



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 1 March 2012

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Scottish Parliament

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

Climate Justice

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S4M-02156, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, on climate justice.

09:15

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): I welcome the proposed amendments to the motion from both the Labour Party and the Scottish Green Party. I believe that, unless the debate takes an unexpected turn, we should be able to support both amendments.

In December, I represented Scotland on the United Kingdom delegation to the United Nations framework convention on climate change summit in Durban. It was the second year in which a Scottish minister had been part of the delegation to the UNFCCC. The First Minister and Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, sent a joint message to the UNFCCC calling for climate justice to be reflected in the outcome of the talks, which should witness a collective global raising of ambition on both climate change mitigation and climate justice.

I will return to the climate justice theme of today's debate in a minute or two, but first I will update the Parliament on the outcome of the Durban conference. In July last year, the First Minister wrote to the Prime Minister supporting higher global ambition on tackling climate change, saying in particular that it was essential that we work towards European Union agreement to a second commitment period for the Kyoto protocol, given that the first commitment period comes to an end in 2012. David Cameron expressed gratitude for the Scottish ministers' support and acknowledged that Scotland has a good example to share with European colleagues of low-carbon investments and policies creating jobs and growth.

A second Kyoto commitment period should be an interim step towards a single, legally binding agreement on all parties to deliver the necessary global action to tackle dangerous climate change. Clearly, we were delighted that at Durban the EU did indeed pledge a second commitment period for Kyoto and that, in return, it gained a timetable from the major emitter nations for a new global

agreement on climate change to be negotiated by 2015 and ratified by 2020. That is a tremendous example of Scottish political support across all the parties contributing to influencing an outcome on a global environmental issue of the first importance.

In addition, in the months prior to setting off for Durban and in support of United Kingdom influencing efforts, I met a wide range of European ministers from, among other countries, Germany, France, Spain, Denmark, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Slovakia, Latvia, Estonia, Malta and Hungary to promote the evidence from Scotland on the jobs, investment, trade and growth potential of the low-carbon economy in order to assist in moving thinking within the EU towards increasing the drive for green growth.

In Durban, as part of the UK delegation, which included two UK secretaries of state and a minister of state, I took part in speaking engagements and meetings with the business sector, states and regions, Governments, non-governmental organisations and members of the European Parliament to promote Scotland as a model of international best practice on climate change and to promote our messages about the economic potential of low carbon. I am very grateful for the support of Scottish NGOs and young people in Durban in promoting the positive messages about Scotland.

Over the past two years, international recognition of Scotland as a country pursuