is currently to have it removed.

Is the minister aware that Pibble mine lies on the site of a proposed wind farm development, and that the other sites that the review mentions do

not? Does the minister believe that that is just a coincidence?

Stewart Stevenson: SNH has notified and confirmed 10 SSSI denotifications in full and four in part, and has notified but is yet to confirm a further four denotifications in full and two in part.

With regard to the evaluation of Pibble mine, if the information had been available when it was designated, it would never have been designated in the first place as the number of points that its scores falls well below the designation level.

Council Tax Freeze

7. Margaret Burgess (Cunninghame South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it considers that local authorities will maintain the council tax freeze in 2012-13. (S4O-00395)

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Aileen Campbell): The Scottish Government is committed to maintaining the council tax freeze for the remainder of the current session of Parliament and is currently working with local authorities to deliver it for 2012-13.

Margaret Burgess: The minister’s answer is reassuring, particularly as Labour politicians in my constituency—and recently in the chamber—seem to be confused about their party’s position on the council tax freeze. Will she confirm how much she expects the council tax freeze will save hard-pressed families in North Ayrshire between now and 2016?

Aileen Campbell: Margaret Burgess will be pleased to know that the average saving for a council tax band D dwelling over the current session of Parliament will be more than £1,136. That is on top of the savings that have been made in the previous parliamentary session, thereby providing hard-working families with a cumulative saving of £1,239 throughout the lifetime of the policy.

The policy involves the Scottish National Party Government doing what it can with the powers that it has to protect hard-working families. Along with policies such as the abolition of prescription charges and the provision of free tuition, the council tax freeze provides tangible help for real people’s lives, and it helps the constituents of North Ayrshire, about whom I know Margaret Burgess cares so passionately.

Statutory Repairs (City of Edinburgh Council)

8. Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is regarding the statutory repairs system for shared buildings in the City of Edinburgh Council area. (S4O-00396)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): I am aware that there is an on-going audit and police investigation into the statutory repairs system at the City of Edinburgh Council. That is potentially a serious issue, and it is right that it is fully investigated. It would not be appropriate for the Scottish Government to comment while the investigation is on-going.

Marco Biagi: It is clear that I do not have to impress on the cabinet secretary the importance of the matter and the concerns that have been filling my mailbag for some months. Does he believe that, in the event that the current investigations find any evidence of wrongdoing, there may be a role for the Scottish Government in addressing the underlying framework to ensure that such problems do not happen again?

Alex Neil: The Scottish Government will take cognisance of any recommendations from the council as a result of the investigation. It is far too early for me to comment, but in principle the Government always listens to recommendations on where we need to improve our own procedures.

College Budgets (Widening Access to Education)

9. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what impact its proposed reductions to college budgets will have on widening access to education. (S4O-00397)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): Further education colleges already offer learning opportunities to students from a wide variety of backgrounds. Our plans for reforming post-16 learning are predicated on ensuring that such provision is better aligned with jobs and growth, is sustainable and continues to focus on improving life chances. As part of that reform we want to consider how best to ensure wider access to all post-16 learning, including that offered by colleges.

Ken Macintosh: Does the cabinet secretary agree that of our further and higher education institutions, our colleges have the best record of serving disadvantaged communities? Is he aware of concerns among some of our most vulnerable learners—those with additional needs—that they are already being disproportionately affected by the cuts?

Michael Russell: The record of our further education colleges is very good, but that does not mean that it cannot improve. I am spending a considerable amount of time talking to college principals and students in colleges. I am endeavouring to set to one side the

scaremongering in order to talk about how we can focus the resource that we have—a resource that is under a great deal of pressure from the coalition Government and which would have been under pressure from a Labour Government—on where it counts, and in particular on those who are distant from the labour market and who need the best opportunities.

The reform of post-16 education can produce better results for more people. The opportunities for all guarantee is part of that. I would have expected Opposition support for ensuring the effective use of resource and the betterment of our colleges but, alas, the Opposition is always looking backwards.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): The minister will be aware of on-going discussions between colleges in Ayrshire and Renfrewshire regarding amalgamation. Will he update us on the progress of those talks and the likely implications for FE colleges in Ayrshire and Renfrewshire?

Michael Russell: The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council and the Government published a paper on regionalisation last week. An active discussion is taking place among a range of colleges about how they should take forward the regionalisation agenda.

The exact solutions will depend on the pattern of provision and what those colleges wish to achieve. I had a positive discussion with a group of principals and chairs last night about how regionalisation was moving forward. I encourage every member to talk to their local further education college, to be part of the process of change and to ensure that the resource that we have is applied to the front line of education, and not to the back room.

Common Grazings

10. Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the role of common grazings with regard to the future of crofting. (S4O-00398)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): We recognise that common grazings are an important part of crofting and bring economic, environmental and social benefits to the Highlands and Islands. We promote their use through better regulation and financial support. One of the Crofters Commission's key objectives, in its corporate plan for 2011 to 2014, is to encourage better shared management of common land.

Financial support is provided through the single farm payment and the Scottish rural development programme. The reform of the common agricultural policy will provide the opportunity to

look again at how support for common grazings is provided.

Jean Urquhart: With reference to the review of the common agricultural policy and the draft proposals for non-historic direct payments post-2013, unintended consequences of the change could be abandonment and further economic decline. Will the minister agree to work with stakeholders to find a mechanism to ensure that common grazings receive equitable payments per hectare of land managed?

Stewart Stevenson: We regard common grazings as an important part of the economy of the Highlands and Islands. There are 921 such grazings. We will see a different kind of oversight through the election of members to the Crofters Commission next year. The appropriate order is before Parliament and I believe that it will be considered in committee shortly.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The minister is aware that the most recent crofting acts put burdens on grazings clerks to report on the crofting activities of other tenants. Will he review that in light of the disharmony that it causes in crofting communities?

Stewart Stevenson: It is clear that one of the huge benefits of changing the way in which we manage crofting is that we have good, accurate maps. We are strongly encouraging crofters with a shared interest in the grazings to collaborate on that, and the early feedback is that that approach is working well.

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. (S4F-00293)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Carrying forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Iain Gray: At a time like this, we should all be focused on jobs and the economy but, week by week, more and more questions are raised about Scotland's future—about European Union membership, the euro, defence policy, defence contracts, NATO membership, International Monetary Fund membership, renewables investment, pensions and benefits. The First Minister has no credible answers and the uncertainty is corrosive. Why can he not steady the ship by deciding on a date for his referendum?

The First Minister: On the referendum, I thought that what we would do is to stick to the policy that we outlined in the election campaign, which as I remember was quite successful. That is to say that we would hold the referendum on Scottish independence in the second half of this parliamentary term. My submission would be that, if we changed that, Iain Gray and others would come to the chamber and denounce us for being elected with an overwhelming majority under false pretences. Why does the Scottish National Party not carry on with its policy of keeping faith with the Scottish people on the basis that the Scottish people have kept faith with the Scottish National Party?

Iain Gray: That excuse does not really wash any more, does it? The timeline is something that he blurted out off the top of his head when he was in a corner in a television debate in Perth—I was there. It is not in his manifesto, no matter how many times craven back benchers try to pretend that it was. Everyone knows the real reason why he will not name the date: opinion polls such as this week's, which showed that 72 per cent of Scots do not support separation. Is that not why he cannot decide on a date?

The First Minister: We have had a range of opinion polls and they have shown substantial and increasing support for independence for Scotland.

Iain Gray gives the game away, because the reason why he talks about separation is that he is frightened of the concept of Scottish independence. All I can say to him is that, given the electoral track record, I think that our

interpretation of the wishes of the Scottish people has been validated more often than Iain Gray's interpretation has. The Government was first elected in 2007 and it was re-elected with a massive majority six months ago. We were elected on a perspective that would offer the people of Scotland the right to determine our constitutional future in a referendum on Scottish independence. That is exactly what we will do, and that consistency of purpose is one of the reasons for the overwhelming success of the Scottish National Party.

Iain Gray: The reason why Alex Salmond talks about normal countries, devo max, indy light and fiscal autonomy is that he is scared to talk about separation, which is what he supports.

Listen—if we cannot have a date because he cannot decide on a date, surely we can agree on the rules. I assume that the First Minister wants an honest and fair referendum, so any right-thinking person would think that the Electoral Commission should oversee it. It regulates elections to the Scottish Parliament and it scrutinises elections and referenda all over the world. Sir David Steel thinks that we should use it—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Order.

Iain Gray: George Reid thinks that we should use it, and he is a lifelong nationalist. Why is the First Minister so scared of having the Electoral Commission scrutinise his referendum?

The First Minister: When we set out the referendum bill, I assure you that it will pass even Iain Gray's test of fairness and impartiality. Of course it will be scrutinised and it will be balanced, and it will be balanced by authorities that are accountable to this Parliament. That is an important thing for parliamentary democracy.

Iain Gray does not have to quote Liberal Democrats. I will quote a few Labour figures' comments on the arguments that I present:

"the SNP clearly stated that any referendum would be held later in the life of this parliament. That's what many Scots voted for, that's what gave Mr Salmond his majority and that's the mandate which the SNP has ... It's absurd now to ask him to break one of his flagship promises the minute the Scottish Parliament reconvenes just because it might be politically convenient for those who oppose independence."

That was said by Hugh Henry MSP. [*Applause.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: I have a range of quotes on the issue that stretch back to one of my predecessors, Henry McLeish and, lo, unto Malcolm Chisholm writing in *The Scotsman* this very morning. Once Iain Gray manages—in the few weeks that remain to him as leader—to

organise his party to support his view, he can then come and tell me what that view is.

Iain Gray: I really think—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Iain Gray: I really think that David Steel and George Reid know a little bit about accountability to the Scottish Parliament—they were both Presiding Officers of it.

I say as gently as possible to the First Minister that, before I finish my job, perhaps I will get him to listen to the question. I asked him what the date will be. If it will be in 2014, 2015 or 2016, that is fine—just tell us what it is. The longer this goes on, the more it looks as if Alex Salmond is trying to rig the referendum to get the result that he wants.

A couple of weeks ago, the First Minister said that he would bring Scotland's claim of right to the Parliament to reaffirm it. It says that the people have the right to decide

"the form of Government best suited to their needs".

I tell him that Labour will have no trouble with that—we have already signed the claim of right. He is the one who could not put his name to it. Why? Because he has always put party before principle. Is that not why he cannot name a date in the first half, second half or any half of the parliamentary session?

The First Minister: I welcome Iain Gray's clear statement about a referendum in the second half of the parliamentary session—I think that he said that that was fine. We shall hold him and his successor to that commitment.

I responded to Iain Gray's questions on which he wanted me to be specific. Through an excellent quote from Hugh Henry, I pointed out that some people in the Labour Party recognise that that party lost the election and must accept the mandate from the Scottish people. One of my predecessors, Henry McLeish, has written about that this week. In relation to the attempted sabre-rattling from the Conservatives, aided and abetted by—perhaps in cahoots with—the Labour Party, the former First Minister said:

"It's a Scottish matter and the mischief making that we've seen at Westminster isn't of any help. Westminster should keep out of the referendum and not meddle.

How can anyone at Westminster be so divorced from reality to deliver an insult to the Scottish people in this way and to heap contempt upon them.

It would be insulting and contemptuous to the Scottish people for Westminster to get involved and anyone suggesting this at Westminster needs to grow-up instead of ranting in an anti-Scottish way."

I fully endorse Henry McLeish's comments.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S4F-00280)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans to meet the Prime Minister in the immediate future.

Ruth Davidson: In March, Robert Foye and Morris Petch—two vile rapists of teenagers and children—had their minimum sentences cut. Such was the outrage that the Scottish National Party Government promised to do something about it. In the eight months since, it has happened time and time again: in May, Neil Strachan's minimum sentence was cut and, last week, James Rennie's minimum sentence was cut. They are two of the most sickening paedophiles, whose cases have shocked Scotland. They are among a string of sex offenders who could be free much earlier than their trial judges intended.

In March, the Scottish Government said that it might change legislation to stop minimum sentences being cut, but in September that was absent from the legislative programme. Why is it taking so long?

The First Minister: It is not. I think the Conservative leader has been misinformed. The criminal cases (punishment and review) (Scotland) bill—Petch and Foye—will be introduced into the Parliament by the end of this month.

Ruth Davidson: I read the quotes from the justice minister at the weekend to that effect. It seems like it has taken headlines such as “Call This Justice?” to prompt them—that should not be the case.

These cases point to a much greater issue. There are some crimes that are so heinous, so cruel and so vile, and some criminals who deserve never to be free again, whose victims demand real punishment and from whom society deserves real protection.

In England, criminals can be sentenced to a whole-life tariff—in other words, they will never be free. Why is it that Scotland does not have the same protection as England? I know that the Scottish Government hides behind the European convention on human rights, but change starts with political will. I have the political will to ensure that, in some cases, life should mean life. The key question is, does the First Minister?

The First Minister: There are three things to say. One is that the bill that Ruth Davidson asked about will resolve the issues raised by the Petch and Foye judgments, so that courts regain appropriate discretion in setting the punishment parts of discretionary life sentences and orders for lifelong restriction. Of course, the legislation

cannot impact on current cases—it cannot apply retrospectively, as I am sure Ruth Davidson understands—but it will stop future cases arising where the punishment part of the sentence is reduced on appeal. I hope that the whole chamber will be able to support it when it comes forward later this month.

Secondly, Ruth Davidson should acknowledge that the efforts that have been made, through legislation and administration, on the management and control of sex offenders are second to none. The Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010 further strengthened the management of those arrangements. The Dundee pilot is now being rolled out across the whole country. In fairness, I do not think that it is reasonable not to acknowledge the strength of the action that is being taken by this Parliament on a matter of great concern.

Thirdly, one cannot just wave away the European convention on human rights. What would be appropriate would be to get unity across this Parliament in saying that this Parliament—our national Parliament—should stand in relation to that act as every other Parliament does. As Ruth Davidson may know, we are at a very substantial disadvantage at the present moment in that we are not given time and effect to respond to court or convention decisions. That is totally unreasonable and leads to bad cases and bad law in Scotland. I hope that, given her statement, she will support the aim and intention of this Government to see our national Parliament stand in equality with other legislatures before that convention.

The Presiding Officer: I call Alex Fergusson to ask a constituency question.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Tomorrow, the First Minister will visit my constituency to open the new Stena Line port at Loch Ryan. I know that he will join me in welcoming the investment that that represents, but does he also recognise that Stena's move leaves the town of Stranraer with what is effectively an industrial wasteland at its waterfront? Will he ensure that every available resource from his Government is put at the disposal of the local authority in its efforts to implement the excellent regeneration master plan that it has put together to breathe some much-needed new life into the town?

The First Minister: I know that, as the local member, Alex Fergusson will welcome the investment in port Ryan and the south-west of Scotland. It is a huge and substantial investment that consolidates the future of the ferry service as a euro route and will maintain many, many jobs in the south-west of Scotland.

I recognise that the move to port Ryan causes challenges for Stranraer but, as the local member knows—because we have discussed the issue—there are also substantial opportunities at that port front, which I think is an unrivalled location for a series of developments that offer great promise. I compliment the local authority and the others involved for their vision in putting forward those plans and proposals, and I can give them the assurance that this Government will be fully engaged and involved in bringing the plans to reality.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):

Given that the United Kingdom Government has confirmed that full details of implementation of the basing review will not now emerge until April 2012 and in view of the disquiet that the delay is causing the community in Leuchars, what representations is the Scottish Government making to the UK Government?

The First Minister: The Cabinet Secretary for Parliamentary Business and Government Strategy wrote to the Secretary of State for Defence signalling the Scottish Government's continuing concern over the timescale for providing our communities with further information and reassurance on military base changes. Mr Crawford has requested a meeting with the secretary of state to discuss that and other defence matters. As far as Scotland is concerned, the defence review had some hard decisions, but there was also some satisfaction with other aspects. In a hugely difficult situation, some gains were won. However, after that difficult process, which resulted in hard decisions that have caused tough choices for communities such as Leuchars, it would be totally insupportable if the timetables that were envisaged and set out earlier this year were not held to. It is entirely reasonable that this Parliament should insist that, having had that difficult defence review and given the decisions inherent within it, the timetable should now be supported and maintained.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S4F-00285)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

Willie Rennie: In an independent Scotland, would soldiers serving in United Kingdom regiments be required to leave the British Army and join the Scottish Army?

The First Minister: The short answer is no. Soldiers in that position would have a straight choice. I do not know whether Willie Rennie is

familiar with the fact that there are regiments in the British Army in which citizens of the Irish Republic serve as proud members.

We should have a Scottish defence force, for a number of overwhelming reasons. First, as we have just been discussing, there has been no security in defence jobs in Scotland with the present position—just the opposite, in fact. The second reason is that I and many members of this Parliament across the parties—and, at one time at least, many members of the Liberal Democrats—believe that the location and siting of weapons of mass destruction on the soil of Scotland is totally and utterly unacceptable.

Willie Rennie: The First Minister is correctly quoting from his "Talking Independence" document, which says that

"all serving military personnel from Scotland ... will be given the opportunity to transfer to the Scottish Defence Force."

I met British soldiers in Afghanistan. They risk their lives every day for each other, no matter which part of the UK they come from. It is a strong, human bond, built on loyalty. The First Minister wants them to break that bond for his independence agenda. Why does he want them to choose between their colleagues and their country?

The First Minister: By definition, what Willie Rennie puts forward is a very false perspective. He should be talking about giving people additional choices, not removing choices from people. I would say to Willie Rennie that the soldiers, including veterans of Afghanistan, who are being made redundant by his Government just now are facing no choice whatsoever.

We all face difficult choices in public administration. There are hugely difficult choices—I do not negate that fact. However, I have never before heard of a Government sacking people when they are engaged in fighting for this country. That is something that is unique to the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats at Westminster.

The straight answer to Willie Rennie's question is that we are offering additional choices.

I have no insight into the voting habits of Scottish soldiers but, given the results in constituencies in which the issue has a substantial impact, I have every reason to believe that military families and personnel voted for the SNP in overwhelming numbers last May.

Economy (Representations to the United Kingdom Government)

4. Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what representations the Scottish Government has

made to the UK Government on the economy. (S4F-00291)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 16 November, calling on him to use the autumn statement to take urgent action to support economic recovery.

It is now abundantly clear that UK recovery has been much more disappointing than the chancellor hoped that it would be when he outlined his economic plans in June 2010, and there is an urgent need for a change of approach.

We are calling for new support for capital investment, improved access to finance for small and medium-sized companies and action to enhance the economic security of the population at large. That includes the proposal for an increase of £2 billion in capital spending over the next three years, which could help to support 9,000 jobs in Scotland.

Annabelle Ewing: I am aware that John Swinney, the cabinet secretary, also wrote to the UK chancellor about the chancellor's strange comments about investment in Scotland, and that no reply has been received other than a somewhat hysterical letter from Danny Alexander. Does the First Minister share my concern that, while the UK Government should be concentrating on its own economic policies, it is instead putting investment in Scotland at risk?

The First Minister: We dealt with this subject last week when we looked for the motivations behind the chancellor's curious remarks, and we alighted upon Conservative Party lobbying in the north-east of England. The fact is that, in contrast to the UK chancellor, who could not name a single company, we can name a range of international companies—added to last week with the opening of Amazon and the announcement about Dundee being the factory of the future for Michelin—such as Doosan, Gamesa, Mitsubishi and all the rest who have declared their confidence in Scotland's future. Given that those major international companies are voting with their investment in Scotland, is it too much to expect other parties at Westminster to display the same confidence in Scotland's prospects instead of talking them down?

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Does the First Minister support this week's announcement by the coalition about the reducing of employment rights? If he does not, has he or have any of the Scottish ministers made representations to the UK Government to that effect?

The First Minister: I am concerned by what I have seen about those proposals, although I do

not think that they have been fully enunciated yet. I read with great care some of Vince Cable's comments on the issue. We are considering them and will respond as soon as we can properly analyse the detail.

However, instead of this Parliament and Government being organisations that lobby the United Kingdom, perhaps the real solution is for this Parliament to have the power to make the decisions for ourselves.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): At the weekend, the SNP announced six key measures that it wants the UK Government to take. How much additional borrowing will be required to pay for those six key measures?

The First Minister: The additional borrowing for capital investment will be £20 billion. That will be mitigated by the returns from crucial investments.

If we look at the signals that business is calling for from the United Kingdom Government, we see that encouraging investment in infrastructure is the overwhelming, number one demand. Business is not calling for things like cuts in the top rate of income tax, as supported by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. One of the key problems facing the country and anyone who is looking at it is the lack of economic growth. That is a major concern. It is not possible to get borrowing and the deficit under control unless we are prepared to stimulate the economy and generate economic growth, hence the call for capital investment, which is widely supported across the range of interest groups in this country.

When we are evaluating what should and should not be done to control deficits, Mr Swinney, who has contributed not one penny to the borrowing and deficits of the United Kingdom and has lived within a fixed budget for the past four years, speaks with more authority than any Tory or Labour chancellor.

Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind): On the co-operation that might or might not exist between the Treasury and the finance departments of the devolved Administrations, given the state of the euro, exemplified by Germany's failure to sell all its bonds yesterday, I am concerned that this Parliament might not be properly informed by Her Majesty's Treasury about the effects on the Scottish economy, and I think that the same fears might be voiced in Wales and Northern Ireland in relation to their economies. Does the First Minister plan to do anything about that?

The First Minister: There is a meeting of the British-Irish Council on Monday, at which we will take our regular opportunity for dialogue with the other devolved Administrations. Margo MacDonald will know that, twice in the past few months, the devolved Administrations have come together to

put forward an alternative economic prospectus. We demand and request proper information from the UK Treasury. On some occasions we get it and on others we do not. For example, we have asked whether there will be consequentials to the housing investment that the Prime Minister apparently announced earlier this week, but we have not had a clear answer yet, which perhaps indicates that it was not that much of a clear policy. Nonetheless, like the other devolved Administrations, we hope and believe that we will get answers.

There was a great deal of profound common sense in the joint declaration that the devolved Administrations made earlier this year. Given the direction of travel—or lack of it—in the UK economy since then, the chancellor could do a lot worse than listen to the joint, united voices of the many political parties that are represented in the three devolved Administrations.

Ports (Security Checks and Policing)

5. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Government will ensure that proper security checks and policing are in place at ports. (S4F-00295)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): As the member will be aware, many aspects of ports security, such as immigration, aviation and maritime security, are reserved matters, while responsibility for policing is devolved to the Scottish Parliament. In recognition of the vital importance of ensuring that our major ports and airports are policed accordingly, the Scottish Government has provided Scottish police forces with funding of £7.8 million in 2011-12 to support their operations, which is an increase of £1.6 million in comparison with funding in the final year of the outgoing Administration.

Johann Lamont: The First Minister will be aware, as we have heard, that the Stena Line ferry service to Belfast has moved from Stranraer to the newly developed port at Cairnryan. Is he aware of the on-going local concerns about security, given the double whammy of the United Kingdom Government's decision to axe funding for ports police officers and last year's decision by the Scottish Government to axe 11 police officer posts, which could be followed by more? I expect that he will have discussed the matter with the UK Government, but what steps is he taking in the interests of this country's security to ensure that his Cabinet Secretary for Justice makes good the cuts that he authorised to police control at the ports?

The First Minister: The responsibility for those matters lies with the UK Border Agency. At present, they are reserved matters.

On policing, I think that even Johann Lamont would agree that our position on police numbers in Scotland is a substantial advance on anything that the Labour Party could possibly have imagined, given that it forecast that we would not have 1,000 additional police officers and now we have them. There should be general recognition of that fact, along with the fact that we have a 30-year low in recorded crime.

I was trying to speak positively to Johann Lamont, which is sometimes difficult—*[Interruption.]* No, it is possible, and we will do it.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice met the Northern Ireland Minister of Justice, David Ford, the UK Border Agency, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary to discuss the security of sea crossings between Scotland and Northern Ireland. The cabinet secretary has agreed to look favourably at Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary's request for four additional officers, and the Scottish Government and the police service will continue to review ports policing in the run-up to the creation of a single Scottish police service.

In addition to the many other things that it will deliver, the single Scottish police service will be extremely helpful on ports security, in the sense that Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary is one of the smaller police forces in the country and such demands can be extremely onerous on a small police force. I hope and believe that Johann Lamont, in the positive spirit in which she approaches all her questions, will welcome the fact that the cabinet secretary has agreed to look favourably at enhancing and increasing the police service at the ports, even against the backdrop of the disgraceful cutbacks of the UK Border Agency.

Payroll Costs (Temporary Staff)

6. David McLetchie (Lothian) (Con): To ask the First Minister to what extent attempts by the Scottish Government to reduce its payroll costs through reductions in the number of its permanent staff are being undermined by the increased use of temporary staff. (S4F-00290)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): They are not being undermined.

David McLetchie: The fact is that last year there was a £12 million overspend in the part of the budget that deals with the cost of voluntary redundancy and the employment of agency and other temporary staff to plug gaps arising from a reduction in the number of permanent staff. So-called efficiency savings are turning out to be inefficiency savings as they lead to rising costs under other budget headings. Can the First Minister assure us that expenditure on agency,

temporary and seconded staff will have fallen when this year's figures are finalised and will continue to fall over the period of the spending review?

The First Minister: I am tempted just to say yes, because it has.

I actually saw the rather misleading article in *The Times* newspaper. I may be being unfair to *The Times*—it may have been Mr McLetchie who gave the article to it. The point is this: the other staff costs include the cost of voluntary redundancy schemes. We have had a substantial increase in the figures for voluntary redundancy schemes, but I am sure that this Parliament would want us to treat people in that situation fairly—and that has resulted in the increase.

The administration budget for temporary staff reduced by 50 per cent. I will just repeat that for Mr McLetchie's benefit: it reduced by 50 per cent in 2010-11 compared with the previous year. Even Mr McLetchie, joining Johann Lamont in his optimism, will agree that a 50 per cent reduction fits the bill for the Conservative Party in Scotland, since that is approximately the reduction in its support in the past few years.

The Presiding Officer: That ends First Minister's question time. Members who are leaving the chamber should do so quickly and quietly.

Orthopaedic Trauma Services (Ayr Hospital)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-00930, in the name of John Scott, on the provision of orthopaedic trauma services at Ayr hospital. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the proposals by NHS Ayrshire and Arran to close the orthopaedic trauma unit at Ayr Hospital; believes that this would be to the detriment of patient care in southern Ayrshire and constitute a particular danger to patients admitted to Ayr Hospital suffering from life-threatening neck or head injuries; is concerned that the closure of the unit undermines the long-term future of accident and emergency services at the hospital, and, therefore, condemns NHS Ayrshire and Arran's proposals to close the orthopaedic trauma unit at Ayr Hospital.

12:32

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I begin by thanking my party for allowing me to bring forward this debate on the continuing provision of orthopaedic trauma services at Ayr hospital. I hope that the Parliament, having survived the trauma of the collapse of the voting and sound system on 27 October, which was largely reinstated and restored yesterday, will welcome and take note of this debate.

I also thank the Parliament for its power and influence because, since the motion was lodged, NHS Ayrshire and Arran has withdrawn its proposal to move trauma orthopaedics from Ayr hospital, as announced recently in the local press. I should also thank the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy for her influence and for the discussions that I know she had with NHS Ayrshire and Arran executives. I ask Parliament to take note that, once again, the wishes of the people have been respected.

Today, I want to reaffirm the need for a two-centre approach to hospital care and, particularly, accident and emergency services in Ayrshire, of which trauma orthopaedics is an integral part. I know that that view is shared by other colleagues such as Adam Ingram and Chic Brodie.

Centralisation of services has been a long-term agenda of NHS Ayrshire and Arran and, although we have stopped the process with trauma orthopaedics, it comes as no surprise that the intention existed following the desire of NHS Ayrshire and Arran and the then Labour Government to close the A and E department at Ayr hospital—a plan first disclosed to me in August 2005 at the NHS Ayrshire and Arran annual review, presided over by the then Labour

minister Andy Kerr. Perhaps that is why no Labour members are taking part in this debate.

As members will recall, that plan provoked outrage in southern Ayrshire, with 55,000 people signing a petition against the proposals and 5,000 marching through the streets of Ayr in February 2006 in protest. I put on record my thanks to all those who helped in the campaign between 2005 and 2007. It is worth noting how correct that campaign was: the A and E units at Ayr and Crosshouse are both now busier than they have ever been. Attendances at Ayr hospital are peaking at 140 to 150 per day. On average, 30 medical patients, 11 of whom require surgery, are admitted daily.

In 2007, the need for a two-centre approach to be taken to A and E services because of Ayrshire's geography was pointed out to NHS Ayrshire and Arran, as it has been since. The argument was, and still is, driven by the need to be within an hour's distance of an A and E unit by ambulance or car.

That need will remain and grow with the ageing profile of Ayrshire's community and the increase in admissions of elderly people, particularly those suffering from falls and, as a result, broken limbs. The growing incidence of osteoporosis, osteoporotic fractures and heart attacks demands that as little time as possible be spent in ambulances on Ayrshire's far-from-perfect road surfaces.

The same arguments apply for trauma and orthopaedics. That is why I and others were so opposed to the most recent proposals.

It is self-evident that I am not a doctor, but doctors have advised me that the proposals to locate trauma and orthopaedics on one site at Crosshouse would have led to a loss of capacity and capability in the A and E department at Ayr hospital and may ultimately have posed a threat to the long-term viability of the A and E services there. That is why, once again, I found myself taking issue with NHS Ayrshire and Arran's centralising agenda.

Where time is not of the essence for the treatment and survivability of an illness, there is a place for concentrating resources on one site. Over the years, services such as maternity and paediatric care have moved to one site at Crosshouse. On the other hand, urology and ophthalmology are located at Ayr. I welcome the fact that the new cardioverter defibrillator fitting service, which was previously provided in Glasgow, was located at Ayr hospital in July this year.

However, I am also aware that the centralisation of patient records at Crosshouse has not been a huge success thus far. Medical staff have

expressed to me concerns about faults that have emerged in the TrakCare system, which is apparently being rolled out across Scotland before those faults have been fully ironed out. Perhaps, in his closing speech, the Minister for Public Health might make the Parliament aware of what is being done to make that system work better.

Again, I thank those who helped to see off the latest threat to A and E services at Ayr. However, I note that elected members of all parties will need to remain vigilant and protective of the facility if it is not to be placed under threat in future. After all, as Benjamin Franklin noted more than 200 years ago:

"A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still."

That applies to the decision makers at NHS Ayrshire and Arran, who were convinced against their will to adopt a two-centre approach to the provision of A and E services in Ayrshire following the election in 2007. I, and others, remain unconvinced that their view has changed, notwithstanding the clear instruction of the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy. For as long as there is a breath in my body, I will watch to see that two centres are maintained in Ayrshire, and the minister and the cabinet secretary will have my absolute support in that regard.

12:38

Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I congratulate John Scott on securing the debate—it is better late than never. I also share his disappointment at the Labour Party's apparent lack of concern for the debate and the important issues that it raises.

As the minister and members will know, John Scott has been a staunch defender of Ayr hospital since he was first elected, and I have joined him on many occasions to help protect the hospital's services.

Four years ago, a great victory was won when, on taking office as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, Nicola Sturgeon immediately fulfilled a Scottish National Party manifesto pledge by reversing the previous Labour Executive's plans to close Ayr hospital's A and E department and centralise Ayrshire and Arran A and E services at Crosshouse hospital. To say that that decision was warmly welcomed in our local community would be an understatement and it certainly established trust and confidence in the new Government.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said with regard to NHS Ayrshire and Arran, even though the board committed itself to maintaining full A and E services at both Ayr and Crosshouse hospitals.

Back in February 2008, the board assured the cabinet secretary that it would do so and it continues to provide that assurance.

The local public's mistrust of the board stems from senior management's long track record of support for centralising hospital services, usually in favour of Crosshouse. For example, the closure of paediatrics at Ayr hospital predated the A and E issue. In addition, the board's conduct of the consultation process on the A and E issue was a model of how not to consult, with its preferred option being presented on a like-it-or-lump-it basis.

As John Scott has pointed out, the issue took fire again when a stop-press bulletin from management to staff in early September seemed to confirm the public's worst fears that the proposal was being considered again. The bulletin stated that savings had to be made in trauma and orthopaedics and that previously rejected proposals to develop a centre of excellence for in-patient trauma services at Crosshouse would be revisited. That would require a review of bed numbers and theatre provision at both hospitals—and, what is more, the plan was to be pushed forward as soon as possible to “avoid uncertainty”. Naturally enough, alarm bells immediately started ringing, given the range of implications that such a development would have not only for the provision of trauma and orthopaedics at Ayr hospital but also for the future of A and E services. One need look only at St John's hospital in Livingston for an example of how such a move turns out.

Like John Scott, I have raised this issue as a matter of urgency with both NHS Ayrshire and Arran and the cabinet secretary and I have received assurances from the national health service that any service redesign proposals would require to demonstrate the service's capability to deal not only with orthopaedic A and E cases on both sites but with any orthopaedic care following elective surgery on both sites. I have no doubt that the minister will confirm that the centralisation of trauma and orthopaedics in pursuit of savings was never on the Scottish Government's agenda and that such a proposal would be given short shrift.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if the member could conclude.

Adam Ingram: I ask that, in his reply to the debate, the minister reflects on priority areas for efficiency savings. No doubt service redesign can play an important part, but I suggest that we would do well to start with corporate rather than clinical services and that NHS Ayrshire and Arran appears to many to be a suitable pathfinder.

12:44

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I, too, thank John Scott for securing this debate. I

am standing in for my colleague Jackson Carlaw, who is unable to attend Parliament today.

John Scott is, indeed, a worthy local champion for health services in his constituency—and rightly so. After all, it is the duty and responsibility of all MSPs to ensure that the constituencies and regions that we represent get their fair share and equality of access, irrespective of geographical location. John Scott's campaigning to keep A and E open at Ayr hospital is well recorded, and I also acknowledge Nicola Sturgeon's role in the process.

It is right to associate the threat to the orthopaedic trauma service with accident and emergency services. There is no doubt that a critical mass of services is required to maintain the level and diversity of staffing in hospitals. Over the years, we have all heard the saying “death by a thousand cuts” being used when one service goes and other services become unsustainable as a result.

As John Scott said, since the motion was lodged, NHS Ayrshire and Arran has withdrawn its proposal to move trauma orthopaedics from Ayr hospital. There is no doubt that it helps if MSPs work as a team locally—I note the support from Adam Ingram and Chic Brodie, although there is none from Labour, unfortunately. Adam Ingram made a very good point in highlighting the like-it-or-lump-it type of consultation. I am afraid that that approach is all too prevalent across Scotland. The people in Kilchoan in west Ardnamurchan are currently experiencing it.

The background to the threatened cuts at Ayr hospital should continue to cause concern, given that plans to cut local services and centralise elsewhere have been thwarted twice. The petition against the proposals that has been signed by 55,000 local people speaks volumes about how they value their NHS services. I am not normally partisan in such debates, but I hope that the same 55,000 people will be made aware that no Labour MSP who represents the Ayrshire area is present for this debate.

In Highland terms, the distance between hospitals that members have mentioned is not significant. The main difference lies in the greater density of population and the increased ageing population in the area, given that Ayr is such a popular retirement destination. The increased risk of osteoporotic fractures, treatment and recovery highlights the need for the retention of the unit. We are all painfully aware of the need to continue to make efficiency savings, and there is no doubt that efficiencies can be made in the NHS while the high quality of care that we expect is retained. As the minister will know from listening to recent evidence in the Health and Sport Committee, there is no doubt that efficiency savings targets have

brought a more rigorous financial discipline to NHS boards than existed previously. I have also taken from oral and written submissions that efficiency savings are possible without cutting priority front-line services.

We can campaign against cuts to local services, but there is no doubt that we should always heed issues that medical staff raise, as John Scott highlighted.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if you would come to a conclusion, please.

Mary Scanlon: Okay. I was going to mention that it is unfortunate that the TrakCare system has not been successful.

Again, I thank John Scott for bringing the debate to the Parliament.

12:48

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): As other members have done, I welcome John Scott's motion. Above all, I acknowledge the key role that he and many others, including Adam Ingram, have played in keeping Ayr accident and emergency services open and, indeed, in preserving Ayr hospital as a hospital that serves the south Ayrshire community. I am less concerned about Labour MSPs not being here, because we will probably get more sense from their benches than we normally do.

Without the initiative that I have mentioned, 10,000 attendees a month who appear at Ayr A and E would have had to seek succour elsewhere, and nowhere near all of those outpatients—or 97 per cent of them—would be attended to within four hours or be served by a quality organisation that has achieved being fourth of the 14 health boards on attendance-rate measures. A high point in the hospital's life has been the standards that were achieved throughout 2009. Some 99.3 per cent were regularly seen and attended to within four hours. We need no reminding that Labour and the Lib Dems wanted to close that department and service. As John Scott said, that particular horse—that is, the closure of orthopaedic trauma services—has bolted. When I met the chairman of the board only weeks ago, I was assured that orthopaedic services

“will be retained in Ayr”.

Although clinicians think that the services could be improved, and although Crosshouse hospital was perceived to be a centre of excellence, a complementary proposal was awaited from clinicians at Ayr hospital. The proposal has now been received and, as we know, the decision to centralise orthopaedic services has been overturned.

This is an exciting time for NHS Ayrshire and Arran. During the next few months there will be a new chairman of the board, a new chief executive officer, whom I have met, and three new board members. There will be a new regime and a new sensible strategy. I am sure that we will secure dual focus on A and E in Ayrshire.

There will be a more realistic relationship with general practitioners, a review of mental health care, which might involve moving in-patient services to Irvine, and greater care in the community, through community crisis teams. Further developments include the extension of telehealth scanning and diagnosis, a review of patient and visitor transport services, particularly for the likes of Arran and Cumbrae, competitive analysis of GP practices and drug provision, and a strengthening of community health partnerships.

All those initiatives bring a new and realistic dawn for the health board, but—there is always a “but”—although we must have a preventative spend regime and realistic resource productivity gains, we must be vigilant and ensure that we never again go down the road that was travelled some five years ago. Orthopaedic services will continue to be provided in Ayr and there will be a dual focus on accident and emergency. There will be no more unabated concerns for people in our constituencies who become ill, sick and injured: as John Scott said, not while there is breath in our bodies.

12:52

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): I congratulate my fellow Ayrshire MSP John Scott on securing the debate and bringing the matter to the Parliament's attention.

As members said, the motion has been overtaken by NHS Ayrshire and Arran's decision to withdraw its closure proposal and maintain orthopaedic trauma services at Ayr. It is a wee bit concerning that only in September we were dealing with the possibility of the unit's closure and the ensuring public reaction, which reached the Parliament, and that only a month later it was announced that the unit would stay in place. We might never know whether the decision was the result of the response from the public and Ayrshire's MSPs, who signed the motion that condemned the proposal. It seems to me that such proposals need more careful consideration before they see the light of day.

In March, the board advertised for a consultant in orthopaedics and trauma, who would be based primarily at Ayr hospital. Although the papers for the post mentioned the review of services that was taking place and the possibility of relocation of trauma services to Crosshouse, we must wonder

why the board embarked on the recruitment drive if it wanted to close the unit.

A glance at the statistics tells us that the Ayr unit received more than 1,000 emergency in-patient cases in 2009-10. If that number of cases were transferred to Crosshouse, Crosshouse would deal with more than 3,500 cases per year, while Ayr would handle only elective orthopaedic in-patient services. Such an approach would mean that people, many of whom travel quite a distance from around the south of Scotland to get to Ayr, would need to make an additional 40-mile round trip to Crosshouse.

An unintended consequence could surely be that all accident and emergency cases would end up in Crosshouse. If a paramedic was not certain that an injured person would not require orthopaedic trauma support, a precautionary approach might be taken and ambulances might drive past Ayr to reach the trauma unit at Crosshouse, on every occasion.

That is why issues such as the one that we are debating upset the public. When proposals are drawn up, it is not clear to me whether a public impact assessment is carried out, so that the full implications can be properly set out against the suggested benefits of change. Equality impact assessments must be carried out, but does the minister think that they sufficiently assess the impact on the public, who might face much longer journeys to access health services?

Scotland's health service is among the best in the world, and we take great pride in seeing it delivering for the people of Scotland. If this is an example of a proposal that never really was, I respectfully ask Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board to consider very carefully how it communicates its thinking on such issues to staff and the public in the future. If it takes the trouble to mention the possible relocation of trauma services to Crosshouse hospital in a job advert, the public and their elected members are entitled to express their concern. I sincerely hope that the minister will respond positively to members' comments and the issues that have been raised in the debate.

12:55

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): I congratulate John Scott on securing time for the debate and on bringing an important issue before Parliament.

No one should be in any doubt about the importance of the issue to the Government. After all, it was the first act of the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy, when she took up her post in May 2007, to reverse the previous Administration's decision to close accident and emergency departments at both Ayr

and Monklands hospitals. I will use the time that is available to me this afternoon to reinforce why that was and remains the right thing to do.

I make it clear from the outset that neither NHS Ayrshire and Arran nor NHS Lanarkshire will make any changes to the core A and E services that are delivered at Ayr and Monklands hospitals, including the key support services for those emergency departments along with orthopaedic trauma services. The Government has been consistent in its view that the service reviews of both NHS Ayrshire and Arran and NHS Lanarkshire, which culminated, in 2006, in the recommendation to close the A and E departments at Ayr and Monklands hospitals, were flawed. They failed to address sufficiently the very real concerns of a significant portion of their local population about the centralisation of those services. As the cabinet secretary said at the time, many of those concerns were based not on emotional attachment to bricks and mortar, but on a level-headed analysis of particular local circumstances and the needs of local communities both at that time and into the future.

Genuine concern was articulated at the time by many, including John Scott and Adam Ingram, that the health boards' proposals would significantly inhibit access to A and E services and that, in particular, insufficient consideration had been given to the issues of geography, local transport and the ambulance infrastructure. There was also a recognition that the proposals would mean diminished emergency care provision in some of the most deprived areas of Scotland, where people need it most. Those concerns remained even after the consultation work had been carried out by the respective boards. Neither the boards nor—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Sorry—can I stop you for a moment, minister? The motion is about NHS Ayrshire and Arran. If they had known that you would widen it out, other members might have wished to take part in the debate. I ask you to address the motion in your summing-up.

Michael Matheson: With due respect, Presiding Officer, I am. The decision was made on both of those issues at the same time. I am trying to address both issues because they were dealt with in parallel.

Neither the boards nor ministers were able to make any convincing case that the proposal to centralise A and E services would be of benefit to local communities. The overwhelming feeling in the affected areas was that the boards' processes and their subsequent recommendations—as endorsed by ministers—paid scant regard to the clearly expressed views in their communities.

The Government recognised the significant damage that the sequence of events had had on public confidence in the NHS change process. That is why we are absolutely determined not only to overturn those decisions, but to start the rebuilding of trust, which is critical to the development and delivery of a patient-centred health service. Alongside developing revised guidance to enhance meaningful public engagement and piloting direct elections to make the NHS more accountable to local people, we were determined to regain public confidence in the change process as a means of ensuring that health boards' proposals are robust, evidence based, patient centred and consistent with clinical best practice and national policy.

That is why when the cabinet secretary charged NHS Lanarkshire and NHS Ayrshire and Arran to bring forward new proposals to maintain A and E services at Ayr and Monklands hospitals, she also—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, again, I am afraid—can I stop you for a moment? The motion is quite specific about NHS Ayrshire and Arran; it is about orthopaedic services. It is a members' business debate about that, so I would be very grateful if you could return to NHS Ayrshire and Arran.

Michael Matheson: With all due respect, I am doing that, but it does not preclude us from mentioning NHS Lanarkshire.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think that the members' business debate is about NHS Ayrshire and Arran. I would be very grateful if you would—

Michael Matheson: I respect what you are saying, Deputy Presiding Officer, but I think that you are being overly sensitive to the mentioning of NHS Lanarkshire.

The cabinet secretary said at the time that there would be independent scrutiny, which was undertaken by Dr Andrew Walker, who published his final report in January 2008. The independent scrutiny panel found that the board in Ayrshire and Arran had not made convincing cases for significant changes to emergency services. In other words, the report confirmed that this Government's decision to reverse the closure of the A and E department at Ayr was the right one. The ISP recognised the very high quality of A and E provision at Ayr and it said that there was scope for further maintenance of the services and for further development in the future.

Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board took full account of the ISP report in coming forward with proposals to build on the strengths of its existing services. That meant that there would be no cutback in the A and E service that is presently provided. I want to be clear that that was the case in 2008 and that

it remains the case today. The Government will not countenance any proposal from either of the boards that seeks to undermine that commitment.

What we have been doing is analysing exactly what the board was considering. It is right that the board is keeping its services under close review to ensure that it offers the highest quality of care for local communities and it is right that health boards keep services under review to ensure that they offer best value for the considerable taxpayer investment that goes into them. However, all boards know that any proposed service changes must be primarily based on enhancing the quality of patient care. This Government was re-elected on a commitment to keep NHS services local where it is appropriate and in the best interests of patients to do so.

NHS Ayrshire and Arran has been clear throughout the recent review of services that it remains absolutely committed to maintaining the full A and E service at Ayr hospital. Members should be in no doubt, and neither is NHS Ayrshire and Arran, that that commitment includes the retention of key support services for an A and E department of that size, including critical care, anaesthetic cover and orthopaedic trauma services.

In terms of future development at Ayr hospital, members will also be aware that this Government has sought to maintain a high level of capital investment through supplementing with revenue-to-capital transfers and a pipeline of revenue finance investment. In the face of an unprecedented level of cuts in capital funding from the Westminster Government, that decisive action by the Scottish Government will mean that progress can be made on a range of key local projects, including the development of front-door services at Ayr and Crosshouse hospitals—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, I would be grateful if you could close now.

Michael Matheson: —which will be made before the end of the spending review. I can confirm that officials are engaged with NHS Ayrshire and Arran to identify options for the development of those projects and for the phasing of expenditure over the next few years.

With regard to the specific points raised by John Scott on the tracking system, I am more than happy to respond to the member in writing on that. I assure Adam Ingram that we are very clear with boards about having to target back-room functions in looking for efficiencies to ensure that resources are targeted more directly to front-line patient care.

In drawing my remarks to a close, I hope that members are reassured that there is no equivocation in the firm commitment of this Government to maintaining A and E services at

Ayr hospital and at Monklands general hospital. Some 40,000 people attended Ayr A and E department in the past year and 65,000 attended the department at Monklands, which demonstrates the level of need for those services within those individual areas.

13:04

Meeting suspended.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy

Health and Social Care Integration

1. Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made regarding health and social care integration. (S4O-00399)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): Good progress is being made regarding our plans for integrating health and social care. A series of engagement sessions with a wide range of stakeholders was held over the summer and autumn, which has provided valuable input to the development of our plans. Parliament will be informed in December of the Scottish Government's proposals and there will be a public consultation on the detail of the proposals in 2012.

Angus MacDonald: As the balance of care moves further towards supporting independent living for people for as long as possible and for as long as they wish in the community, housing issues must become more integrated into the strategy. Will the cabinet secretary give cognisance to the need to ensure that the housing aspect is more integrated into the strategy, including issues such as access to telecare technology and the adaptation of properties to make them easier to access?

Nicola Sturgeon: Angus MacDonald is absolutely correct to raise that point, which was raised strongly by stakeholders during the engagement sessions in the summer. Rightly and understandably, we tend to concentrate on bringing together health and social care, but we must remember that, if older people are to be supported to live independently for as long as possible, that requires a wider range of services, and housing is absolutely at the heart of that. I give Angus MacDonald an assurance that we are very much taking that into account in deciding how to move forward with our plans.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary agree that, whatever system is devised, there is a great need for increased democratic accountability at the front line of health and social care services and that at present that is not properly provided?

Nicola Sturgeon: As the member knows, I am a great advocate of increased democratic

accountability in the health service and I have moved to deliver that. Therefore, I agree that, as we bring together health and social care, democratic accountability at community level is extremely important. I assure Richard Simpson that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, individual local authorities and other stakeholders are, as we would imagine, very clear about the importance that they attach to democratic accountability. As I did with Angus MacDonald, I assure Richard Simpson that that aspect is very much in our thinking as we decide how to move forward.

NHS Shetland (Meetings)

2. Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government when the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy last met NHS Shetland and what matters were discussed. (S4O-00400)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): I last met the chair of NHS Shetland on 21 November during my routine monthly meeting with NHS board chairs. We covered a wide range of matters of current interest that affect health services in the area.

Tavish Scott: I acknowledge that the cabinet secretary understands the concerns of Scalloway residents regarding the loss of the pharmacy from their general practitioner practice, given our earlier correspondence, for which I am grateful, regarding NHS Shetland's actions on that matter. Is it the Scottish Government's position that there is no legal reason that prevents a health board from considering all bids to provide pharmacy services at the same time and therefore to make an objective assessment for the area concerned? Although I appreciate her former profession, will she do her best to prevent lawyers from running local healthcare and instead ensure that local people have confidence that decisions about local health services are taken for the right, logical and health-related reasons?

Nicola Sturgeon: I give Tavish Scott an absolute assurance that lawyers do not run the health service. The health service is run locally by health boards and, ultimately, by me and the Government. Of course, all decisions that health boards take must be within the law. In deciding on applications for new pharmacies, it is vital that health boards operate within the existing regulations, which the Government recently updated.

I understand very well the local feeling on those issues in many areas including Shetland, and I am clear that health boards must take account of that. Indeed, one of the reasons for revising the regulations was to ensure that local people are

properly consulted. Ultimately, health boards have to take the decisions, and they are required to do so lawfully. Rightly, those decisions are independent of ministers.

If Tavish Scott wants to raise particular issues regarding the matter, I will be more than happy to continue to address them.

Health Services (Highlands and Islands Remote Areas)

3. Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what reassurances it can provide that the quality of rural health services will be maintained, especially in the more remote rural areas of the Highlands and Islands region. (S4O-00401)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): Improving the quality of health services in rural areas was key to the work of the remote and rural implementation group, which was established in 2008 to identify a strategy for sustainable healthcare in remote and rural areas of Scotland. It delivered on 63 commitments and 20 forward issues between 2008 and 2010.

The RRIG has completed its work, but support continues to be given to all national health service boards to implement the actions and further recommendations that were contained in its final report, which was published in October 2010.

Mike MacKenzie: I know that the cabinet secretary is aware of the problems in providing out of hours and emergency cover in west Ardnamurchan. Is she in a position to suggest a solution to the problem?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am aware of the current issues in west Ardnamurchan and I assure the member that I am taking a very close interest in how they are progressed. It is not for me, of course, to dictate to the community what the correct model of service provision is, but I have made it clear to both NHS Highland and the Scottish Ambulance Service that I expect them to work closely together, and with Highland Council and the local community, to come up collaboratively with a system that provides resilience and high-quality health services in the area.

A short-life working group, co-chaired by the Scottish Ambulance Service divisional manager for the north and Michael Foxley, who is the leader of Highland Council and one of the local councillors, was put in place to develop options to ensure a sustainable and clinically assured service for the community. I will continue to look very carefully at how that work progresses.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary might also be aware that Galloway community hospital, which is in my region, was forced to downgrade its accident and emergency facilities to a minor injury unit during staff shortages last month. What assurances can she give that further reductions in NHS funding will not result in reductions in services in rural areas across Scotland, such as Galloway?

Nicola Sturgeon: Notwithstanding that the original question was specifically about the Highlands and Islands region, I am happy to address Claudia Beamish's question.

My colleague Michael Matheson participated before lunch time in a members' business debate, which I know was close to the Presiding Officer's heart, on accident and emergency services in Ayr. I mention that to make it clear that local provision of accident and emergency services is very important to this Government, and I think that our actions over the years have demonstrated that.

Of course, local boards have an obligation to ensure that the services that they provide are safe and sustainable. Any actions that boards take in that regard have to meet those standards. I am aware of the situation in Galloway and of the decisions that the board has taken, and I think that it has taken the right decisions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Thank you. We anticipated your resilience, cabinet secretary.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for her response to Mike MacKenzie.

The loss of the dedication and commitment of Nurse Jessie Colquhoun presents a tremendous challenge to the Scottish Ambulance Service and NHS Highland. From what I have been told, the option of local people training as emergency responders, given that a road or air ambulance can take more than an hour to arrive, is not acceptable to many in the community. Will the cabinet secretary ensure that even the most remote communities have an assurance of emergency care, in and out of hours, that is of a similar standard to that in other areas of Scotland?

Nicola Sturgeon: I echo Mary Scanlon's comments about the local nurse involved, who I understand is due to retire. From everything that I have heard from people in the area, she has done a great service to the local community and I know that people will miss her greatly when she retires.

I have said previously, and I will say it again, that I believe that people living in rural Scotland—even in the most remote parts of Scotland—have a right to expect high-quality health services. Everything that we do as a Government and

everything that we encourage and support health boards to do is designed to achieve that. Clearly, the way in which the services are delivered in some of our most remote communities will not be identical to how they are delivered in urban parts of Scotland. It is crucial that the health board, the ambulance service, the council and the community come together to come up with a model of service provision that is deliverable and which satisfies the community's concerns about safety and sustainability. I support that work, and I will continue to look carefully at the progress that is being made, which I hope will be good.

Child Mental Health Treatment Services (Waiting Time)

4. Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what the average waiting time is for children seeking mental health treatment. (S4O-00402)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): We have introduced a waiting time target that means that by March 2013, no one will wait longer than 26 weeks from referral to treatment for specialist child and adolescent mental health services.

The Information Services Division is collecting the data on a monthly basis using a live database. The data that is collected will be published when it is of sufficient quality to ensure accuracy, reliability and comparability.

Jenny Marra: Given the Government's target of 26 weeks by 2013, does the minister think that the waiting time of 182 weeks—or three and a half years—for children to see a psychologist in Tayside is acceptable? What will he do to reduce it to 26 weeks as soon as possible?

Michael Matheson: That area has historically not been given the level of priority that it deserves, which is why we as a Government renewed our focus on it several years ago and made additional resource available. Up to 2009, we provided approximately £6.5 million to increase the number of psychologists who are working in that very specific field. In addition, we have invested approximately £2 million since 2009-10 to increase the capacity in tier 3 and tier 4 services, to ensure that we provide early intervention as early as possible so that people get the right clinical outcomes from their treatment.

However, we recognise that there is a need to make further progress in that area, and we are working with boards throughout Scotland to make it clear that we expect them to achieve the target that we have set for them.

Healthcare Services

5. Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it will provide more sustainable and high-quality healthcare services closer to the communities that they serve. (S4O-00403)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Government is investing more than £200 million in community-based facilities via the hub initiative to support the delivery of high-quality local healthcare.

Gordon MacDonald: I recently attended the sod cutting for the new Wester Hailes healthy living centre in my constituency. The local community has waited for more than 15 years for those new healthcare facilities, and residents in the Firrhill area have been waiting for a similar period of time for a new health and social care centre. Can the cabinet secretary provide an update on the status of the proposed Firrhill partnership centre?

Nicola Sturgeon: I was delighted to perform the official sod-cutting ceremony for the new Wester Hailes healthy living centre. It is a fantastic development and, as Gordon MacDonald said, it is long overdue for the local community.

Gordon MacDonald is right to mention the Firrhill area. I can tell him today that that project is now progressing as an NHS Lothian facility; the intention previously was that it would be a joint facility between the health board and the local council. It is intended to include the following services: the Craiglockhart and Firrhill medical practices, community nursing, podiatry, older people's mental health, learning disabilities, community mental health and paediatrics. NHS Lothian is in discussion with the council regarding the purchase of the preferred site.

I know that Gordon MacDonald takes a close interest in that issue as a constituency member, and I am happy to keep him up to date with progress.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): What action does the cabinet secretary intend to take following the warning from the Royal College of Midwives about a crisis in the number of midwives as the result of an increasing age and retirement bulge, which could clearly impact on local communities? How does the Government intend to plan for sustainable recruitment in the NHS?

Nicola Sturgeon: I saw the Royal College of Midwives' work earlier in the week.

I hope that I am not misquoting the Royal College of Midwives in Scotland when I say that in

its report, or certainly in the commentary around that report, it is pointed out that there is a good number of midwives in Scotland and that we are in a good position—that puts us in a better position than other parts of the United Kingdom. Of course, we want to ensure that we continue in that good position.

The Royal College of Midwives is right to point out the demographic challenge; my challenge as health secretary and our challenge as the Government is to ensure that in our workforce planning, in the broadest sense—in student numbers and working through to the numbers that we expect to see qualify and be available to the NHS—we are taking account of all those factors. I assure the member that we continue to do so in close dialogue with the Royal College of Midwives.

Health Service Changes (Consultation)

6. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what consultations national health service boards should carry out before implementing changes to services. (S4O-00404)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): NHS boards must routinely communicate with and involve the people and communities that they serve to inform them about their plans and, indeed, about their general performance. They must do so, in particular, when they are taking forward service change proposals. Government guidance of February 2010 supports boards in their statutory duty to inform, engage and consult their patients and the wider public. The Scottish Health Council has an important supporting role in providing advice to boards on appropriate engagement.

Rhoda Grant: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response. Obviously, she is aware of the situation in Ardnamurchan, but there is a similar situation in Glenelg in my region, where staffing changes have led to lesser services being proposed by NHS boards. The communities in those areas are very unsatisfied and very worried, despite having been consulted. The cabinet secretary has written to those communities and said that service changes should not lead to lesser services. When will she intervene to ensure that health boards provide the same level of service, if not improved services, under those service changes?

Given that there are no emergency services as such in those areas, will the cabinet secretary also intervene with the Scottish Ambulance Service to ensure that adequate service provision is in place?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am very well aware of the situation in Glenelg and Arnisdale that the member

raises. For members who are not aware, the situation has arisen because a part-time general practitioner there has been seconded to work with the Scottish Government. NHS Highland is in the process, as we speak, of developing options for future GP service provision in the area and has made it very clear that the status quo, based on the current model of service, is one of the options that is being considered. I have made it very clear to NHS Highland that any proposals that it puts forward should be based on the need to maintain and improve the quality of the service that is provided to local people.

Of course, locum GP cover is in place to cover the vacant position until a decision is taken on a permanent solution. Therefore, there is no change right now to current service provision. I hope that the member appreciates that this is an on-going matter, that current service provision is being maintained and that it would therefore not be appropriate for me to intervene in any way at this stage. However, as I said in relation to the west Ardnamurchan situation, I am looking carefully and keeping abreast of developments in this instance, too.

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary assure my constituents in west Caithness that the future consultation on the Dunbar hospital in Thurso will not rule out the retention of respite beds and 24/7 accident and emergency, which affects the whole north coast of Sutherland?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Rob Gibson for his question. I know that he takes a very close interest in all those matters on behalf of his constituents.

I am aware of the proposals for the redesign of services in west Caithness and the potential changes to Dunbar hospital in Thurso, but I stress that there are no firm proposals yet. I have made it clear to all boards that I expect proposals for service redesign to result in improved quality of care for patients and that they must be developed with the full engagement of all stakeholders and the wider public. If and when NHS Highland puts forward proposals, and if those proposals are deemed to constitute major service change, the board will be required to carry out a full public consultation in line with Government guidance. Of course, any decisions that are subsequently taken by the board would, in those circumstances, be subject to a final decision by ministers.

Glasgow Royal Infirmary (Parking Charges)

7. Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy has taken regarding the recent increase in parking charges at Glasgow royal infirmary. (S4O-00405)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): As Sandra White is aware, the multi-exit passes that have been the subject of the recent price increase are outwith the terms of the contract between NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and the car park owner. However, I encourage the car park operators to enter into discussions with the health board with a view to ensuring fairness for the staff who use this car park.

Sandra White: The cabinet secretary is aware that I met staff outside Glasgow royal infirmary. Since then, I have received confirmation from Impregilo that

“We are therefore reviewing our options, including introducing additional/season tickets with further discounts on the revised tariffs.”

I have written again to Impregilo to request a meeting of all the concerned parties. Will the cabinet secretary also write to Impregilo or request a meeting with it to resolve the situation?

Nicola Sturgeon: Sandra White has assiduously represented her constituents on the issue. I am pleased to hear the extract from the letter that she read out and to hear that Impregilo has responded favourably to her representations. I can say easily that I would be happy to make contact with the company to discuss the matter and to encourage it to review the recent increase in car parking charges.

Paul Martin (Glasgow Provan) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the most effective way of dealing with the issue once and for all would be to introduce legislation that ensures free car parking at all NHS hospitals throughout Scotland?

Nicola Sturgeon: The issue is serious, but I struggle to take seriously Labour members who stand up and make the point that Paul Martin just made. The Government before the SNP Government introduced car parking charges. A private finance initiative contract that was concluded under the previous Labour Government is involved. It is down to that Government's actions that car parking charges are in place at Glasgow royal infirmary. All Labour members would do well to stop and reflect on that point.

As the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, I abolished car parking charges in all NHS car parks. I wish that I could do so at Glasgow royal infirmary and the other PFI hospitals—Ninewells and Edinburgh royal infirmary—but, thanks to the contracts that Labour signed, buying out those contracts would cost the public purse millions of pounds, which could not be spent on front-line health services. I would like to undo the previous Labour Administration's folly.

I have managed to do that in a number of respects but, unfortunately, I cannot do that for everything.

Reablement Strategies

8. Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made in rolling out reablement strategies across local authorities. (S4O-00406)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): As part of the Scottish Government's reshaping care for older people programme, the joint improvement team has supported local partnerships to review and redesign home care services and to develop re-enablement models in their areas. In April 2010, the joint improvement team published a step-by-step guide to home care re-enablement on its website. It held a series of regional two-day workshops throughout 2010 to provide practical support to partnerships that were considering or had started the redesign of home care services.

The Scottish Government is working on an intermediate care framework, which is due to be published early next year. That will assist partnerships to design and develop rehabilitation and re-enablement services in their areas.

Clare Adamson: I congratulate the Government on launching the best practice toolkit that is designed to manage and reduce falls and fractures in Scotland's care homes for older people. Does the minister plan to extend that toolkit to the care of elderly people in their own homes?

Michael Matheson: Clare Adamson refers to the toolkit, which I had the pleasure of launching in East Kilbride in the summer. A key part of that is promoting good physical activity among older people to help to keep them physically well and to reduce the chances of a fall. The toolkit also looks at problems that can arise because of a building's design.

We are working with agencies such as the fire service to ensure that, when fire services visit older people for fire prevention purposes, they consider situations that might cause concern and could result in a fall. We are looking to create stronger links between our national falls programme and our national telehealth programme to maximise the use of telehealth to deal with the issue. When the Scottish Ambulance Service responds to someone who presents with a fall but does not require to be hospitalised, it is working to arrange for that person to be referred to other services that might be able to intervene and provide assistance to address situations that are of concern and are resulting in falls.

We are taking forward a range of measures. I have no doubt that the toolkit will be used well

across the rest of the country in a variety of settings.

Healing Spaces (Midpark Hospital)

9. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the effect on psychiatric patients of the healing spaces project not being installed timeously at the Midpark hospital in Dumfries. (S4O-00407)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): I understand from NHS Dumfries and Galloway that it is working with the Holywood Trust and other local charitable organisations on delivering the healing spaces project, which will be opened as soon as the new Midpark hospital in Dumfries is opened. Patients are due to move into the new hospital in early December as planned.

Joan McAlpine: I am sure that I can pass on the gratitude of my constituents who are involved in the project to the national health service workers in Dumfries and Galloway who have worked hard to make it happen. Will the minister join me in acknowledging the important contribution that the arts make to psychiatric therapy?

Michael Matheson: This is a very good example of the NHS working along with local organisations to ensure that it delivers a valuable project to patients in the area. I have no doubt that the arts project will have significant benefit for patients with mental illness who are able to participate in it. I have no doubt that arts have an important part to play in the therapeutic provision that can help to support the recovery of people with mental health problems. I am more than happy to endorse Joan McAlpine's views on this issue.

Dementia (West Scotland)

10. Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to tackle dementia in West Scotland. (S4O-00408)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Government is taking national, strategic action to tackle dementia and to support local service improvement in the west of Scotland and across the country.

That includes implementing the standards of care for dementia, investing in upskilling the dementia workforce and supporting local partnerships to reshape older people's and dementia services through the change fund.

All seven partnerships in the west of Scotland are using change fund money this year for

dementia-related projects that are either planned or under way and about 40 per cent of the dementia champions who are being trained this year are drawn from hospitals in the four national health service boards in the west of Scotland.

Stuart McMillan: I would be grateful if the cabinet secretary could indicate whether there will be any set allocation of funds and resources from the preventative spend budget to tackle dementia in the next financial year.

Nicola Sturgeon: Partnerships are asked to submit change plans by February next year setting out how they would use the change fund for older people's services in 2012-13. The fund is intended to help to shift the totality of health and care spend, emphasising anticipatory care and preventative services that support older people to stay well within their own home. Although no set allocation within the change fund has been identified specifically for dementia, I would expect dementia services to feature strongly in partnership plans. Of course it is also the case that partnerships must ensure that at least 20 per cent of next year's change fund spend is dedicated to supporting carers to continue to care for older people, which might well include care support provided to people with dementia.

In summary, I give the member and the chamber a strong assurance that improving services for patients with dementia and their carers and families is one of the utmost priorities of this Government and we are determined to see real change.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): Earlier this year, the Scottish Government announced plans to train 200 dementia champions, with the contract awarded to the University of the West of Scotland and Alzheimer Scotland—Action on Dementia, both of which are based in Paisley. Will the cabinet secretary give an update on the progress made with the first 100 to be trained this year? What is the completion date for the training?

Nicola Sturgeon: The programme is well under way and is going extremely well. I am more than happy to provide in writing the specific details around the allocation of dementia champions. The programme is a key part of our work on raising awareness and the profile of dementia and raising standards around dementia care. As I said in response to Stuart McMillan, 40 per cent of the dementia champions that are being trained this year are drawn from hospitals in the west of Scotland.

We are working closely with Alzheimer Scotland on that work and on ensuring that we are implementing the dementia standards in full across all settings, with a particular focus on improving care in general hospitals and improving

post-diagnostic support for people with dementia, which is absolutely key in ensuring that they get the support that they need.

Scottish Ambulance Service (Meetings)

11. Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met the Scottish Ambulance Service and what matters were discussed. (S4O-00409)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): I chaired the public annual review of the Scottish Ambulance Service on 10 October in Kirkcaldy. We discussed a range of issues, including performance levels, finance, the workforce, clinical quality and how the service will continue to improve and develop to ensure the best possible care for patients across Scotland. I also meet the chair of the Scottish Ambulance Service as part of my routine monthly meetings with all NHS board chairs.

Dr Simpson: Does the cabinet secretary agree that rest breaks are required under European Union regulations for reasons of safety and could be given up only if the ambulance service were designated as the police and the armed forces are? Does she have any intention to consider redesignating emergency ambulance personnel to bring them under the same section of the regulations as the police? Also, does she have any concerns, as I do, about the fact that there is at least anecdotal evidence that some red light calls are being downgraded to yellow light status?

Nicola Sturgeon: As Richard Simpson will know from my statement to Parliament on the issue a few weeks ago, I take a close interest in this issue. On a weekly basis, I monitor the number of times that calls are interrupting rest breaks and all the issues around that. We have an interim agreement in place at the moment and talks are on-going to secure a longer-term agreement. The experience of implementing the interim agreement will be a factor in those on-going discussions.

On Richard Simpson's first point, we have discussed this issue before. In my view, the ambulance service is an emergency service, and there is nothing in law to say that it is not. As I have said in response to a previous question from him in the chamber, if we ever needed to do anything to put that beyond doubt, I would do it. I believe that ambulance workers should have rest breaks, and the interim agreement guarantees those breaks. If a rest break is interrupted, ambulance workers receive financial compensation, and their rest break should be rescheduled to later in their shift. We ask a lot of our ambulance workers, and I believe that they do a fantastic job. It is therefore incumbent on me, on

the Government and on all of us to ensure that we look after their health, wellbeing and safety. Rest breaks are therefore extremely important, and any longer-term agreement should recognise that.

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I should like to draw the cabinet secretary's attention to the fact that, when a constituent of mine called an ambulance in the middle of the night, some time ago, the ambulance could not get to them very swiftly because the address was not recognised by the ambulance's sat nav system. The address is on a housing estate that has been there for several years, on a road that has certainly had houses on it for at least a year. Will she undertake to look into the matter, please, and to ensure that our ambulance service has the most up-to-date maps possible?

Nicola Sturgeon: That is an important point and one that has been raised recently in connection with some tragic incidents, including one of the incidents that gave rise to the concerns around rest breaks.

The Scottish Ambulance Service's mapping system works by using two information sources to provide an overall navigation system that encompasses both geography and address information. The first source is the mapping that provides the geography to be included on the system and the second aspect of the system is street-level data that allows for addresses to be plotted on to the geographical maps. A dedicated e-mail address is also available for local authorities to submit new street names and locations. It is monitored daily by Scottish Ambulance Service data administrators, who then update the system.

As well as that, we have a system that allows anecdotal updating by ambulance service workers or, indeed, by anybody else. That is the system that the Scottish Ambulance Service is ensuring that it has in place.

Smoking Ban (Cars Carrying Children)

12. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to consult on introducing a ban on smoking in cars carrying children. (S4O-00410)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): We have no current plans to consult on extending Scotland's smoke-free laws to private cars. Successful implementation of the smoking ban has undoubtedly already reduced exposure to second-hand smoke among children in Scotland.

We remain totally committed to maintaining Scotland's position as a world leader in tobacco control. In developing our proposed new tobacco control strategy for launch next year, we will

explore what additional measures might be taken to further protect children from the impact of second-hand smoke.

Mark Griffin: Studies that came out in February and August this year showed that the level of particulate matter in cars in which people were smoking was similar to that in a smoke-filled pub. Does the minister agree that that has a disproportionate effect on child passengers because of their less developed immune systems and faster breathing rates? Will the minister commit to considering a ban in the strategy that he mentioned?

Michael Matheson: As I said to the member, we are at an early stage with the new tobacco control strategy and we will look at a range of different measures that might be appropriate. We will engage with a range of stakeholders and get their views about what they want to see in the new tobacco control strategy. At this stage, we have no intention of consulting formally on the introduction of a ban on smoking in cars that are carrying children. We are committed to ensuring that our country continues to lead the world with the measures that it can take to reduce the risks of exposure to second-hand smoke and to reduce the overall level of smoking.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 13, in my name, has been withdrawn due to unforeseen circumstances. I apologise to the chamber and to Humza Yousaf in particular.

Obesity (Children)

14. Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what checks and balances there are to ensure that, when tackling obesity in children, their weight remains within the healthy spectrum. (S4O-00412)

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison): The aim of programmes to tackle overweight and obesity in children is to support children and young people to grow through their overweight to achieve a healthy weight. As a minimum, all Scottish Government-funded programmes require participating children to be weighed and measured on entry to and completion of programmes.

Dennis Robertson: I know that the cabinet secretary is aware of my personal interest in this area and of the Eden unit at Cornhill in the NHS Grampian area. Are there any plans to look at additional services to support under-16s who are underweight and develop anorexia and their parents?

Shona Robison: A lot of work has been done by health boards, in particular Grampian, to ensure that it is not just children who are overweight but under-16s who are underweight

who have access to the right programmes and support. The member has cited one of those support arrangements in Grampian, where the issue was the subject of quite an extensive health committee investigation that led directly to improvements in the support for children in the north of Scotland who have weight issues. I hope that I can work with the member to continue to strive to improve those services.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Meetings)

15. Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy last met the chief executive of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. (S4O-00413)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): Ministers and officials regularly meet senior management of national health service boards, including NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. I chaired the board's annual review on 17 October when matters of national and local priority were discussed.

Duncan McNeil: Will the cabinet secretary confirm that discussions will be held with the health boards about the concerns of the Royal College of Midwives about the long-term shortfall in midwife numbers? Will she assure me that action will be taken to secure and ensure the sustainability of midwife-led maternity units? I am particularly speaking about the successful unit at Inverclyde royal hospital.

Nicola Sturgeon: I answered the general question about the RCM's report in my response to Nanette Milne's question and I am happy to repeat the assurances that I gave her about my responsibilities for workforce planning and ensuring the sustainability of services. I am not talking about any particular unit here, but generally I am committed to midwife-led maternity units. One or two of them were under threat when I took office and I am glad to say that they are still operating.

Clearly, all health boards have to ensure the safety and sustainability of all services, but where they provide a service that is used and wanted by the public, it is important that they are supported.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: With everyone's permission, we will squeeze in question 16.

Heart Disease

16. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action is being taken in local communities to reduce heart disease. (S4O-00414)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): The Scottish Government's action to reduce smoking rates, to reduce excessive alcohol consumption and to tackle obesity in communities will make an important contribution to reducing heart disease. In addition, the keep well programme of health checks will continue to target people who live in Scotland's most deprived communities, who are at greatest risk of developing heart disease, and to support them to improve their health.

George Adam: The minister may or may not know that Paisley recently became a heart town as part of the have a heart initiative. Does he agree that initiatives such as Paisley becoming a heart town and have a heart Paisley are an important part of the campaign to promote healthy lifestyles in our communities?

Michael Matheson: I am aware that Paisley is now a heart town and that, as such, it is part of the British Heart Foundation's programme to target healthier living in areas where there is a high level of coronary heart disease and to get people to take action to improve their overall health. Such local initiatives are a valued addition to the Scottish Government's overall approach.

Back in June 2009, the cabinet secretary launched our better heart disease and stroke care action plan, which is about improving the overall quality of care for people who suffer a cardiac episode or a stroke and about ensuring that people take action on their lifestyle to reduce the risks that they may be leaving themselves open to as a result of a particular type of behaviour, the food that they eat or other activities that they may be involved in that could be detrimental to their health.

United Nations Climate Summit

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-01406, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, on Scotland's contribution to the United Nations climate summit.

14:57

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson):

Against a background of continuing global economic difficulties, over the next two weeks around 200 nations, parties to the UN framework convention on climate change, will meet again in Durban, South Africa, to continue negotiations on international action to tackle global climate change.

Climate change is certainly a huge environmental threat to the international community, with the poor and vulnerable, particularly in developing countries, being worst affected. It is also a huge threat to the global economy. Unchecked, it is reckoned that it could cost between 5 and 20 per cent of global gross domestic product.

At the Copenhagen climate talks two years ago, Scotland presented its strategy of acting as a model of best practice on climate change. In unanimously agreeing a world-leading target to cut emissions by 42 per cent by 2020 in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, the Parliament had strong support from business and civic society. Despite the strong commitment of Scotland and others to tackling the issue, there was no breakthrough at Copenhagen. Our hopes for a single, global, legally binding climate change treaty now rest on making steady progress, year by year, in constructing the building blocks for a treaty to be agreed at some, hopefully not-too-distant, future date.

Scottish ministers were determined not to let the disappointment of Copenhagen dilute our commitment. We had already moved on from seeking high ambition to putting in place the framework for delivery: annual targets that would allow us to say, year on year, how we proposed to meet our 2020 goal; proposals and policies to drive down emissions; plans for public engagement; and research on consumer behaviours.

International interest in Scotland's climate change commitments and programmes continued to grow. At last year's UNFCCC summit in Cancún, Scottish ministers had a place on the United Kingdom delegation for the first time. As well as working with the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change on the UK team, we

began work to strengthen our support for developing countries, progressing our partnership with the Maldives with the funding of a study by Robert Gordon University into the marine energy potential of the islands. That study has now been finalised and will help the Maldives Government's development of its renewable energy strategy.

We have also launched international partnerships with the Inter-American Development Bank and the Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute, and we have begun discussions with Malawi on how we could build on the renewable energy pilots by the University of Strathclyde that have been funded under our international development fund.

In these hard economic times, while people throughout the world understand the environmental and moral messages on the need to act on climate change as a matter of climate justice for developing countries, they are naturally concerned about jobs. The Scottish Government believes that the evidence from Scotland demonstrates the powerful jobs, investment, trade and economic growth potential of the low-carbon economy.

In Scotland, we have a GDP of around £100 billion, with a low-carbon market of around £8.8 billion that is forecast to rise to some £12 billion by 2015-16, thus representing more than 10 per cent of the Scottish economy and around 5 per cent of the workforce. Globally, the market is already worth £3 trillion—£3 million million—and is forecast to increase in value to £4.3 trillion by 2014-15.

With 25 per cent of Europe's offshore wind and tidal energy resource, 10 per cent of Europe's wave potential and its largest offshore storage capacity for carbon dioxide, Scotland has a unique competitive advantage in the low-carbon economy. The market offers a broad range of opportunities across the economy for Scotland, and it includes sub-markets of renewable energy and low-carbon, environmental and clean technologies.

Our strategy is to encourage investment in jobs by remaining at the forefront of the development of regulatory frameworks for clean energy technology. We believe that the competitive advantage lies in being at the forefront of technological innovation.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Does the minister accept that such a clear and unrelenting focus on the economic benefits that he seeks to gain from low-carbon technologies will be seen as coming at the expense of the moral responsibility that we talked about when we passed the 2009 act if he decides that Scotland should use carbon

credits to meet what were intended to be domestic targets for reducing emissions?

Stewart Stevenson: I hope that the member was listening when I appeared at the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee earlier this week. It is not a plan of ours to use carbon credits, but any country that does use them has a choice in the nature of the credits. If a country used credits, it would certainly be important for it to consider how the credits can deliver a benefit to the developing world as a way of managing issues in its own country. Credits can be used to deliver a moral and social purpose if a country believes that it needs them, but we are not in that position at this stage.

Our strategic approach has attracted major international investors, such as Mitsubishi, Iberdrola and Gamesa, to set up global research and development centres in Scotland. Over the past year, there has been further growth in international interest in Scotland's progress on low carbon.

David Cameron has thanked the Scottish ministers for their support for greater ambition in the European Union on climate change and to drive green investment, and he has acknowledged that Scotland has good examples to share of progressive climate policies delivering jobs and investment. At the invitation of the UK Government, we have provided low-carbon case studies to assist it in its international influencing efforts. Indeed, we use them ourselves.

Members should not just take David Cameron's word that Scotland is setting the pace on international action—there are some here who might be reluctant to do so. The First Minister was recently given the international climate leadership award by the Government of South Australia—a part of Australia that, under the previous premiership of Mike Rann, has been taking the lead on the climate change agenda in the southern hemisphere.

With co-operation from the UK Government, I have been taking Scotland's messages on low-carbon economics to colleagues in Europe. I have met ministers from Denmark, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Latvia, Estonia and Malta to share the Scottish experience of low-carbon jobs, investment and economic growth. Those messages about the jobs potential of the low-carbon economy have been warmly received and there are clearly opportunities for co-operation.

The Scottish ministers have an unprecedented level of international engagement on climate change. That will continue in Durban, where I will be part of the UK ministerial team. There, we will continue to demonstrate how we are making the

low-carbon economy a reality. We will demonstrate how our leadership in low carbon is resulting in jobs and growth even in these stretched financial times. We will demonstrate that investment now will lead to energy security and lower costs for consumers in the long term.

A Scottish Government official will also work with the UK team on the UN's capacity building work stream. That, as Mr Harvie may care to note, is of key importance to developing countries. We plan to strengthen further our support for developing countries in line with our new profile in the world.

There are significant positives on which to build. There is now an agreed aim of limiting the global temperature rise to no more than 2°C, although current emissions reduction pledges are not nearly enough to achieve that. A lot more work is needed to break out of the current low-ambition stand-off of major international players.

Scotland is not alone among countries in setting high ambition. The UK, Germany and Denmark have also committed to high targets for 2020 and the Australian Government is introducing carbon legislation. There are also good examples of helpful actions in China, India and the United States.

It must also be said that, despite the slow progress towards a global treaty, the other countries that are not yet adopting the formal targets are, nonetheless, making investment in the low-carbon economy where they see economic benefit. We can expect countries such as China and India to continue to do that to an increasing degree in the years to come.

Scotland has been an active member of the Climate Group's states and regions alliance for many years. That highlights the fact that many progressive policies and actions are being delivered at sub-national and local levels of government, including in US states such as California and Texas.

The leadership of the EU and the UK is another invaluable asset. The EU has said that it is open to a second commitment period for the Kyoto protocol after 2012, which keeps the way open for other parties to make similar commitments.

However, time is short. We do not expect to break through at Durban and, with global emissions at an all-time high, we have only a short time span to get them on a downward track, allowing for the time that it would take for countries to ratify a new treaty.

Therefore, my message when I attend the UNFCCC in Durban as part of the UK delegation will be that it is imperative that we do not miss the massive opportunities that the fundamental shift in

the global economy will provide. We believe that action is needed now to grasp the opportunities that higher ambition on emissions reduction presents to drive and incentivise investment in new low-carbon markets, to achieve energy security and to achieve environmental and climate justice objectives.

The evidence already shows that investment is happening in Scotland and that the country is already securing competitive advantage through new technologies and markets. Other countries should follow suit.

In addition, it is imperative that Scotland continues to articulate to the international community that, as an industrialised country, we have a moral obligation to act on climate change and to influence others worldwide to do the same.

Many countries are, of course, far less fortunate than Scotland is. They do not share our wealth of natural resources and renewable energy potential. By sharing our knowledge and information, creating partnerships between academic institutions and working with countries that are likely to be disproportionately affected by climate change, we not only support our overall approach to international development but assist developing countries in their transition to a lower-carbon economy appropriate to their circumstances.

The Scottish Government is giving clear direction and support to the development of the low-carbon economy. Similar action should take place in Europe and around the globe and we must work together to ensure that we grasp the low-carbon economic opportunity.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that Scotland will be participating in the 17th Conference of the Parties on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as a member of the UK delegation; encourages active engagement with other delegations to deliver the message that action on climate change is both necessary and urgent, and recognises that Scotland's experience demonstrates that action on climate change can create jobs, investment, trade and economic growth opportunities.

15:10

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): We, too, had great hopes for the Copenhagen summit. Although some progress was made, it illustrated the challenge of achieving climate justice around the globe.

Last month, I was privileged to visit Bangladesh with Voluntary Service Overseas, having been tasked to produce a report on the impact of climate change on water and sanitation. The villagers I met already see seasonal changes with wetter, more unpredictable monsoons and hotter, drier weather. Because so much of Bangladesh is

already below sea level, people find talk of even a tiny rise in sea levels deeply alarming.

What is agreed in Durban is no academic exercise. For millions of the world's poorest people, it will mean the difference between being a farmer and being a homeless climate refugee. We need agreement to ensure that countries take responsibility for their emissions and are transparent in recording their progress. Furthermore, any agreement must mean money for climate adaptation to ensure that countries that are economically disadvantaged and vulnerable to climate change are helped to survive the coming decades. Their development must be low carbon and their natural assets, which act as carbon sinks, must be properly valued and protected.

Like the minister, I am proud of our strong climate change legislation. Labour played a constructive role in that by improving the Scottish National Party's original proposals and reflecting the aspirations of the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition to set a strong framework for action for business, national and local government, local communities and, indeed, all of us as citizens. Although we will be constructive again today in this debate, we are concerned that the motion sets out only half the picture. For a start, it is too self-congratulatory. There is much to be proud of but we should not pretend that it is enough; indeed, the Scottish Government's own figures for the past two years show as much. Even with the recession and tiny targets of 0.5 per cent this year and 0.3 per cent next year, the Government will struggle. It is all a far cry from the 3 per cent annual targets that people were promised.

Our disappointment stems from the fact that, although the policy levers exist to grow a low-carbon economy and cut emissions, they are not being used to the full and there are serious concerns that even the limited and vague measures in the report on proposals and policies, detailing how the Government intends to meet the targets, have not been allocated adequate funding in the budget settlement.

Stewart Stevenson: Does the member accept that it is not just for the Government to fund the proposals and policies in that report and that, in fact, the majority of the funding that will deliver what is in the RPP will come from the private sector, and from power generation in particular? It is all about a balance between the different sectors.

Sarah Boyack: Yes, but the key point is that it is the role of the Scottish Government to lead and to demonstrate that it will do what it expects others to do. Cutting the active and sustainable travel budget by 45 per cent over the next three years sends the wrong message and stands in total contrast to the SNP's election pledge. When we

signed up collectively to ambitious targets in the previous session, we did so in the knowledge that they would be challenging but doable. We argued that early action was vital to create new jobs and industries and to help people to survive the recession. Although renewables are vital, the Government must give a much higher priority to energy efficiency. Not enough is being done to make the big lifestyle and economic changes that are needed.

For example, electric vehicles could be transformative, would enable green manufacturing and would be effective not only in our towns but in rural areas that have ready access to renewable electricity, such as the northern isles and the Western Isles. Moreover, if electric vehicles were linked with the car club movement, people on lower incomes could access them, too. It is therefore just plain daft that the money that has been allocated to kick-start the electric car transformation has been taken from the sustainable travel budget, which has been cut. That simply does not make sense.

What is plan B if a deal is not struck in Durban? The minister warned about that in his opening speech. Delay now means storing up tougher and more expensive decisions for the future and years of unnecessary carbon emissions building up in our environment.

Our amendment is a reality check. It is intended to be constructive. We have to be realistic about the future. It is clear that we need sustained action over time and across Government elections. Crucially, we need the report on proposals and policies not just to be a stronger mechanism but to have funding for its implementation.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No, I will not, as I took a long intervention earlier.

We have resisted the temptation to provide a list of potential budget changes because it is not just about this budget; it is about subsequent budgets, too, and all of us signing up. If we were in power, there would be much more on energy efficiency in homes and buildings, low-carbon vehicles and sustainable transport.

We have welcomed the progress on the fossil fuel levy, but how will that money be used? What about investment in our low-carbon environment? We have immense peatlands in Scotland. They are our rainforests and our natural carbon sink, but they are not being looked after. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds argues that, around the world, the large-scale degradation of peatlands is resulting in serious environmental impacts. The UK is in the top 20 for carbon emissions from damaged peatlands, and Scotland has 80 per cent

of the UK's deepest blanket bog peatlands. Therefore, we need action now. If our peatlands are left to dry out, the environmental damage will be immense, and the carbon emission reductions that we will need to make elsewhere in the economy will be hugely increased. We cannot just do the stuff that it is good to talk about; we must do the hard stuff as well. There is no room for complacency.

Through freedom of information work that we have done, we have uncovered that the claims that the Scottish Government has made about the climate challenge fund have been overstated and not effectively monitored. I suspect that we could debate that matter for an hour. It is not enough to make claims about what will happen; we need to ensure that things have happened and that we learn lessons. Claims have been made about climate change emission reductions that will be delivered, but we know that they will not happen in every case. If there is a project to make a village hall energy efficient, for example, a carbon emissions reduction will be predicted, but if the hall is used much more than it was before, its carbon emissions will increase. That is not a bad thing, but the predicted emission cannot be bagged; the emissions as they happen must be looked at. There must be credibility. It is not enough to make predictions; the outcomes of projects must be considered. We need better monitoring in every aspect, not only of one fund.

We want to highlight the increasing challenge. Approval for a new power station at Hunterston, for example, would be massively damaging for Scotland's carbon reductions. It is disappointing that we do not have carbon capture and storage for Longannet, and today's European Environment Agency report adds yet more weight for action to reduce CO₂ emissions and protect our environment. Today, Jewel and Esk College is announcing plans to go solar, but the UK Government is cutting back on crucial investment to enable people to install solar panels, which would save money and emissions and, crucially, create jobs.

There can be no room for complacency. We need action at every level of government—whether at the UK, Scottish or local level—and action in the business community. We need to ensure that, when actions are being predicted and benefits are being stated, they are real. That is vital so that, when the minister is abroad talking up what we are doing in Scotland, there is a reality check and a sense of humility. We know that the emissions reductions that we must make will be challenging. If cuts are being made in the sustainable travel budget while we spend lots of money on major road building, the impact on how we will reduce our carbon emissions must be

thought through. We do not believe that enough is being done in that respect.

It is not enough simply to make good claims about energy efficiency investment in our houses and buildings; we must ensure that there is real investment. It is not good enough for the Government to claim that it is increasing the budget because it previously reduced it. That is not a real gain. We need decisive action.

I agree with the minister that progress in the Durban talks is vital, but it is not enough just to talk about the good things that we are doing on low-carbon investment. We must be honest with the rest of the world about the areas in which we will find it hard to reduce our carbon emissions as well, and we know that our increasing use of energy is massively challenging. We need only look at the footprint from our use of cars and other vehicles and at the emissions that they create. The process will not be simple and we delude ourselves and other people if we pretend that it will be.

The agenda must have buy-in from not just the SNP Government but future Governments and businesses and local authorities throughout Scotland. The consequences of inaction would be devastating and future generations would not thank us. The amendment in my name is not a delete-all amendment but a constructive amendment, which shows that we are all behind the minister in meeting the challenge.

I move amendment S4M-01406.3, to insert at end:

"but realises that meeting the targets set in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 will be increasingly challenging, will require the statutory Report on Policies and Proposals to be fully funded to meet the 2022 emissions targets and that therefore there is no room for complacency."

15:20

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

It is nice to be back and to see so many familiar faces on the front benches. I have arrived in this climate change debate by a series of defaults. In spite of the recent reshuffle in the Conservative ranks, I am not a climate change spokesman. I do not think that I am even the second choice. Never mind; here we are. We can remember the good old days when we all worked together on the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill.

At that time, I made it clear that I am something of a foot-dragger, if not a knuckle-dragger, when it comes to climate change issues. However, I am convinced that climate change is a problem, which we need to address. There are one or two people in my party who do not share that view, but I made my living as a farmer in the north-east for many

decades and I realise that the climate is changing and that the causes are—at least in part—significantly man made.

It is ironic that conferences such as the one that we are discussing happen in warm, far-flung parts of the world and that ministers from European and North American nations will get on planes later this month and travel all the way to Durban in South Africa to enjoy some nice summer sun in the southern hemisphere.

We know that Scotland is a model of good practice—perhaps the model of best practice, as the minister said—but there was disappointment after the Copenhagen conference, and last year's discussion at Cancún left as many questions as it found solutions.

The amendment in my name is subtle and makes a single point. I lodged it largely because, although I support the Government's motion, one aspect of it is not clear enough for my liking. It says that the Parliament

"encourages active engagement with other delegations to deliver the message that action on climate change is both necessary and urgent".

My amendment is designed to show that, on climate change, unlike in some areas of policy, the Government needs to work closely with colleagues in the UK to achieve its objective.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member give way?

Alex Johnstone: I was going to develop the point, but I will take an intervention.

Stewart Stevenson: I thought that it would be helpful if I indicated that the Government is minded to support the amendment in Alex Johnstone's name and indeed the Labour amendment, now that we have heard that the Government is not to finance everything in the RPP.

Alex Johnstone: On co-operation in the United Kingdom, it was good to hear a minister who had nice things to say about his counterparts in and the leadership of the Government in the south. David Cameron has participated in that regard. As the minister said, he has thanked the Scottish ministers for their active involvement in and contribution to the debate so far. Of course, it was the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government in the south, under David Cameron's leadership, which invited the Scottish ministers to participate in last year's conference—the first time that they had received such an invitation—and which will ensure that the Scottish ministers participate in the next one.

However, there are challenges. When we consider the carbon emissions of countries such

as China, India and the United States, it is clear that it is essential that we find ways to secure more agreement than has been achieved hitherto. The UK Government has made a point of keeping the foreign aid budget high, but in many cases the funds do not deal with climate change issues. We must ensure that we give economic support to countries that require our assistance if they are to achieve their objectives—I am talking about smaller countries; countries where there is a real problem need to be negotiated with hard.

However, there are problems with the Scottish Government's policy. Many people will say that the overreliance on wind as a source of renewable energy is beginning to cause hostility in some key areas of the country. In spite of the fact that I have tried to take a pragmatic approach to wind farms, I continue to get an increasing level of hostility from people in the areas where wind farms are most prevalent.

The Scottish Government has ambitious hopes for carbon capture and storage, but those hopes are perhaps misplaced when we see public resistance to such a development at Hunterston and when funding requirements exceed the funds that are available in the case of the Longannet plant.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The member is in his last minute.

Alex Johnstone: I am just coming to a close, I am afraid.

There is also the question of why the Government continues with its irrational hostility towards the nuclear industry, which could have a much bigger part to play in achieving our 2050 objectives if it was simply accepted that it could do that job.

I believe that we need a pragmatic, cost-effective and economically sustainable approach to fulfilling our objectives under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. We need to move forward in such a way that we do not throw good money after bad but concentrate our limited resources in the areas that will achieve the greatest result. For that reason, I have some difficulty with the Labour amendment, which appears to be an open-ended spending commitment. We need a cost-effective, pragmatic approach. If we do it in any other way, we could run out of money before we achieve our objectives.

I move amendment S4M-01406.2, to insert at end:

"and encourages collaboration with other UK delegates to agree a common policy in advance of the conference."

15:26

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): The debate about Scotland's international role in Durban needs to focus more on the international opportunities. Many non-governmental organisations remind us endlessly in their briefing papers of the need for better delivery on our own targets, but they do not always applaud the progress that we have made. I want to show how, through our actions here, we can work along with our international partners to underpin world-wide reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

The scientists' measurements of Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions are as follows. In 2009, the emissions—including emissions from international aviation and shipping and with the figures adjusted to take account of trading in the European Union emission trading scheme—amounted to 52 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, which is 27.6 per cent lower than in the 1990 base year. Between 2008 and 2009, they were reduced by 3.8 per cent, or 2 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. Ignoring the effects of trading in the EU ETS, Scottish greenhouse gas emissions fell by 7 per cent between 2008 and 2009, and by 29 per cent between 1990—the base year—and 2009. We are warned that in 2010-11—it takes a long while to get the results—there has been a small increase; however, we have made plans for an average reduction of 3 per cent per year between now and 2020. It is important that people in Scotland grasp the fact that the action will be cumulative.

The Scottish Parliament must encourage other nations to see the ways in which our groundbreaking proposals and policies are setting out to achieve the ambitious targets that Scotland has set. However, meeting legally binding climate change targets is challenging. For example, some recent calculations by NGOs of cumulative emissions reductions, as opposed to year-on-year savings, got rather muddled up; Stop Climate Chaos Scotland has apologised to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee for drawing wrong conclusions at an earlier stage of our taking evidence on this year's budget, which it originally described as putting us

"on a path for embarrassing failure."

We are not on a path for failure; we are in the midst of success.

I turn to marine emissions. The RPP says that the Scottish Government is working with operators and the ports sector, particularly those that are receiving public support, as the improvements to the efficiency of our subsidised fleet are dependent on the pace of vessel replacement.

I understand that the Government is considering whether there is scope for more efficient powering of vessels in port through connection to shoreside power sources. The Government supports efforts for an international agreement on carbon emissions from shipping, and the battery-operated ferries that are under construction on the Clyde show that we have the potential to build a huge number of ships for commercial purposes to new designs just to meet the needs of our northern isles and Western Isles services. That has the potential to be a great new industry for Scotland.

We need an international agreement to be brokered at Durban so that no part of the world is disadvantaged by a cap-and-trade scheme for marine fuel. The EU carbon trading scheme is one model, but I hope that the Scottish Government will help delegates at the 17th conference of the parties to consider a United Nations-backed scheme that bears in mind the arguments of the Chamber of Shipping on those urgently needed agreements.

Peatlands have been mentioned. Scotland holds a special place among the 175 nations globally that have peatlands, as it has 80 per cent of the peatlands in the UK, which is in the top 10 countries in the world. Some of the world's best blanket bogs are found in Scotland, including the flow country, which is in my constituency. There is considerable international interest in our peatland restoration work at that site and substantial income goes to the area from EU LIFE funds in recognition of its environmental significance. Scotland's deepest peatlands store about 6,500 megatonnes of carbon, which is 10 times the amount of carbon that is stored in the whole of the UK's forest biomass. A loss of only 1 per cent of Scotland's peat would equal annual greenhouse gas emissions of about 57 megatonnes of CO₂ equivalent. Conversely, restoring damaged peatland could greatly reduce emissions and contribute to meeting Scotland's climate change targets.

Peatlands are important for carbon reduction and clean water, and Scotland has a key role in consequent research work. The centre for ecology and hydrology has a greenhouse gas monitoring station in the flow country. The environmental research institute in Thurso, under the leadership of Professor Stuart Gibb, is creating a hub for that cutting-edge technology. There is a clear community of interest in peatlands across a wide range of organisations. We need to muster the considerable peatland expertise and resources in the public and private sectors in Scotland and across the UK and Europe to lead to a UN-backed order at Durban to measure land-management emissions in every country.

To achieve the required scale and urgency of action, the UN must recognise the challenges of the current economic climate and deliver the urgent actions at COP17. That is the outlook that we want from our ministerial presence as part of the UK delegation in Durban, with the support of all parties in the Parliament and some of our vigilant NGOs.

15:33

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): As members have highlighted, the international climate conference in Durban is a seismic event that affects the future of our planet and all living beings. It is our responsibility as humans to be sure to lay the foundations for a legally binding and fair deal for the future. Perhaps I reiterate the obvious, but the complexities of the global negotiations merit the attention of all of us. I will share some thoughts on leadership, community support and global connections.

Scotland has the respect of the world for the vision that has been shown and the action that has been taken in having the first climate change legislation with binding targets. That has been shaped in part by Scottish Labour, with cross-party support, and by the current Administration. As part of the UK delegation to Durban, the Scottish Government can take a significant lead, and I wish ministers well with that. However, it is essential that Scotland lead by example, so I will, in spite of our reputation, highlight one or two areas of concern.

In the vision section of "Low Carbon Scotland: Meeting the Emissions Reduction Targets 2010-2022: The Report on Proposals and Policies" the Scottish Government states:

"Walking or cycling to work or school will become increasingly popular. Changes in travel habits and other actions to tackle climate change go hand in hand with important health, social and environmental benefits: reducing the incidence and economic costs of heart disease, obesity, diabetes, depression, and local pollution."

However, as has been highlighted by Sarah Boyack, according to WWF Scotland's calculations,

"motorway and trunk road spending is up by 25%"

but

"active travel equates to less than 1% of the transport budget."

I have been approached by South Scotland constituents who are alarmed by the cut in the active travel budget. Will the minister please look again at that budget, so that the warm words of the vision are matched by real support for initiatives in communities?

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): I, too, have received a great deal of correspondence on that issue. Does the member acknowledge that the £50 million future transport fund over this session of Parliament is a new funding line that is entirely for sustainable travel? That should have been taken into account in the calculations that have been presented to parliamentarians by NGOs.

Claudia Beamish: I acknowledge what Marco Biagi is saying, but the fact remains that there has been a cut of 45 per cent in the actual budget, which is a cause for concern.

Leadership is also needed in energy efficiency. The Scottish Government is in the bottom half of the league table in energy efficiency in public buildings, according to a Department of Energy and Climate Change survey. In his closing remarks, will the minister shed light on that? The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body lay in 246th position; we should all take responsibility for making changes in that.

I add my voice to the 15,000-strong Friends of the Earth petition to the UK Government, on its plans to slash financial support to communities that plan to install solar electricity systems. The decision has caused difficulty for many of my constituents who have already paid deposits, and there is now uncertainty about future initiatives. I know that the minister, Fergus Ewing, has already written to the UK Government on the issue; will he update Parliament? It is a ruthless, sudden and ill-advised decision by the UK Government to change the cut-off point for lower feed-in tariffs to December 12.

If we are to continue to lead by example, the Scottish Government must go on supporting communities and householders in their quest for a sustainable future. I know that the Scottish Government will do that.

Only last Saturday, I heard of an innovative plan to create a woodland allotment in Peebles—well, not in Peebles itself, but the plan is by people from Peebles. The residents will work together to tap into the wood life cycle to get fuel, while keeping fit and even, perhaps, providing work opportunities. Innovation is key, so when communities are being adventurous, I ask the minister to ensure that financial support is imaginative and not too restrictive in its criteria.

The minister has highlighted our moral obligation. It is vital that we continue to make connections around the globe so that we can be in dialogue with other countries in the quest for a fair solution to climate change beyond the Durban negotiations. As parliamentarians, we are all in a position to do that. I would like to share a small example. In the summer recess, some of us

welcomed a young Chinese group from a project at the University of Nottingham. I was asked to share thoughts, through an interpreter, about the economics of climate change, and I am now building future dialogue with members of the group. They were especially interested in issues at local government level.

In developing the complex global negotiations about a fair way forward for developing countries, it is my belief that, post Durban, we can all take responsibility for taking forward connections. At a time of economic concern, I am reassured when the minister says that we must be more rather than less innovative.

We need to keep our nerve in Scotland, in supporting our communities in their innovative quests for a sustainable life, in developing skills and green jobs, and in helping vulnerable people to adapt to climate change. Then we can truly speak out at Durban and beyond. I wish the minister well as part of the UK delegation. As he says, time is short, and it is our moral responsibility to act.

15:39

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): There is a pessimistic backdrop to the upcoming discussions in Durban that is deeply disappointing. Not just one, but a series of recent reports have reinforced—if reinforcement were needed—the pressing need at the very least to extend the commitment period of the Kyoto protocol, which is due to expire next year. That will allow time to agree a binding treaty, to come into force by 2015 at the latest, that will bring inside the tent countries that the protocol does not cover. However, it seems that some of the world's richest countries still do not get it on climate change, or simply cannot summon the will to address the situation.

Following the failure of the Copenhagen summit in 2009, it appears, sadly, that no new global climate agreement will be reached before 2016, at the earliest. Such an agreement would not come into play before 2020, which is eight years from now.

The International Energy Agency's chief economist, Fatih Birol, and leading United Nations climate change official, Christiana Figueres, have both warned that time is running out if we are to keep a temperature increase below 2°C. Worryingly, however, that may be understating the seriousness of the situation with which we are confronted, because it has also been suggested that the chances of restricting the increase in global temperature to 2°C above 1990 levels are already all but gone.

The IEA's "World Energy Outlook 2011" publication tells us that if recent climate change

commitments are implemented by Governments only in what it terms “a cautious manner”, we are heading in a direction of travel that is leading to an average long-term temperature increase of 3.5°C. If Governments renege on those commitments, we are looking at an increase of 6°C or worse.

There was more bad news this week when we learned from the World Meteorological Organization’s “Greenhouse Gas Bulletin” that the volume of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere reached a new high in 2010 and that the rate of increase has accelerated. However, it appears that leading nations are planning to turn a deaf ear or a blind eye—characterise it as you like—to those warnings and to the predicted consequences that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change outlined a few weeks ago in a report that made clear the extent to which continuing global warming will produce increases in extreme weather events.

For members who have not read the IPCC report—given the volume of material that we each have to digest weekly, I realise that that may be the majority of us—I will summarise its most pertinent and worrying points. Looking ahead to the unfolding 21st century, it predicts that there is a 99 to 100 per cent chance that the frequency and magnitude of warm daily temperature extremes will increase globally; that it is 66 to 100 per cent certain that the frequency of heavy rain or the proportion of total rainfall from heavy precipitation will increase over many parts of the globe; and that there is a 66 to 100 per cent chance that average tropical cyclone wind speed will increase. It says with 66 to 100 per cent confidence that droughts in some areas will intensify, and it predicts with 99 to 100 per cent certainty that coastal erosion will continue and that rising average sea levels will, along with increased cyclone speeds, pose a significant threat to small tropical island states.

I, as other members have, read the *Scotsman* story this morning on Lord Krebs’s report on climate change and its impact on Scotland. Of course, who would say that the prospect of fewer winter deaths, lower heating bills, fresh business opportunities and a boost to tourism would be unwelcome? However, along with those comes increased risk of flooding and storms. In any case, should we not be looking at the bigger picture and, in particular, at the overwhelmingly detrimental impact that climate change is having on the third world?

On a global scale, so much—much more than has been done so far—needs to be done. It is an opportunity for Scotland, with our world-leading climate change legislation, to lead the way. As Stop Climate Chaos Scotland summed things up in its briefing:

“It is therefore of utmost importance that ... Scotland continues to set an example to others. Other countries, some of which are on the cusp of legislating on climate change, are looking towards the Scottish example to see what is possible and achievable.”

Of course, leading the way means walking the walk as well as talking the talk. It was therefore heartening to hear Stewart Stevenson’s response when he was challenged on the issue during an evidence session with the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee. I hope that he repeats that message in Durban and tells the world that Scotland remains absolutely committed to meeting our climate change targets; that it is not acceptable to adopt a “We’ll move if you do” approach to the issue; that the world is past the point at which that sort of conditionality will address climate change; and that somebody must seize the initiative. He can point to the progress that is being made towards fully unlocking the potential of offshore wind, tidal and wave power as evidence of Scotland’s commitment to delivering.

I agree with Sarah Boyack and Rob Gibson on the importance of seizing the opportunity that is presented by our peatlands to propel Scotland towards fulfilling its emissions-cutting targets. Fully exploiting the natural carbon storage option that that represents is a work in progress. First, we need Durban to agree to count carbon that is stored in peatlands, although it is anticipated that that will happen. We also need to agree on a counting mechanism, which it is anticipated will happen a year from now. We need to gather the evidence that shows the extent to which temporary methane gas emissions, following on from peatland restoration, militate against what we seek to achieve. What a chance that offers Scotland to cement its place at the forefront of battling climate change.

15:45

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):

Alex Johnstone remarked earlier on the familiar faces in chamber this afternoon and it is something of an unexpected pleasure to be back speaking on climate change for the Lib Dems. I and, I am sure, the minister, thought that those days were behind me, but I am afraid that my colleague Jim Hume is away on a humanitarian mission this week, so here I am again.

I see that not much has changed in the few months since I last spoke on climate change. The Government is still quick to trumpet our “world-leading” climate change bill, but is rather more circumspect when it comes to actually putting in place the measures that will enable us to meet our ambitious targets. I will turn to that in a moment; however, I start by welcoming the fact that Scotland will be represented on the UK Government’s delegation to the COP17

conference in Durban next week. It is important to recognise the work that has been done by Chris Huhne at the Department for Energy and Climate Change, not only in driving the UK Government forward to ensure that it is the “greenest” ever, but also for the pro-active and inclusive approach that he has taken in engaging with the Scottish Government.

The Government’s motion is right to highlight that action on climate change should not be seen as a burden but, rather, as an opportunity for innovation and growth. Scotland has the opportunity to develop itself as a green energy powerhouse, and it is right that we are able to share our experiences with the rest of the world. As has been said already today, the fight against climate change cannot succeed on the basis of action being taken in just one country. The conference of the parties summit is a vital forum for engagement, and I am pleased that it is one in which Scotland can participate fully.

The motion this afternoon also notes the urgent need for action. I fully endorse that sentiment. Early action is absolutely vital—global action that will mitigate and limit the worst effects of climate change, and the action that we need to take here to meet the targets in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. On that, I was interested to see the minister’s appearance at the Rural Affairs, Environment and Climate Change Committee yesterday to discuss the use of carbon credits towards targets from 2013.

From the beginning of our work on the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, everyone involved was clear that domestic effort must be the focus of our efforts. The use of carbon units should be a last resort: indeed, we chose not to allow them to be used towards the 2010, 2011 and 2012 targets at all. I recognise, of course, that in setting the latest limits, the minister is following the advice of the UK Committee on Climate Change and that the availability of carbon units does not necessarily mean that they will be used. Indeed, despite the relatively low price that was mentioned by the minister yesterday, I must trust that the Government will not be tempted to rely on the credits as an easy way to hit our targets.

Patrick Harvie: I am grateful to Alison McInnes for giving way, but I am slightly concerned that she says we “must trust ... the Government” not to do that. If we want the Government not to do it and the Government says that it does not want to do it, why should we pass an order that will allow the Government to do it?

Alison McInnes: Patrick Harvie will know that I am keen to ensure that we do not allow the use of carbon units at all, but we are where we are. I said, “I trust”—I do not mean that I really believe that that is the case. I genuinely hope that I am

proved wrong and that the Government does not intend to use the units if at all possible. Our emissions are our own responsibility and purchasing credits cannot be looked at as a substitute for real domestic action.

Actually, it is not the credits themselves that I would like to touch on but, rather, a worrying detail that is mentioned in the advice of the UK Committee on Climate Change. It notes that, given the current EU-wide target and the current policies that are outlined in the RPP, our 2015, 2016 and 2017 emissions targets would be missed. Even if we add the maximum effect of all of the RPP’s proposals, the 2017 target would still be missed, and that is the best-case scenario, so to speak. For the RPP’s proposals and policies to become a reality, they need to be properly budgeted for; I am afraid that, on current evidence, that is simply not the case.

Transport is one of the biggest contributors to the non-traded sector of emissions in Scotland, yet the Government has budgeted, by some fairly generous calculations, just £30 million for low carbon transport measures in 2012-13. Friends of the Earth Scotland estimates that, over the three years that are covered by the latest spending review, funding for sustainable travel is barely a tenth of what is needed to fully fund the RPP and barely 5 per cent of the amount that will be spent on roads.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Alison McInnes: I am almost at the end of my speech. There seems to be a worrying trend across the spending review: a real-terms cut in support for sustainable and active travel, in support for bus services, in funding for the zero waste initiative, and so on.

There are tough decisions to make, but it is up to the Government to decide what its priorities are. Ensuring that Scotland’s message on climate change to other countries has substance and is not empty rhetoric should be one priority.

Some movement has taken place on energy efficiency in homes. I would like action to go further still, but I welcome the increase in the budget for energy efficiency measures. However, I will sound a small note of caution. My experience of a recent visit at home from a local company that is working on a home insulation scheme highlighted that people are still largely unaware of the financial support that is available to help to improve energy efficiency and, thereby, to reduce emissions at home. The Government still needs to address that lack of public engagement.

As the minister will well remember, we spent a great deal of time last summer on ensuring that the RPP was comprehensive and ambitious. It is

the sort of document that might well serve as a best-practice example at next week's summit, but it will be of use only if the Government has the will to follow it through.

I think that we all agree that we should be proud of the action that we have taken on climate change and that engaging positively with other COP17 participants is important. I echo Sarah Boyack's sentiments: we must work with other nations and encourage them to do their bit to reduce emissions, but it is just as vital that we do not become complacent in our efforts here at home.

15:51

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in this important debate. As we have heard, the Durban conference is a key step on the way to achieving in the next few years a legally binding global deal on climate change targets and, thereby, a commitment to a low-carbon future. As we have also heard and as the minister said, such a deal is—sadly—not expected to emerge from the Durban summit. Rather, it is hoped that the summit will make sufficient progress to pave the way for reaching such a global deal by perhaps 2015.

In the context of the Durban summit and the ongoing international efforts to reduce emissions and progress to a low-carbon future, Scotland has an important role to play. We have heard that Scotland is widely recognised internationally on the basis of the leadership and ambition that it has shown with its world-leading climate change legislation. Since the Parliament unanimously adopted the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill on 24 June 2009, Scotland has actively participated in the global debate and has shown by example what can be done.

I understand that the Minister for Environment and Climate Change has held bilateral talks on climate change with international colleagues 14 times since May, in advance of the Durban summit. It is to be hoped that our ambitious approach will be adopted elsewhere. The minister has emphasised in his international discussions that climate change should be viewed as an opportunity rather than a problem. We in Scotland are showing by example that a low-carbon economy can lead to jobs, trade, investment and growth. We are all aware of the significant recent investments in the low-carbon economy that we have managed to attract to Scotland, to the tune of £750 million.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): An ambitious approach is all very well, but does the member accept that if we fail to resource the RPP properly and cannot achieve the target, Scotland

will be left with egg on its face and will look a bit silly internationally?

Annabelle Ewing: I am puzzled by that intervention. When a comment along the same lines was made earlier, the minister's clear response was that the RPP is properly resourced but that it should be recalled that the drive must be made not simply by the Government but by all of us, including the private sector in particular.

I pay tribute to the significant efforts of our NGOs, which seek to influence the international debate. They have worked hard and engaged actively with parliamentarians and with NGOs and activists in other countries to bring Scotland's ambitious Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 to the forefront of best-practice discussions. I wish our NGOs continuing success in those discussions.

A debate on climate change raises the important issue of individual responsibility. It is axiomatic that, if individual behaviour does not change, we will all fail. I submit, however, that the most effective way of changing individual behaviour is to bring people with us. I believe that the Scottish Government, in particular, has recognised that with its successful climate challenge fund initiative, which seeks to facilitate community-driven projects on climate change. That initiative has been going for some years now and has, I understand, supported about 345 grass-roots projects.

I have direct personal experience of a very successful community project that benefited from the fund: the Comrie Development Trust's Comrie carbon challenge project. I declare an interest at this point, because I did some work for it some years ago, which appears in my entry in the register of members' interests. In Comrie, where I live—members will be pleased to hear that it is a very can-do village in its approach to important issues—there has been a noticeable change in people's behaviour and I believe that that behavioural change is continuing apace. In a significant number of cases, people's initial scepticism has given way to their embracing enthusiastically carbon-reduction measures, and to a general awareness that, especially in these difficult financial times, it does indeed pay to be green.

In the light of the climate challenge fund's important role, I am very pleased indeed to see that, notwithstanding the significant Westminster cuts that are being imposed on the Scottish Parliament, we in the Scottish National Party are managing to maintain climate challenge funding over the spending review period.

We have a great case to make on the world stage; we should not be the slightest bit afraid of doing that. Of course, we must do all that we can

here, but we have a good case to take to other countries. We recognise that a key plank of a successful climate change policy is in bringing the individual with us.

However, I want to make one remark that is not so positive, which is on the discriminatory system for transmission charging. Until the UK Government stops dithering and delaying on that important issue, there is a serious risk that Scotland's renewable energy industry will be sabotaged. We cannot allow that to happen. If it does, there will be impacts not just on our huge potential in renewables. We will also fail to meet our climate challenge targets, as will the rest of the United Kingdom.

15:57

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): The importance of the developed world's participation in the UN summits on climate change rests on its ability to deliver on its climate change targets. Trust is the linchpin for states the world over to be able to negotiate compromise and agree the global reductions targets that are essential to sustaining our natural environment. Without the confidence that Scotland as a developed nation is serious about reducing its emissions targets, there is little incentive for developing nations to address their demand for finite natural resources as they, too, seek to industrialise.

This year's conference in Durban offers the opportunity for Scotland to showcase to the world what action it is taking to fulfil its ambitious commitment to reduce carbon emissions by 42 per cent by 2020. That target is world leading and, as such, lends itself to substantial scrutiny. Without proper implementation through progressive policies that are underpinned by sufficient financial commitment, we risk hindering, rather than helping, negotiations in Durban.

As Sarah Boyack pointed out, there are already signs that the targets risk being missed. Preliminary figures show that instead of having locked in emissions savings from 2009, emissions in Scotland rose again in 2010. The budget and the RPP do not go far enough to reverse that and put us back on track towards achieving what is one of this Government's flagship policies, to which parties across the Parliament signed up.

Most of Scotland's carbon emissions emanate from our homes, but investment in demand-reduction programmes has declined. In the 2010-11 budget, funding of £71 million was available for programmes such as the energy assistance package and the universal home insulation scheme. This year, however, that funding stands at just £48 million. That means that more, not fewer, of Scotland's homes will run inefficiently,

adding significantly to energy demand and our carbon footprint.

Nearly 20 per cent of Scotland's carbon emissions stem from transport, yet this Government has moved away from funding policies that will help to meet emissions targets and towards policies that actively undermine them. The sustainable and active travel budget line has been reduced from £25 million to £16 million, but spending on trunk roads and motorways is set to increase by 25 per cent.

Marco Biagi: Will the member give way?

Jenny Marra: I will make this point; then I will give way.

Just this week, I came across that kind of policy in action. Up in Dundee, we have an issue with a school bus that has been withdrawn. The council says that it has no power over whether the service should be reinstated and that it is the responsibility of the bus companies. In fact, that illustrates a failure by the Scottish National Party properly to fund public transport mechanisms, which means that many more families will have to rely on their cars to get their children to school. Indeed, the convener of education agreed with me that more bus regulation would help the public transport system in this country. I commend her comments to the SNP Government.

Kevin Stewart: First, the member is describing not a school bus but a bus that goes past schools. School buses are something different. Does she agree that initiatives such as hydrogen buses in Aberdeen, and schemes such as Getabout, run by Nestrans—I declare an interest as a former chair of Nestrans—are ensuring that active and sustainable travel continues?

Jenny Marra: It sounds as though the scheme in Aberdeen is a good idea, but that is not happening down in Dundee, where bus regulation is badly needed. Again, I commend to the Government the proposal for bus regulation, which the SNP convener of education in Dundee agrees would be an excellent idea.

There is less investment in transport methods that reduce impact on the environment, and more in those that do not. Similarly, although the RPP identifies that the proposals for eco-driving, travel planning and cycling infrastructure investment require funding of £714 million until 2014, the spending review does not seem to provide even 10 per cent of that. Without adequate funding, those policies turn from genuine mechanisms for reducing demand and achieving emissions targets into empty rhetoric.

I understand the fixed budget of the Scottish Government, but I also understand that it was well aware of the figures before the election, when it

was committing to the RPP. The imperative to reduce Scotland's emissions is a legislative commitment that the Government signed up to and has a duty to deliver. It cannot be ignored.

We will go to Durban as the nation with the most ambitious target in the world, but only if the Scottish Government adopts a more innovative approach in its climate change policies by ensuring that schemes that are aimed at demand reduction are meaningfully funded will we reduce Scotland's carbon emissions and make a substantial contribution to the international climate change talks.

16:03

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome this important debate on the negotiations in Durban next week. The seriousness of climate change is not underestimated by our Government, this Parliament or the people of Scotland. The challenges, as we all know, are considerable.

Earlier this month, the International Energy Agency published its "World Energy Outlook 2011" document. As Graeme Dey has already said, that report highlighted that, if we are to achieve the long-term goal of limiting the rise in global temperature to a manageable two degrees, urgent action needs to be taken to reduce CO₂ emissions on a global scale. The report makes it clear that the window for introducing effective action is closing quickly. If that vital long-term target is to be met—and the risks are increasing that it will not be—global emissions must peak by 2020 and decline thereafter. For that crucial target to be met, progress has to be made at next week's climate change conference in Durban.

Climate change is often viewed as solely a problem for our future generations. However, the reality is that the damaging effects are already having a human impact. From risks to agricultural production in Africa to coastal erosion in South Uist, the effects are real and we must act not as individual nations but as one planet together.

We have heard from various members about the positive and world-leading steps that Scotland is taking in the fight against climate change, and it is right that we do so. Scotland has some of the world's most progressive and ambitious climate change legislation. As a nation we are blessed with energy resources from the old but still vital technologies in oil, coal and gas, to the newer, greener developing technologies in wind, hydro, wave, tidal and solar. We should be viewing those technologies as an opportunity not just to cut back on our carbon emissions, but to boost our economy and create jobs. It is estimated that there are already 10,000 jobs in the clean fossil fuels and carbon capture and storage industries in

Scotland alongside 3,000 additional jobs in renewables. That is just the tip of the iceberg, and we are likely to see an increase many times over in the years ahead. This year alone has seen the announcement of more than £160 million in investment by renewable energy developers, with the potential to add 400 more jobs.

As we look ahead to next week's 17th UN conference of the parties, Scotland has a positive message to take to Durban: implementing actions that limit climate change is not only essential for the future wellbeing of our societies, but good for stimulating economic growth and creating jobs. That positive message is urgently needed. It is clear that, at best, the Durban conference will provide a stepping stone to a successor to the Kyoto treaty, which expires at the end of 2012. However, although everyone now agrees that time is running out to have a new version of Kyoto in place before the end of 2012, it is imperative that progress is made in Durban on preparing the ground for a new treaty to be signed by 2015. Part of that progress could be in securing agreement that a second emissions target commitment period will commence in 2012 upon the expiry of the first. Doubtless even that interim measure will be difficult to agree with those seeking a binding treaty to succeed Kyoto, including the 27 members of the EU, being reluctant to move forward unless the world's largest emitters, who remain outside the Kyoto framework, undertake to participate in a future, legally binding emissions reduction framework.

There is always the risk that the failure of the Durban conference to achieve a comprehensive agreement on the successor to the Kyoto protocol will reduce pressure on some Governments to adhere to the climate change targets that have previously been adopted. Needless to say, that would be a disastrous reaction. Accordingly, I was pleased that the European Parliament last week adopted a resolution underlining the EU's commitment to the Kyoto protocol and that the EU should give public and unequivocal support to its continuation at the Durban conference. That resolution also made clear the European Parliament's belief that the European Union must raise its game regardless of the commitments of the carbon giants of the United States of America and China, by committing to a 30 per cent instead of 20 per cent target for cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. I was also pleased to note that in the resolution, like this Parliament before it, the European Parliament recognised the key links between combating climate change and achieving higher rates of sustainable economic growth. In Scotland, we are demonstrating that investing in green technologies is a key source of growth and employment, even in the tough economic conditions in which we find ourselves.

The Scottish Government has shown that it is ready and willing to take a lead in implementing measures that are designed to make a real impact on tackling climate change. In Scotland, we have shown that we are prepared to lead by example. I hope that the EU will do likewise. It is vital that the reluctance of some countries to commit fully to an ambitious, comprehensive and legally binding international framework that is designed to tackle climate change should not be used by the EU as a reason to lessen its commitment to the endeavour. I hope that Stewart Stevenson will take that message from this Parliament to Durban next week. I urge the UK Government to fully endorse that message.

16:06

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): I begin by putting on the record the intervention that I intended to make earlier. Some claims have been made about funding that cannot really go unchallenged. One was about the active and sustainable travel spend, but the other was about the motorway and trunk roads budget. It is going up, but the level 3 figures show that the main increases come from the Forth replacement crossing, an increase in winter preparedness and rising private finance initiative payments. If the Opposition members would like to say which of those they disagree with in their concluding remarks, I would be most grateful.

Patrick Harvie: I will be happy to do that.

Marco Biagi: I think that I can already guess which one Mr Harvie disagrees with.

I am part of the way into my speech and I have not managed to mention the constitution. Every sentence that I use has to have a verb, a noun and a plug for independence, so let me get on to that.

For me, the Durban conference casts a lot of doubt on the argument that the world is interdependent and the nation state is outdated. The 21st century state looks like the 19th century state to a greater extent than it is usually given credit for. Back in 1884, heads of Government met in Berlin, decided the future of the world and carved it up between them. Now, 127 years later, their successors will divide it up in a somewhat different way, but the future of the world is still their responsibility. They might have domestic pressures and cross-border influences, but it is still them—the heads of Government—who commit their states to action. When corporate and civic leaders also have seats around the table, as was the case at Davos, it is called a forum. The status of nation state is still a privileged one to have.

Although I welcome the fact that the UK Government is permitting Scotland to participate in

Durban, I look forward to the day when Scotland can participate directly in such events, when we will be able to express whatever views we hold rather than speak only when we agree with the full member state. That said, I welcome the news that we can find common ground on the issue.

We have a fantastic story to tell. Having achieved a 28.9 per cent cut in emissions by 2009—that figure was obtained using a slightly different measure to the one that Rob Gibson cited—we should achieve the Kyoto target with room to spare. We should remember that the Kyoto protocol asked for a cut of just 5.2 per cent from the 1990 baseline by 2012. In doing so, it was criticised for not going far enough, but there were those for whom it still went too far. It has been ratified by 191 countries, but Afghanistan, Andorra and South Sudan have joined the usual suspect of the US Government in the non-ratification camp.

It is easy to rush to reflexive condemnation of the US Government, but not all the countries that ratified the protocol have delivered. Canada's emissions have not fallen since 1990; in fact, they have risen by 24 per cent. The vast majority of that rise is accounted for by just one province, Alberta, whose centre right government has been unmoved by environmental concerns. The lesson of all that is that deeds, not words, are what matter; they are what the developing world—the underdeveloped world—is calling for.

As my colleague Graeme Dey explained, the consequences of not acting would be stark. Friends of the Earth states in its briefing that the RPP, which is a fantastic document,

“cannot afford to sit on a shelf”.

I agree, although I think that we would disagree on the extent to which that is happening. I hope that the Scottish Government will engage with those concerns, perhaps by updating the climate change delivery plan or providing information in some other way to ensure that there is no doubt whatever among the wider public about the clarity of the Government's intent, whether on active and sustainable travel or carbon credits. I certainly have no doubt about its direction of travel.

In ecological terms, we are the luckiest country in Europe when it comes to economic factor endowment, and we should not overlook that. Two or three hundred years ago, flat land was the prime property; now the rugged landscape and seascape of Scotland can come into their own. We hold the low-carbon investment conference, and I hope that the green investment bank will soon come to my constituency of Edinburgh Central, although I would settle for it coming to one of the neighbouring constituencies—I am not precious about that.

I welcome the investment that Scotland has secured in renewable energy, but I probably speak for many when I say that I would like to see a few more home-grown companies taking advantage of the opportunities that exist. My constituency is benefiting from improvements to housing and public transport and from the climate challenge fund and the jobs that are coming with renewables.

I note that, in August, the Scottish Government expressed an intention to consult on legislation to reduce the use of plastic bags. I hope that the minister looks closely at the option of a bag levy, the potential for which was reserved to the Government under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, because as well as reducing landfill, such a levy could generate funds that could be directed towards spend-to-save measures—such as home insulation—that make financial and environmental sense, but which need a bit of up-front investment. That is an example of suggesting action and suggesting how it might be paid for—many members would do well to learn that lesson.

I support action on climate change not just because it is the right thing for the economy or because of steps such as those I have outlined but because it is the right thing to do. Whether it is expressed through a moral duty or framed under the economic urgencies of the present, what matters is the underlying commitment and intention for real action. The heads of state at such conferences can sometimes give the impression of a nervous schoolboy afraid to volunteer or of a card sharp eager to pull some quick wins. If Scotland can be a voice of reason, however constrained, it becomes our moral duty not just to act, but, by example, to encourage others to do so too.

16:15

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I wish the minister all the best for his time in Durban. I know that he has a strong personal commitment to the agenda, and I hope that as part of the UK delegation he will help to push other countries towards the legally binding international cut in carbon emissions that we so desperately need. I hope that the UK delegation will also support developing countries to adapt to climate change to deal with the problems that Sarah Boyack so powerfully described at the beginning of her speech.

I am sure that the minister will tell others of our landmark climate change legislation, and we can all be justifiably proud of the act that we passed two years ago. However, the key to the act has always been in the implementation, and it is right that Sarah Boyack and others have shifted the focus of the debate towards the action that is

being taken now, as that should be our primary concern.

At the beginning of his speech, the minister talked about our unique competitive advantage in the low-carbon economy. We can all be grateful for that and the great opportunities that we have in areas such as wind and tidal power. I commend the Government's enthusiasm for renewable energy and I always support the Government in what it is doing on that. I was particularly pleased a couple of weeks ago when at question time the First Minister referred to a memorandum of understanding between Scottish Enterprise and local partners to develop Leith docks as a hub for renewable energy. Leith docks would be an ideal location for developing the turbines that are necessary for offshore wind.

I say in passing that the Scottish Government should be clear that the large-scale biomass plant that Forth Ports wants to go along with the offshore wind facility is negative from a climate change point of view. I hope that the Government can make that clear. Even if a small amount of heat from the development could be used, its consequences for climate change would be negative, not just because of the mass transportation of timber but because of the increase in emissions from large-scale biomass plants for many decades.

If Scotland is strong in renewables, transport policy is at the opposite end of the spectrum. I have long regarded transport as the Achilles' heel of our climate change activity. In its budget submission to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, Transform Scotland was slightly less polite than I have been, saying that transport is

"the basket case of climate policy".

There certainly seems to be a contradiction between the rhetoric of the RPP and the budgetary choices that have been made in the transport budget.

Transport is the second largest emissions sector, accounting for just over a quarter of our emissions, and yet recent trends continue upwards. Stop Climate Chaos Scotland tells us that the 2012-13 budget provides not more than 6 per cent of the funding measures required by the RPP. Although I accept what the minister said about the role of the private sector, I do not believe that it can fill such a large gap.

Two thirds of the transport emissions come from road transport, and yet the Government continues to be obsessed with road building. Marco Biagi referred to the road budget. I should tell him that the rising PFI charges are linked not just to roads that have already been commissioned but to the

new roads that the Scottish Government is planning.

I had an interesting exchange during an Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee meeting with Alex Neil, who was trying to argue that building the M74 was helpful for our climate change objectives. People can take whatever view they like about the pros and cons of that project from an economic point of view, but it is a bit absurd to see a road that generates more traffic as helping our climate change objectives.

Kevin Stewart: Will Malcolm Chisholm give way on that point?

Malcolm Chisholm: I am afraid that I will be short of time. I will give way if I have time, but I need to deal with the transport budget in more detail.

Active travel was highlighted not only by a report from one of the Parliament's committees in 2009 but by the SNP's manifesto, which promised

"to increase the proportion of transport spending that goes on low-carbon"

and active travel. However, as Sarah Boyack reminded us, the sustainable and active travel budget line is down 45 per cent in next year's budget.

Sustrans has told the Parliament that it will get nothing next year, although one of the five transport milestones in the RPP is that at least 10 per cent of all journeys should be made by bicycle. That will be impossible with the funding cuts.

The freight facilities grant has also been abolished, although the RPP emphasises the modal shift of freight.

Although there is a ring-fenced cycling, walking and safer streets budget for local authorities, which stands at £7.5 million for this year, there is no guarantee that it will be continued till next year. I urge the Scottish Government to ensure that it is continued.

I never like to ask the Government to spend large sums of money without saying where they should come from. The transport lines that I have mentioned are not large and, with small shifts of resources within the transport budget, it would be easy to ensure that the sustainable and active travel budget was maintained.

Marco Biagi made great play of the future transport fund, saying that it was £50 million. I accept that some of my former colleagues sometimes rolled up three years' budgets into one, but the fact is that the future transport fund budget for next year is £3.25 million. That certainly does not cover the enormous gap in next year's transport budget that Sarah Boyack and others described.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Mr Chisholm, come to a conclusion, please.

Malcolm Chisholm: The conclusion is obvious: make small shifts in the transport budget and make sure that it contributes to combating climate change.

16:22

Paul Wheelhouse (South Scotland) (SNP): I am pleased to support the Government's motion.

Although there is much scepticism regarding the concept of climate change in the UK—Graeme Dey referred to the article in today's *Scotsman*—I have little doubt that such change is at work. I have taken the time to visit the Met Office in Edinburgh to see the predictions of its models and I encourage other members to do so. After hearing from the team there, I am convinced that fundamental changes in climate are already in train and that, if we are to blunt their impact, we must act now to limit global temperature rises to 2°C if at all possible.

If we fail to act, we will literally reap the wind. Not only will there be more frequent extreme weather events, but there will be greater pressure on global food and water supplies in the form of mass migrations driven by changing climates. The human cost of the increased incidence of what we currently regard as tropical illnesses should also not be underestimated.

As many members have said, developing countries are the most vulnerable to the impact of climate change. By 2020, up to 250 million people in Africa could be exposed to greater risk of water stress, and up to 1 billion people in Asia are thought to be at risk of water shortages by 2050. Some small island states, many of which are Commonwealth member states, face the possibility of complete inundation.

By 2030, developing countries will require between \$28 billion and \$67 billion in funds to enable them to adapt to climate change. That equates to 0.2 to 0.8 per cent of global investment flows or only 0.06 to 0.21 per cent of projected global GDP.

In central and south Asia, crop yields are predicted to fall by up to 30 per cent. Reduced crop yields in tropical areas will lead to an increased risk of hunger and climate-sensitive diseases. They will also put at risk Scotland's food security and cause rising food prices in our shops. Although the impact is likely to be locally severe elsewhere in the world, it will affect us all—even those who have their heads in the sand, such as Lord Krebs, who was mentioned earlier.

We have a responsibility to address those global issues. Global CO₂ levels, as measured by the

World Meteorological Organization, have risen to 389ppm—the highest level recorded since 1750. There is also a worrying upward trend: 2009's increase of 2.3ppm was considerably higher than the increases experienced in previous decades.

Globally, climate change is posing real threats, mainly to many smaller developing nations that are relatively poorly resourced to tackle them, but also to many of our major trading partners. One of those small states is the Maldives and, in December 2009, Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond and the President of the Maldives pledged to work together to tackle the impact of global warming. The Maldives, which lie off the coast of the Indian subcontinent, are made up of nearly 1,200 small islands, none of which is more than 2m or 6ft above sea level. As a result, the country is particularly vulnerable to the sort of rise in sea level associated with global warming.

When the South Australia Government awarded the First Minister the South Australia international climate change leadership award, it said—

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I am glad that the member has mentioned the award given to the First Minister. Given that he was nominated for it by one of his own ministers, Fergus Ewing, will Mr Wheelhouse and the rest of the chamber unite with me in nominating Mr Ewing for the brown nose of the year award?

Paul Wheelhouse: I would rather not comment on Mr Ewing's nomination of the First Minister. Instead, I would rather use the words of those made the award, who said that Scotland is almost two thirds of the way towards achieving its target of reducing emissions by 42 per cent by 2020. I also point out that, by 2009, emissions had fallen by 27.6 per cent from the 1990 base year; Marco Biagi might have cited a slightly different figure in that respect, but that figure includes the effects of international aviation, shipping and participation in the EU emissions trading scheme.

The final draft of Scotland's RPP, which a number of members have referred to, was published in March 2011. Current policies would deliver a 38 per cent reduction in emissions on 1990 base levels, with the remaining 4 per cent to be achieved through UK or EU enforced actions over which the Scottish Parliament currently—and I stress the word “currently”—has no authority. As President Nasheed of the Maldives said,

“We are inspired by Scotland's commitment to low carbon growth. Scotland is an example for others to follow.”

Finally, in recent weeks, the Labour party has called for more money for further education colleges, the national health service and justice—and now it is calling for more money for sustainable and active travel. Perhaps, in closing,

Labour members will tell us in detail where that money will come from.

16:27

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): It is clear that the political significance attached to climate change has come a very long way since previous decades when the Greens, who had been campaigning on such issues for many years, were dismissed as eccentrics. Now only those who live in denial, who indulge in conspiracy theories and who are hard-right economic libertarians are dismissed as such—[*Interruption.*] I am sure that Alex Johnstone more than any of us welcomes the progress that has been made.

I welcome the Scottish Government's participation in the international discussions that will take place not just this year but, I hope, in future. However, these United Nations debates always bring a mixture of emotions. People do their best to sustain hope while preparing for the inevitable disappointment, and the strong acceptance that something must be done is often lost in negotiation and a failure to recognise that nature itself does not negotiate.

Clearly there is a need for a global binding agreement, not just a short-term fix—or what we might call a second Kyoto commitment period, which I would nevertheless welcome in the interim. We need a commitment to a timescale towards 2015, a legally binding treaty containing the implication that 2015 will be the global peak year for emissions and a commitment to global 80 per cent cuts by 2050. We also need movement on financing to ensure that low-carbon development can be available to poorer countries. Instead of making economic growth for the world's rich countries our priority, we should be prioritising the eradication of poverty in the world's poorer parts and making that compatible with the climate change programme.

There are sources of financing that we can put in place for that, but, sadly, the UK Government—the “greenest” Government in history—is doing its very best to prevent a financial transactions tax and taxes on high-carbon-emitting industries such as the aviation industry. The UK Government seems to be utterly disinterested in those opportunities. We need those taxes to finance a lot of that work and many of the other priorities that we hope will come out of the global negotiations.

Will any of this happen? Sadly, progress is likely to remain painfully slow. We are likely to see the continuation of a country-by-country approach in the period leading up to some future deal—and I hope that there will be a deal. In his opening speech, the minister spoke of the progress that he sees where countries see economic benefits to be

gained. The great danger is that the conference will simply become an opportunity for countries to fall back on GDP and not CO₂ as their priority, while countries that do not see an economic benefit will make no changes. Scotland's credibility on the issue, like that of any other country, will come from actions, not targets. As Marco Biagi said, deeds are what count.

The minister said that Scotland

"is already securing competitive advantage",

but that is not the same as cutting emissions. I cannot be the only person who remembers the clear commitment to a 3 per cent annual cut in Scotland's CO₂, and not just from when the climate change legislation was introduced. That was to be the commitment from the moment the SNP came to power but, sadly, it has not happened. I am afraid that saying that we are two thirds of the way towards a target is complacent. We have done the easy bit of the journey; the hard bit has not even begun. In fact, most of the emissions cuts that we have seen over the years have been the result of deindustrialisation and, in more recent years, recession.

Despite the commitment on paper for the Government not to use credits to meet our CO₂ targets, an order has been introduced to allow that approach. If we do not want to use credits—the Government does not need to use them—let us reject that order.

Our consensus on the climate change legislation was powerful and rare. Not many countries in which there is a political debate about climate change manage to get that degree of consensus. Five political parties sought to make the bill better and stronger as it was considered, and they all lodged amendments and succeeded in getting them incorporated into the bill to strengthen it before it was passed. That is rare, but the consensus was limited to the aspiration, intention and targets. We have never achieved that consensus on actions.

I refer to Malcolm Chisholm's comments on the transport budget and transport policy. Transport is an ideal example of where actual actions that have been taken for many years—not just under the current Administration but under its predecessor—have been out of kilter with climate change targets. If anybody—minister or not—wants to try to persuade me that the M74 extension is good in climate change terms, they will need to buy me a lot of drinks in the bar to make the effort.

Aside from supporting a good renewables programme, the Government has not recognised that increased renewable electricity generation does nothing in climate change terms unless it is used to phase out fossil fuels. We have heard from Fergus Ewing a gleeful prediction about

another 50 years of oil and gas extraction and a refusal to rule out shale gas extraction in Scotland. If we extract and burn that shale gas, we will add billions of tonnes of unnecessary fossil carbon to the atmosphere. It does not matter a whit whether that ends up in Scotland's emissions inventory or somebody else's. If we want to take responsibility, we need to phase out those dirty industries, not pursue any opportunity for GDP growth that we can see from the agenda. We should take a bit of responsibility.

I thank the Presiding Officer for her indulgence and the few extra seconds.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We turn to the winding-up speeches. I can give members some room for interventions in those speeches if they are minded to take them.

16:34

Alex Johnstone: I said in my opening speech that a lot of familiar faces were here for the debate. Rob Gibson, Alison McInnes, Malcolm Chisholm and Patrick Harvie gave the quality speeches that we always expect of them. We also heard from some new faces, such as Jenny Marra, Marco Biagi and Paul Wheelhouse, who introduced the idea that disease will be one of the disadvantages of climate change that will affect us. My experience leads me to think that plant and human diseases will be a problem in Scotland as the climate warms up. Graeme Dey gave us the benefit of his words and made the point that some of the world's richest countries still do not get it. That is a message that must be delivered at the conference in Durban.

The key issue that I take from the debate is that there is still broad hostility to carbon trading and the opportunities that it might bring. I agree with all members who spoke on the subject that it would be entirely inappropriate if countries such as Scotland used carbon trading mechanisms to avoid making the commitments that we should be making. The carbon units that were discussed in the Parliament earlier this week could represent exactly that kind of move and we need to be careful not to go down that road.

However, there is a broader argument, which I want the minister to address, if possible. As we all know, Scotland is capable of exceeding average performance in making progress against emissions reduction targets. We could do better than many similar countries. Scotland is lucky enough to have much of Europe's coastline and the opportunity to use wind, wave and perhaps tidal energy in future.

If Scotland has the ability to exceed its targets and outperform the average, it is important that we use that opportunity. There are countries out there

that will find it much more difficult to achieve the targets and which will perform below average. If Scotland could meet part of their targets for them, that will achieve the average performance that needs to be achieved. A carbon trading mechanism is one of the measures that could be used to ensure that those who can do, and that those who cannot get someone else to do it for them. There is an economic opportunity for Scotland in that regard, which we cannot afford to ignore. Other mechanisms could achieve the same objective, but carbon trading could undoubtedly contribute, if it were set up in the right way.

I spoke earlier in the debate and I do not intend to speak at great length in summing up. This has been a vital debate. It has allowed many members who have participated in such debates in the past to restate some of our priorities and to bring forward new ideas; it has also allowed a new generation of members of the Scottish Parliament to enter the debate and offer constructive and positive suggestions. In that respect, if nothing else, the afternoon has been valuably spent.

The Durban conference is on the horizon and it is important that we take the opportunity to send the minister off with the good will of the whole Parliament, as we have done on many other occasions. I assure him that he has good will from the Conservative benches. I am glad that the Westminster Government has shown broadness of mind and willingness of spirit in including Scottish ministers in its delegation. It is important that the opportunity is taken and that we work together to set objectives and high targets and to achieve all that we can in the shortest timescale. For that reason, the minister has my best wishes.

16:38

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): The first goal of the Durban conference must be to agree a second commitment period for the Kyoto protocol, or we will have no global targets after 2012. We know that the United States of America has not signed up and that Canada, Russia and Japan do not want to extend the commitment period and are instead focusing on targets for emerging countries such as China and India. The task is not going to be particularly easy for the UK delegation and our Scottish ministers.

As others have said, climate change is a matter of climate justice. It affects us, but it most affects the poorest and most marginalised communities—those who, as Sarah Boyack said, contribute least to the problem. Those countries require funding through the United Nations for prevention, mitigation and adaptation measures. Scotland accounts for only 0.2 per cent of global emissions but, individually, we have some of the largest

carbon footprints in the world. We cannot lecture others if we do not tackle our own overconsumption.

Equally, we can put out the message that, although we produce only one five-hundredth of the world's carbon emissions, we still understand our responsibilities and are prepared to take action and make difficult—and, let us face it, sometimes unpopular—decisions in the course of shouldering our responsibility to reduce our carbon emissions.

Kyoto needs to be extended. However, a replacement must be negotiated by 2015 and I, too, believe that it needs to include legally binding global targets. Those targets should also include other emissions that are carbon contributors. The minister will be familiar with what I am going to say, as we spoke about the matter during the passage of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill. The targets must include things such as chlorofluorocarbons and hydrochlorofluorocarbons, which were used as refrigerants and as blowing agents in plastic foam insulation prior to 2004 and which are now being released into the atmosphere when industrial buildings are demolished. Their carbon equivalents are some 300 million to 400 million times those of carbon dioxide, but they are not covered by the Kyoto protocol. Therefore, although we discussed them during our debates on the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, it was not possible to include them in the bill because they were not included in the Kyoto protocol. I hope that, as we look forward to 2015, any future agreement will consider some of those other compounds, which are very dangerous to our environment as well.

Our amendment specifically mentions the statutory report on policies and proposals, which is a requirement of the 2009 act. The report states that the policies and proposals require to be fully funded if we are to reach the 2022 carbon emissions targets and that the EU needs to agree a 30 per cent reduction target. I am not arguing that the Scottish Government must fully fund them all or that that needs to be done within the current spending review period: this is not a funding demand; it is a statement of the Government's own policy.

At the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, the minister argued, correctly, that there are several partners who are responsible for funding and achieving the RPP: the Scottish Government, the UK Government, the European Union, the public sector, the private sector and—as Claudia Beamish and Annabelle Ewing said—communities and individuals. We need to be clear about who is responsible for what and how things are being funded. That is where the concern about the low-carbon transport

budget, which Jenny Marra mentioned, comes in. At the moment, it is not clear how 94 per cent can be brought in from outside in one year or 90 per cent across the spending review cycle.

Our amendment also mentions the increasing challenge, to which Patrick Harvie referred. We may be two thirds of the way to the 2020 carbon reduction target of 42 per cent, but that is, as others have said, partly due to the economic recession. If the euro zone collapses, we will probably easily meet the target because the economy will go down the toilet and we will all be in depression. That would be a pretty drastic way of meeting our target. Obviously, we all hope that the economy will recover, and we all agree that green jobs, renewables technologies and energy efficiency programmes will contribute significantly to recovery. However, economic recovery is also very likely to be accompanied by activities that generate carbon, such as construction, and when that happens we will need to bear down on other carbon reduction programmes so that we can continue to make progress. Graeme Dey made an important point about the recent reports that have indicated that, if we do not all do that, we will see increases in global temperatures of 3.5°C to 6°C.

As it stands, the motion comes over as a bit complacent. It smacks slightly of lecturing others and seems to be making the claim that our experience already shows that action on climate change will create economic opportunities. The minister counteracted that in his speech when he talked about the potential for those opportunities. I agree that there is the potential for such opportunities, but I do not think that, two and a half years after the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill was passed, we can say that they will happen.

As Patrick Harvie said, we must guard against the view that climate change adaptation is somehow all about economic advantage and not about the moral imperative to tackle climate change. Our credibility is undermined when the Government makes extravagant claims. Members have referred to the First Minister's claim of a reduction of 700,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions and the praise that he received from Al Gore. However, the Government's deputy director for climate change was more honest and confirmed that the reduction to 2011 was 125,886 tonnes. Overclaiming does nothing for our credibility.

I will support the Tory amendment, but I wish that I had more confidence in the UK Government's commitment. Although David Cameron, before he was Prime Minister, was ferried around by dog sleds in the Arctic and cycled to work followed by a car that contained his shoes and briefcase, I do not see that commitment in the UK Government's actions.

I will give a couple of examples. I am concerned about the UK green deal because it relies on owner-occupiers taking out a loan for energy efficiency measures, rather than receiving a grant. The power companies have struggled with the uptake of the current scheme, so I do not think that, in a time of economic recession when people are worried about mortgages, wages and their futures, they will take out an extra loan for energy efficiency measures. I am appalled by the reduction in the feed-in tariff, to which Claudia Beamish referred. Energy efficiency measures and microgeneration are essential. Those actions by the UK Government destroy its credibility.

I have gone on so much about that that I do not have much time left.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have some time left if you need it.

Elaine Murray: Good. I thought that I was overrunning a little.

Sarah Boyack mentioned the importance of peatlands and tropical forests. Rob Gibson has a passion for peatlands, which I think is shared by the minister. I hope that progress will be made on that in Durban. I do not know whether the minister will have an answer to this but, given the announcements on the fossil fuel levy, will change at Durban enable us to use some of that additional money for peatlands? The International Union for Conservation of Nature UK peatland programme estimates that we need expenditure of about £15 million a year. Is the fossil fuel levy a possible source of that extra funding?

There has been a lot of debate about transport. Claudia Beamish, Alison McInnes and Malcolm Chisholm referred to concerns about the active travel budget, which is decreasing while the motorways and trunk roads budget is increasing. Surely money could be transferred from the motorways and trunk roads budget, which does nothing to tackle climate change, to the active travel budget, which does a lot to tackle climate change and to improve people's health and wellbeing.

At present, less than 5 per cent of public transport vehicles use alternative fuels, but the SNP manifesto indicated an aspiration to have 100 per cent of those vehicles being fuelled in that way. Does the Government see a way of doing that in the next four and a half years, given the budgets in the spending review?

Malcolm Chisholm briefly touched on biomass. In some places, it makes sense to use biomass. In my constituency, forestry off-cuts from sawmills that are literally next door can be used. However, I see no sense in importing wood from other parts of the country or the world to burn in Scotland.

How does a market for that type of thing influence land use policies in other countries?

I wish the minister all the best when he gets to Durban and I hope that he comes back to the Parliament with good news for us all.

16:48

Stewart Stevenson: The debate perfectly illustrates the old saying that something starts off as a heresy, then becomes an argument and eventually an orthodoxy. Actually, I suspect that we have a heterodoxy—in other words, we all agree, but we have different opinions about certain aspects. The agreement that we struck across the political divide in Scotland in 2009 took a lot of hard work on everybody's part and was an excellent foundation for future action.

Elaine Murray, Aileen McLeod and other members raised the issue of a second commitment period under Kyoto. We should be careful in one respect. A second commitment period for the existing treaty is clearly second best to having an up-to-date treaty that is legally binding across the world and which reflects today's needs. It is certainly something that should be kept in the locker, but the UK Government is clear that the focus has to be on negotiating a new treaty that is suitable for a new era in which we understand more about the issues. The second commitment period is very much a fall-back position and we agree with that approach.

Elaine Murray mentioned CFCs and so on. Those are, like peat, outside the accounting system. We would like the accounting system to take more account of things that have an impact—positively or negatively—on greenhouse gas emissions and, hence, on climate change.

Let us remind ourselves of something that I have said on many occasions, including in 2008-09, which is that the targets are long term, although the impacts are immediate and with us now. The target of an 80 per cent reduction in emissions by 2050 is one that we share with the UK Government. According to the registrar general's report a month ago, he predicts that, in Scotland, my life expectancy is another 16.7 years. I hope that he is wrong. I would be 104 years old in 2050 if I am so spared—I would rather like to see what is happening.

Elaine Murray asked a very specific question about whether the fossil fuel levy can be used to restore peatlands. I do not know the answer to that question, but I will ensure that she gets an answer. There are technical issues about what that money may be spent on but I, too, would like to see some of it being spent on that.

I think that we are in agreement on the value of small-scale biomass in local communities. I thank Elaine Murray for the good wishes—I have also received them from other members, notably Malcolm Chisholm—that I take with me to Durban.

I say to Alex Johnstone that the temperature in Durban today is 19°C and it is raining heavily. Of course, as I will be inside throughout the entire visit, I will not see any of the place. Alex Johnstone talked, as many Conservatives increasingly do, about wind. It is worth reminding ourselves that we have a diverse range of renewable energies. Thanks to the work that was largely led by Tom Johnston, the famous and very effective Labour Secretary of State for Scotland, we have a significant hydro industry, which has been with us for a long time.

We are moving towards tidal energy, which is a much more predictable and reliable source of energy. It has a diurnal cycle, which is not a large cycle, and it also has an annual cycle, but it is predictable. Alex Johnstone says that a pragmatic, sustainable approach is needed, and moving to tidal delivers on that.

Rob Gibson referred, as he would normally be expected to, to peatland. We need to measure and account for our land use, land use change and forests. We hope to see progress on that.

I very much welcome Claudia Beamish to the debate. I recognise that in her previous life, before she became an MSP, she was engaged in the issue. She has an insight and a range of experience that is well worth listening to. She made a point about a report on energy efficiency in which the Scottish Government comes well down the field. If I am thinking of the correct report, it related in essence to whether we had put in smart meters and whether we had got our buildings accredited. We are going for the accreditation standard but we have not gone for accreditation. We are, because of our policy, taking the actions that smart meters might force us to take. We are doing rather better than that report perhaps suggested.

We share Claudia Beamish's disappointment about the sudden change of financial support for solar panels, which follows the disastrous change in the regime for oil. Those changes affect industries that require long-term certainty. Fergus Ewing wrote to the UK Government on that, but I do not believe that we have yet had a response.

I am delighted to say that I have visited the woodland allotment in Peebles, which is an excellent initiative. The climate challenge fund has supported 1,000 allotments so far. I wrote down what Claudia Beamish said in essence as, "Don't be too restrictive", and I do not believe that we are. Claims submitted by projects to the climate

challenge fund showed a reduction at one point of 700,000 tonnes, and that figure is now rising because we are continuing the funding.

I said in committee just over a year ago that not every project will succeed because we are not drawing the regulations so tightly that we are excluding innovation, which may or may not succeed. It is important to recognise that that is the case.

Graeme Dey gave us some fairly alarming figures from an IPCC report that showed that violent storms, CO₂ emissions and so on will increase. That is absolutely true, and we will continue to exercise leadership. Annabel Ewing made an important contribution in which she referred to the Comrie Development Trust, which—if I recall correctly—has three projects supported by the climate challenge fund. I visited the projects, including the allotments, around 18 months ago.

I welcome Jenny Marra to the debate. On transport, she should remember that we continue to make substantial investments in the rail network—for example, we have invested around £1 billion in the Edinburgh to Glasgow improvement programme. On the subject of eco driving, that can be funded by the companies and drivers themselves; I recently heard of an example in which the entire cost of an eco driving course for a team of white van men was recovered in six weeks in reduced fuel consumption. We can see that that is happening around Scotland.

Malcolm Chisholm mentioned the freight facilities grant. Alas, we never got enough good projects, although I must say that I constantly banged the drum in my previous ministerial position. Patrick Harvie seemed to talk down our achievement of a 27.6 per cent reduction in emissions, en route to 42 per cent by 2020, but it is an excellent achievement. Various people have said that it is important that we now lock in that achievement, and we will seek to do so.

Patrick Harvie: Will the minister give way?

Stewart Stevenson: I am sorry, but I do not have time now.

It is important that we recognise the economic value of the activity that we are doing. When we create jobs, we create wider commitment to the agenda. We expect that the number of jobs in the low-carbon economy will rise from 70,000 to 130,000 by 2020, which will amount to approximately 5 per cent of the workforce in total.

I turn to a couple of things to which Sarah Boyack referred. She mentioned carbon capture, but I am afraid that we cannot forget—or forgive—the fact that the Labour Party in government at Westminster failed the test of government when it

sabotaged the Peterhead carbon capture system, and it therefore ill behoves Labour members to speak on that subject. Sarah Boyack said today that she had resisted the temptation to provide a list of budget amendments to address various issues, but she fails the challenge of opposition.

I hope that we have a good conference in Durban, and I thank everyone who has contributed to the debate.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to the debate on maritime safety and coastguards, if amendment S4M-01408.1, in the name of Alex Fergusson, is agreed to, amendment S4M-01408.2, in the name of Tavish Scott, falls.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-01408.3, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01408, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on maritime safety and coastguards, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)

Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 100, Against 16, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-01408.1, in the name of Alex Fergusson, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01408, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on maritime safety and coastguards, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)

Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)

Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 12, Against 100, Abstentions 4.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-01408.2, in the name of Tavish Scott, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01408, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on maritime safety and coastguards, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)

Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 16, Against 100, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-01408, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on maritime safety and coastguards, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 100, Against 16, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes with concern the potential impact of a number of UK Government cuts affecting

maritime safety in Scotland's seas, including the review of Coastguard Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres and the withdrawal of funding from the Scottish Emergency Towing Vessels, alongside other reductions in maritime safety provision, and agrees that this piecemeal approach driven by a cost-cutting agenda cannot deliver a proper strategy for maritime safety in Scotland and the rest of the UK coastline; regrets that the modernisation plan for the coastguards has prioritised cost over other considerations, including the decision to have both the national Maritime Operations Centre and the standby Maritime Operations Centre on the south coast of England rather than to have one of these in Scotland; calls for urgent action to improve helicopter safety at sea following the crash of the Super Puma helicopter on 1 April 2009; recognises the importance of coastguard co-ordination in responding to emergencies in the offshore energy industries, and calls on the UK Government to carry out an individual assessment of the impact of the closure of individual coastguard stations, such as Forth and Clyde, and to reconsider how best to ensure maritime safety for the whole UK coastline.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-01406.3, in the name of Sarah Boyack, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01406, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, on Scotland's contribution to the United Nations climate summit, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)

Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 104, Against 0, Abstentions 11.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-01406.2, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01406, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, on Scotland's contribution to the UN climate summit, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)

Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 114, Against 2, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-01406, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, on Scotland's contribution to the UN climate summit, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)

Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)

Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 102, Against 0, Abstentions 14.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that Scotland will be participating in the 17th Conference of the Parties on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as a member of the UK delegation; encourages active engagement with other delegations to deliver the message that action on climate change is both necessary and urgent, and recognises that Scotland's experience demonstrates that action on climate change can create jobs, investment, trade and economic growth opportunities but realises that meeting the targets set in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 will be increasingly challenging, will require the statutory Report on Policies and Proposals to be fully funded to meet the 2022 emissions targets and that therefore there is no room for complacency and encourages collaboration with other UK delegates to agree a common policy in advance of the conference.

Nuclear Test Veterans

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-01242, in the name of Christina McKelvie, on nuclear test veterans. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. There is a current active case in relation to this issue. To avoid straying into matters that could be considered sub judice, members are advised to avoid making specific references to that active case and to issues relating directly to it.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that over 20,000 servicemen were involved when the United Kingdom carried out nuclear weapons tests in the Pacific Ocean and at Maralinga, Australia, between 1952 and 1967; further notes that there are now only around 1,000 surviving British nuclear veterans and 70 in Scotland, including in the Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse constituency, and believes that society owes a debt to nuclear veterans and that their unique service and contribution should be recognised in the UK.

17:10

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): Usually when we open debates, we say that we are delighted to be speaking in the debate, but I open this one with a heavy heart. I thank and pay tribute to the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association for attending the debate and bringing this issue not just to my attention but to the attention of a number of my colleagues across parties and Parliaments. *[Applause.]*

I want to share some very wise words:

"The first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty. Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces. In return, the whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families. They deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment."

I could not agree more, but those are not my wise words; they are contained in "The Armed Forces Covenant: Today and Tomorrow", which is a heavy document, although it is light on commitment to thousands of servicemen who did their duty and, in fact, went above and beyond the call of duty when they either volunteered or were conscripted to take part in the atomic tests in the south Pacific and Australia. They undertook that duty with honour and dedication.

The men were primarily young conscripts simply carrying out their national service who were exposed to radiation during nuclear weapons testing near Christmas Island between 1952 and

1958. At the time, the veterans had no idea what was going to happen; the only protection they were provided with was the instruction to hide their eyes or turn away when the A-bombs went off. Many of the surviving veterans are now terminally ill—there is a death rate of approximately three veterans a month.

Those servicemen may not have been on the front line of any conflict or theatre of war, but they were indeed on the front line of the cold war—at the beginning of that race for ultimate power through nuclear dominance, in which the United Kingdom was at the forefront.

My heart is heavy as a consequence of the realisation that those servicepeople who did their duty have not had that respected. Many Governments of many colours have neglected their duty of care to the people who served them with honour in the south Pacific and Australia.

The stories of those servicepeople are well documented and each is a heartbreaking account of ill health and misery—from the men who became infertile, developed terrible skin cancers and other conditions or suffered with bone problems, bowel cancer, leukaemia, eye conditions and many more horrible cancers and illnesses; to the wives who suffered multiple miscarriages at three times the normal rate; the children who suffered 10 times the expected rates of birth defects; and the grandchildren suffering horrible defects at eight times the normal rate for deformity. That all comes on top of new medical research that suggests that DNA could have been damaged by radiation exposure.

There is now robust scientific evidence that those previously thought to be safe from exposure were in fact exposed. The Rowland report on New Zealand naval servicemen upwind of tests at Christmas Island suggests that veterans' DNA was damaged by radiation. Leading scientists agree that the exposure could have caused a catalogue of health problems.

It is alleged that the Ministry of Defence did not monitor for alpha or beta radiation at the tests. Residual plutonium and uranium—both alpha emitters—weapons material will remain a hazard for thousands of years. Alpha particles have a higher radiation weighting by a factor of 20 compared with beta and gamma rays in International Commission on Radiological Protection guidelines. The orthodox view is that they are 20 times more damaging. If alpha particles lodge in the body, they continue to be hazardous for life.

The United States, our wartime ally, passed an act in the House of Representatives in 1988, which was signed by President Ronald Reagan, recognising the sacrifice that had been made in

the name of global security and peace. The US paid more than \$100 million to its servicemen. Canada and France have already agreed to pay compensation to their nuclear veterans without the need for litigation. The UK now stands alone as the only western nuclear power not to offer such recognition and not to honour its duty to take care of its servicemen.

A previous Government at Westminster committed £412,000 to fund a study of the health of the nuclear test veterans. However, when the current coalition came to power, it cut that amount to just £75,000. I am ashamed to say that no members of the parties represented in that coalition are here to answer for that today. A total of 633 men came forward to take part in the study, and the results make for stark reading. They show that only 18 per cent of those polled were in good health. Of those with a serious condition, only 16 per cent thought that it was caused by something other than radiation. That means that 84 per cent of those respondents believe that their health issues are directly related to exposure during the tests on Christmas Island.

It is important that we represent our constituents as best we can, and I hope that people will listen and remember as I tell their stories in this debate. My constituents are blighted by ill health. They are a father and a son, and they have an uncertain future. They need genetic testing to prepare for that future, but the Ministry of Defence has informed both of them that their medical records have now been lost. I urge the MOD to find those records, and to allow my constituents to investigate their health issues, which would enable them at least to have a fighting chance. I hope that, in summing up, the minister will join all the members in the chamber and across the Parliaments in standing shoulder to shoulder with our veterans, to give them the dignity and respect that they deserve.

In "The Armed Forces Covenant: Today and Tomorrow", Liam Fox stated:

"The Armed Forces Covenant is the expression of the moral obligation the Government and the Nation owe to those who serve or have served in our Armed Forces and to their families."

In return, those people deserve not only our respect and gratitude but constant attention to how they are treated and to the impact that service life has on them and their families. I ask that the duty that those men did for their nation be respected. Some of them are left today, but none of them has too many tomorrows.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have a long list of members who would like to contribute, so I ask for speeches of a tight four minutes.

17:17

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I thank my colleague Christina McKelvie for securing this debate on a subject of great importance to many people, including some of my constituents. Earlier this year, I tried to submit a motion on this issue but, due to the on-going case in the High Court, it was deemed unacceptable under the sub judice rules. I also wrote to the Secretary of State for Defence at the time, Liam Fox, and the Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans, Andrew Robathan.

The notion of nuclear testing is alien to most of us. It beggars belief that such apocalyptic weapons were deployed while thousands of service personnel were instructed to watch, without protective clothing.

I recall that UK Cabinet papers that were released in 1985 under the 30-year rule revealed that, in 1955, the Prime Minister at the time, Winston Churchill, contemplated evacuating Scotland north of the Black Isle in order to test a nuclear device in Scotland. Opposition from the Norwegian Government, which was concerned about prevailing wind conditions, meant that the suggestion was, thankfully, never taken forward. However, between 1955 and 1963, the British Government conducted secret nuclear tests at Maralinga in South Australia and on Christmas Island. Seven major nuclear tests were performed, as well as 500 minor tests.

In 2001, Dr Sue Rabbitt Roff at the University of Dundee uncovered evidence that suggested that troops had been instructed to walk across the detonation sites within hours of detonation and on the subsequent days, in order to expose themselves to radioactive materials. That was later confirmed by the British Government, contradicting previous statements that no humans were used in experiments related to nuclear weapons testing. Sadly, only 1,000 out of the 20,000 service personnel who were involved in nuclear tests still survive. Seventy of them are in Scotland, including my constituent Thomas Brandon.

Although I realise that we may not discuss details of an on-going legal case, it is known that many surviving nuclear test veterans and their families believe that they have a compensation claim against the UK Government and have suffered poor health, mutation and shorter life expectancies as a direct result of the tests.

Sadly, the experience of UK test veterans is not unique. During the cold war, forces personnel from the United States of America, Canada, France, Russia and China took part in similar trials. However, as we have heard, service personnel from those nations were afforded decent compensation settlements by their Governments.

Indeed, in 1993, the British Government paid the Australian Government £20 million to settle all claims that were made by Australian personnel who were subjected to tests at Maralinga. That is somewhat baffling considering that the letter that I received from Andrew Robathan MP states:

"This and previous Government's position has been that there is no evidence of excess illness or mortality among veterans as a group which could be linked to the participation in the tests or to exposure to radiation as a result of that participation."

We can only assume therefore that the £20 million was an extraordinary act of generosity.

Although the MOD maintains that service personnel suffered no ill effects as a result of the tests, the evidence that has been presented by veterans and their families is compelling. This morning, I read the account of Mr Ken McGinley, who I believe is in the public gallery. He said:

"All we were told to do was cover our eyes – but when the bomb went off we could see the bones in our clenched fists as they were tucked tightly into the sockets of our eyes.

The heat was tremendous and the ill-effects started almost immediately, it was horrendous.

That evening there was men crying and couldn't sleep properly. We were running to and from the toilet with sickness and diarrhoea not to mention the water blisters. And that was just the start."

Two thirds of British Nuclear Test Veterans Association members died before they reached the age of 60. It is argued that ionising radiation, a known mutagen, impacted on veterans' children and grandchildren in the form of physical deformities. Of course, such matters are the subject of legal proceedings and it would be improper to comment on them directly. However, we owe a debt to veterans such as Mr McGinley, Mr Brandon and thousands of others who were forced to take part in those tests. Their unique service will never be forgotten and I am glad that our Parliament recognises it.

Here in Scotland, secret Government records show the political manipulation and manoeuvring that went on behind the scenes in the 1970s to ensure that Scotland did not thwart plans to test fire depleted uranium munitions at the Dundrennan military range near Kirkcudbright. An MOD memo from 1973 warned that test firing would leave parts of the range contaminated, adding:

"It will probably be impossible to remove this completely and initial consideration of this fact is essential."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Gibson, you will have to conclude.

Kenneth Gibson: I have one more sentence, Presiding Officer. The Labour Secretary of State for Scotland at the time, Bruce Millan, protested to

Prime Minister Jim Callaghan that depleted uranium testing would compound the problems that he was having with nationalists and environmentalists who were opposing Scotland becoming a nuclear dustbin. Nevertheless, the MOD pursued its plans, opting to hide them.

17:22

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I welcome today's debate, as it highlights one of the great injustices that were carried out by the Ministry of Defence between 1952 and 1967.

The testing of nuclear weapons in the Pacific Ocean at Christmas Island, in surrounding areas and Australia has left a lasting effect on the ex-servicemen who were involved, and their families. Many of those who were exposed to radiation during the nuclear tests suffered severe ill health and early deaths. Of the 2,500 British servicemen who were surveyed by the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association in 1999, 30 per cent had died; most of those were in their fifties and many had died from cancer. The Johnstone boys, whose plight was highlighted in *The Sunday Post* in February this year, are probably the most well-known case in Scotland but, like many of us speaking in the debate, I have constituents and their families who have suffered from the effects and are still fighting their cases against the MOD.

The MOD acknowledges a debt of gratitude but denies negligence, and the Conservative Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans has described the general merits of veterans' claims as "extremely weak". On the other hand, affected constituents are asking why the MOD is denying nuclear veterans the opportunity to obtain M-FISH analyses to discover the level of genetic damage that has been caused by radiation, whereas chromosome analysis has been successfully undertaken on 294 retired workers from the British Nuclear Fuels plant at Sellafield.

As far back as 1983, Professor Evans of Edinburgh's Western general hospital used cytogenetic blood analysis on blood samples from a nuclear veteran and discovered an inordinate level of chromosomal damage. Ex-servicemen are demanding that all nuclear veterans should have that blood test carried out, but the MOD has refused and no British nuclear veteran has been able to have that blood analysis undertaken since then. In New Zealand, in contrast, members of the Royal New Zealand Navy who were exposed to the nuclear tests had the M-FISH blood analysis performed in 2004 by Professor Al Rowland, with similar results of chromosomal damage as those detected by Professor Evans.

We have to ask why the MOD is refusing to release relevant documents from this era, and

refusing to carry out relevant cytogenetic blood tests. What does it have to fear from the results?

The MOD's refusal to grant nuclear veterans the elementary right to discover the degree of damage that was caused to their DNA indicates that it is deliberately attempting to hide the atrocities that were committed against those servicemen who were ordered to assist in the testing of a British nuclear deterrent and the effects that excessive radiation has on the human body. Many civilians among the Pacific islands communities were similarly affected and they, too, have had no acknowledgement or compensation from the UK Government.

It is not only the harm that was done to the ex-servicemen and the islanders that requires attention; the long-lasting effects on families of DNA damage that can affect future generations can and should be monitored.

The suffering that the victims of the British nuclear testing programme have endured has been ignored by previous Westminster Governments and the MOD. It is about time that the MOD accepted responsibility for the effects of its past policies instead of fighting to avoid its responsibility in the courts. I urge it to bring the matter to a conclusion quickly, and to do the right thing for our nuclear veterans and their families.

17:26

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Like other members, I have constituents who have been affected by the tests, and I thank Christina McKelvie for giving us the opportunity to put on record our feelings about what happened.

Mention has been made of Ken McGinley, who is a constituent of mine and who is here today. I have also been contacted by Archie Morris of Johnstone and Agnes Rettie, whose late husband witnessed the nuclear explosions as a serviceman.

When we see what happened, it is hard to articulate our feelings, but when we listen to the words of some of those who were involved in the tests, it gives a sense of the awe that they felt and, perhaps, of their naivety. At the time, one young soldier said:

"It was an amazing sight, a cauldron of fire—like seeing a mini-sun being born."

As Christina McKelvie said, the men concerned were largely young conscripts, many of whom had probably never left these shores before and who probably thought that they were engaged in a great adventure, little knowing what was before them. These words describe that naivety and their sense of trust:

"We had complete faith in our masters. We were trained not to ask questions. We knew what had happened in Japan. I thought it could not happen here. They would not do it to us."

That reflects not just their naivety, but the faith that they had in the powers that be that they would be protected.

In 1983, as a result of the information that was beginning to come through, Ken McGinley formed the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association. When I spoke to him this afternoon, he told me that of the test veterans whom he knew in Johnstone, of whom there were probably about 20, 10 have died and four are bedridden. I am not too sure what the status of the others is. Why should the mortality rate among such a small group of people known to one man be so high? It is not because knowing Ken McGinley has somehow visited misfortune on them, but because all of them were exposed to the same dangers in the same areas at the same time. That is a remarkable and tragic statistic.

When we send young conscripts to do their duty, the Government and the state have an obligation and a duty to protect them. Kenneth Gibson quoted Ken McGinley, who said:

"I witnessed five bomb tests. Basically we had no protection and warnings at all. All we were told to do was to stand and look at the bomb and cover our eyes up in case we got blinded by the flash."

Such was the compassion and care for those who served for us.

Others have described themselves as being human X-rays. One also said something that reflects the realism and, to some extent, the cynicism that those who were involved now feel about how they were treated:

"I would be amazed that the so-called experts did not know the guinea pig status that we were being subjected to."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Henry, I have to ask you to conclude.

Hugh Henry: I am sorry, Presiding Officer. The clock is not working.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I know, but you have had more than four minutes.

Hugh Henry: I will finish on this point.

Other Governments have realised that they have a duty to their service personnel—America, France and others. The very least that we could do is show the diminishing band of veterans that we recognise that they did something over which they had no control. They were conscripted and sent to do their duty. We owe it to them to do the right thing. They are suffering and, as Christina McKelvie said, there is a diminishing band of them. It is disappointing that they are having to

battle their way through the courts. We owe them that, and I hope that they succeed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Christine Grahame, I reiterate that members should not stray into matters that could be considered sub judice because that could affect the outcome of cases and they could be held in contempt of court.

17:31

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I am glad that you reminded a former lawyer of that, Presiding Officer.

I will tell the story of Alex McCue of Galashiels, who is in the public gallery. These are his words.

"In 1956 I was sent out to Australia as a Government official to take part in the Atomic tests in Australia.

On 11th October 1957 a number of personnel and myself were flown up to Maralinga for a day trip to witness one of the detonations code named Kite. This was an airburst dropped from a Valiant aircraft and detonated at 150 metres. We watched from the airfield about 14 miles from ground zero.

A month or so later, I was posted up to Maralinga to work in the Radio Chemical Department in the Village about 20 miles from ground zero and 14 miles from the airfield. This operation was called operation Antler and I was involved in 4 explosions.

I worked in the Radio Chemical building for the scientists to calculate the dirtiness of the bomb. When an explosion took place and the fire ball had died down you get the familiar mushroom cloud with all the muck and rubbish from the ground (sand, rocks, earth) being sucked up. This caused the fallout.

Rockets with containers are fired through the cloud and Canberra bombers with wing tip containers fly through the cloud to pick up samples of the fallout debris. These are then taken to the Radio Chemical building where the boffins broke them down into their elements and sent them into us to calculate their half-life. This determines the dirtiness of the bomb—for instance Strontium 90 has a half-life of 28 years. That is until it decays.

We used to go to laboratories soon after the explosion and we always knew when the canisters came into the building because the Geiger counters used to go crazy.

One of these tests, Taranaki, was the biggest—about the size of the Nagasaki bomb. This was a balloon explosion at 300m at night. We were invited up to the forward area (about 5 miles from ground zero). They said it was to relieve boredom.

We assembled in rows and our instructions were to turn our backs from ground zero and on the counts from the loud speakers of minus 20 we had to shut our eyes and put our hands up to our eyes until plus 10 when we could turn around and open our eyes.

The flash was quite bright to say the least. Even with our eyes shut and hands in front of them it was like a very bright sunny day and we could see the bones in our hands like an x-ray. When we turned around the fire ball was just forming and it was like a giant sunset but up in the air. I think the word awesome is not an exaggeration.

What we did not know at the time was that the tests were not just to show the world we were still a world power but to test its effects on personnel.

Personnel called the Commonwealth Indoctrination Force stood just a mile from Ground Zero. They were mainly middle ranking officers with good career prospects who would be sent back to their regiments as visible proof that there is life after a nuclear attack and conventional warfare could continue. In fact of those taking part in the exercises in the forward area 30% have died, mostly in their 50s.

Another interesting fact was that after the Canberras landed after flying through the cloud they were—should we say—humming so they had to be decontaminated. The aircraft taxied into a roped off area and the contamination squad went over to them with buckets and mops and washed them down. It was very hot so they usually only had shorts and shoes.

A few years ago I was at the AGM of the Nuclear Test Veterans Association and was talking to someone who had known some of them.

He told me they were all dead."

I ask members to bear in mind the fact that many of those men were conscripts. As has been said, the rates of cancer, early death and infertility are all disproportionate in that group and extend through the generations. Members should also bear in mind the fact that some 30 Scottish claimants who would automatically qualify for compensation and pensions under the US and New Zealand schemes do not qualify here. The MOD denies liability and, even if it were liable, claims are time barred.

Rule Britannia.

17:35

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I thank Christina McKelvie for lodging the motion for debate. Like Mr Gibson, I tried to lodge a motion earlier but the matter was, of course, declared to be sub judice. Also like Mr Gibson, I wrote to and got a reply from Mr Robathan. Although I could talk about that—it would not be sub judice—if I strayed into it, I might go into some unparliamentary language.

Therefore, I will talk about the victims of nuclear testing worldwide, who have suffered immeasurable pains and who deserve justice and the Parliament's deepest respect. I will explore some of the policies that other countries have made in response to the call for compensation for the victims of nuclear testing, along with the compensation policies that the UK Government has offered the Australian Government while it neglects the people in its own backyard.

I am interested in the subject because, early doors after the election, I was visited by a nuclear test veteran—Bill Bryce, who stays in my constituency—and relived with him some of the moments that he experienced. The things that

those folks have faced over the years are absolutely horrific and, although four of the five original nuclear weapons states—the US, France, Russia, and China—have concrete compensation policies for nuclear test victims, we still fail on that.

Following the passage of the US Radiation Exposure Compensation Act in 1990, any victim of nuclear weapons testing in the US was entitled to receive an apology from the US Government and monetary compensation for any diseases that were contracted as a result of radiation exposure. Compensation varies from case to case. However, all awards fall within the range of \$50,000 to \$100,000—or £32,000 to £64,000. There is also a special fund of \$45 million to compensate those who were affected by testing in the Bikini Atoll and the Enewetak Atoll of the Marshall Islands.

Since the compensation programme began to operate in 1992, more than 34,000 claims have been filed and the US Government has awarded \$1.6 billion. The huge number of claims reflects the widespread effects that nuclear testing can have on a country and its people.

Although the other countries with compensation programmes have not been as forthright in their reparations, France, Russia and China also have policies to compensate their victims of nuclear testing.

In France, long-standing opposition to even acknowledging the French Government's responsibility for nuclear testing was finally put to rest in 2009. After significant arm twisting by advocacy groups and politicians, the French Government agreed to set aside a €10 million fund to compensate cancer victims and others who were affected at the north African testing sites. There is also an amendment to the law that states that additional funds will be added if the first €10 million runs out.

The Russian and Chinese compensation packages are not quite as good as that, but their Governments have recognised their nuclear test victims. It is time for the UK Government to live up to the words of the armed forces covenant and compensate the men who were affected by the tests that the United Kingdom carried out.

17:39

Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I, too, thank Christina McKelvie for securing this very important debate, although I agree with her that it is a shame that we need to have it. Despite the constraints that the Presiding Officer has put on our ability to debate the issue—or should I say the constraints that the law has put on us—it is still important that we have the debate for our many constituents who have asked us to speak on their behalf. Given those constraints, I

will put on my health librarian hat and discuss the research that has been done on the health of nuclear test veterans. I also refer members to my speech in the veterans debate on 3 November for background information.

From both her Nobel prize-winning research and death from aplastic anaemia in the early 20th century, we learned early on from Marie Curie of radioactivity's applications and radiation's risks. Despite that, when our nuclear test veterans—many of whom, as we have heard, were conscripts—were sent in to witness nuclear explosions, there was an almost cavalier attitude to their personal protection. Although they were given no protective clothing or respirators, they were sent in to the sites shortly after the bombs exploded, had to fly and sail through radioactive dust clouds and had to clean the craft afterwards, often with paper tissues. I said that the attitude was cavalier; I wonder whether it was negligent or, indeed, deliberate.

Given what those men were put through, it is not surprising that, since the 1980s, there has been a lot of research into their health. Of course, as a health librarian, I looked for information on that research on PubMed, a premier public access research tool run by the National Library of Medicine, itself part of the US National Institutes of Health. I was able to find 533 papers, but will quote from only one of them: "Blood money: the duty of care to veterans of UK nuclear weapons tests" by Sue Rabbitt Roff, which was published in the journal *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*. The abstract, which I have abridged, points to evidence of

"deliberate and repeated decisions not to provide adequate radiation protection ... even by the standards of 50 years ago ... to most of"

those

"who participated in the British"

nuclear bomb-testing

"programme. ... The evidence lies in the minutes and memoranda of the scientists, doctors and military leaders overseeing these tests"

and in

"Archival material in the United Kingdom Public Records Office and the National Archives of Australia".

Despite that paper and the number of other papers on the topic, I have been unable to find any meta-analysis of all the work—and I have to wonder why. Indeed, the conspiracy theorist in me began to wonder what was happening and when I followed some links to find the medical research programmes listed, which should be on the National Information Governance Board for Health and Social Care website, I got a "404—Not found" message. We need to ask where that information

has gone; in fact, I have sent an e-mail asking where the research has disappeared to. In investigating the ill health of these brave survivors, we must accord them the dignity of scientific rigour, not political spin.

17:43

Derek Mackay (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): I, too, thank Christina McKelvie for securing this timely debate. Although I want to follow the Parliament's etiquette, I cannot help but mention that, at the start of the debate, there were 17 Scottish National Party MSPs and Labour representation, but a lack of representation from the parties of the coalition Government. I mention that because, previously, there was cross-party support on this issue. I find it unfortunate that some now seem to wish to procrastinate in supporting the nuclear veterans; as Hugh Henry pointed out, they are a diminishing band. Of course, I would not like to suggest that it is a deliberate move by the MOD or British Government to see a diminishing band of those entitled to pursue compensation.

I also want to follow the etiquette that the Presiding Officer has outlined on not compromising the veterans' legal challenge or, indeed, ourselves. I do not know what parliamentary jail looks like and I do not want to find out. The last time that I was in a police cell was related to campaigning against nuclear weapons at Faslane because of their immorality. The concept that we would unleash nuclear weapons on our so-called enemies is bad enough, but the fact that we were willing to use our own people as guinea pigs in testing nuclear weapons is even worse. Irrespective of what members think were the health consequences of doing that, using our servicemen to try out those weapons and that technology was immoral. We do not need a court of law to tell us that that was wrong.

I pay homage to Ken McGinley and his association for their work. Ken in particular has also helped people with welfare issues, to ensure that widows and others have had financial support to see them through very difficult times. He has championed that cause through ill health and has not let the flame or the cause of justice die.

I know about the issue because of my Renfrewshire connections—we debated it in the Renfrewshire Council chamber and all the parties agreed. It is frustrating, however, that although some people have very strong views in opposition, a lack of action is forthcoming when they make it into government in Westminster. In opposition, those people said that support—not necessarily for compensation—should be given to the test veterans, but that support has not been forthcoming and there is absolutely no sign of it

being forthcoming. Why can the UK spend £100 billion on new weapons of mass destruction, but not a fraction of that amount on supporting our veterans and servicemen? That is immoral, too, and absurd with the resources that the UK has at its disposal.

The work that has been carried out has been very encouraging, but the diminishing band of nuclear test veterans deserves the support of the Parliament and all members. We have constituents throughout the country who require our support.

There is a degree of disappointment about how some of the cases have been handled. Files have gone missing and medical records have not been accessed, and that has disadvantaged those who have sought justice. Irrespective of the live legal case, the MOD must do better. There is a David and Goliath battle, and the Parliament should commend those who have served their fellow servicemen so well.

If people think that the issue will go away because—to be frank—the servicemen are going to die, I say to them that the children of those servicemen will live on with the effects and with the battle for justice to ensure that the veterans are not forgotten and that they are given the support that they rightly deserve.

17:47

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I, too, thank Christina McKelvie for lodging the motion.

The Presiding Officer will be well aware that, in my short time in the Parliament, I have tended to speak about subjects that mean something to me. Ken McGinley is someone who means something to me. I met him years ago, when I was a young man involved in politics. At that time he was a Labour councillor and we did not agree on many issues, but we did agree on not having nuclear weapons.

Ken told us his stories about Christmas Island. If it were not for him, a person in my generation probably would not have known what happened. He told me years ago that, between 1957 and 1958, there were up to six test detonations in the Pacific Ocean at Christmas Island that involved weapons that were many times more powerful than those that were used at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

As the years moved on and he was no longer a councillor, I did not see him for a while, although I always saw him in the *Paisley Daily Express*—he would be talking about his latest campaign to represent the veterans in the area. I met him again earlier this year at the peace garden in Barshaw park in Paisley on the anniversary of Hiroshima,

and we had another discussion. Once again, he captivated an audience of young and old people. He talked about what he went through and highlighted the horrors of nuclear weapons.

What Ken said meant something to me and others in my generation as we grew up in the 1980s, during the cold war, with the idea that the world could come to an end because of a nuclear holocaust. That sounds like hyperbole now, but as teenagers in the 1980s, we discussed that regularly. I think that so many of us in that generation became political because that was a major issue.

Ken McGinley and I spoke after we met at Barshaw park and I invited him to the opening of my constituency office. That was an important day for me and I wanted to include a man who had made an impact on my life. On a lighter note, that evening Ken met some people from Glenburn seniors forum, who have also helped me along the way. He told me that a woman told him that they had met before, saying, “I’m sure we danced at the Templars dance hall in Paisley.” Now, Ken must be quite a charismatic individual. That dance hall has been shut for about 40 years and the rest. The story just goes to show the kind of impact he has when he puts his mind to something.

Ken McGinley currently represents 16 Renfrewshire men. The 16 men from Johnstone were taken to the test destinations wearing little more protection than old-fashioned goggles, two T-shirts, a poncho—I do not know how that was going to help them—a denim jacket and woollen gloves. It is incredible to think that soldiers were left in that state.

The word “hero” is often used in conversation to apply to anyone from football and other sports stars to community activists and voluntary workers. For people in the services, the word tends to be used to describe people who are called on to defend their country. The veterans that we are talking about might not have been involved in a traditional battle, but they served their country and they have suffered as a consequence. There has been talk of acknowledging a debt of gratitude to them. The young men who served from 1952 to 1958 are heroes and deserve much, much more.

17:51

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): I congratulate Christina McKelvie on securing this important debate on the veterans of nuclear tests.

The health and welfare of Scotland’s veterans are at the centre of the Scottish Government’s policy thinking, as has been demonstrably the case for a number of years and was evidenced in

the recent parliamentary debate on veterans. The speeches in today's debate, including Christina McKelvie's supportive and passionate speech, illustrate clearly that there is a groundswell of good will and support across Scotland for the surviving veterans of the UK nuclear test programme.

The motion indicates that around 70 such veterans live in Scotland, but the figure might not be entirely accurate. We know that 70 Scotland-based veterans are involved in the litigation that is before the UK Supreme Court, but there might well be many more. We just do not know, and there is no way of verifying the true figure.

I should say that I took advice and double-checked it before my speech and that although I will refer to the legal case I will not do so in a way that jeopardises it.

That we owe the nuclear test veterans and, indeed, all veterans a debt of gratitude is not in doubt. All the service personnel served with honour and distinction, and we applaud them for that. A member—I cannot remember who—made the point that veterans' families should be equally in our minds, which is true. I think that Mrs Jessie Munn from East Kilbride, who is the widow of a man who served during the tests, is in the gallery. It is often the families who pay a huge price for the activities that our service personnel are involved in.

We show our gratitude across the country: it is never as poignantly demonstrated as it is at the impeccably observed remembrance Sunday commemoration services, which took place earlier this month. The Government tangibly demonstrates its support by putting veterans' issues at the heart of policy making, for example by ensuring that veterans can access the best possible medical care and support services. I think that we have delivered on that, and I have not yet heard of any case in which less than the best medical attention was provided to veterans by the national health service in Scotland.

On whether veterans of nuclear testing should be financially compensated, I fully support the position that where ill health is proved to be a result of service in the armed forces, wherever and whenever that service took place, it is right that the UK Government provide adequate compensation. Ultimately, however, that is a matter for the UK Government and the Ministry of Defence.

I understand that the UK Supreme Court sat for 3.5 days from 14 November to hear an appeal by the veterans, and that the court's decision will be handed down in the new year. Should the case that the veterans brought before the UK Supreme Court prove to have been successful, that will not mean that they are entitled to compensation. Rather, it will mean that their case will be returned

to the Court of Appeal in England and they will be required to win that particular battle.

It would be inappropriate for the Scottish Government to comment on the validity or otherwise of the veterans' cases. For a start, we have not seen all the evidence that has been put forward by the veterans' legal team or, indeed, the case that has been made by the MOD. In any event, were that evidence to be made available to us, the Scottish Government does not have access to the necessary expertise in the field to evaluate it thoroughly. I am not going to defend the MOD's position; that is a matter for UK ministers. I am aware, however, that it is the MOD's contention that the veterans and their legal team cannot prove a causal link between the tests of the 1950s and 1960s and the majority of the conditions and illnesses that are now being experienced by some veterans. Nevertheless, compensation through the mechanism of war pensions is being paid to some veterans who have been able to demonstrate that their specific illness is directly linked to exposure to radiation as a result of the tests.

Listening to the debate, it occurred to me that it would be interesting to examine the links between what was experienced by those who underwent the nuclear tests and the training that has been provided subsequently, since a few years after the tests to all armed forces personnel for nuclear, biological and chemical warfare. It must be the case—it cannot be otherwise—that lessons were learned from the tests that were incorporated into subsequent training. That bears further examination. I will say no more than that.

The MOD and the UK ministers hold the line that the link is not proven in the vast majority of cases. Many people can and do point to academic studies and research that have been carried out overseas, but none of those papers appears to have moved the UK Government. As members have mentioned, other countries have also offered compensation, although it is the MOD's case that that is not always what it seems. That is its case to make. What we must do is ask how the Scottish Government can help.

As many members have, I met on 17 August Ken McGinley, who is a leading light in the veterans' campaign, as well as representatives of the veterans group and Mr Neil Sampson, who is a partner in the legal firm that is acting on their behalf, to hear for myself details of their fight for compensation. I think that they would agree that we had a very productive and useful meeting. I was very much moved when I listened to their stories. The veterans and their legal team fully accept that the matter is wholly reserved to Westminster and that it is for the UK Government to resolve.

At that meeting, however, I offered to pass on to the appropriate UK minister any evidence that they have in support of their claim. That offer was made because the veterans felt that some of the data that they had gathered were being blocked by MOD officials and were not, therefore, reaching the appropriate UK Government minister. So far, I have not had that information passed to me by the veterans, but that may be because they are still suffering from that blockage. I remain intent on honouring the commitment that I made to pass on that information to the relevant UK Government ministers.

Before concluding, I offer an apology to Kevin Stewart. At the earlier debate that we had on veterans, I said that I had written to Andrew Robathan on the issue. I had actually written to him on a different issue to do with the Atlantic convoys. I apologise for that. As I have just said, however, we remain committed to writing to the UK minister on behalf of the veterans when we receive the further information that they themselves are seeking.

My view is very much that the issue demands to be resolved. It reflects badly not only on the UK Government but on society as a whole when veterans of our armed forces feel let down, ignored and aggrieved—especially when they feel let down enough to go to court to try to resolve a dispute. I hope that the veterans get a verdict on their appeal to the Supreme Court as a matter of urgency. If it is proved that those people have experienced, and continue to experience, conditions and illnesses as a result of their service and participation in the nuclear testing programme of the 1950s and 1960s, the UK Government is morally bound to pay compensation. I also hope that, whatever the outcome, the decision is open, transparent and, above all, fair. Those who have served this country in whatever capacity deserve nothing less.

Meeting closed at 17:58.

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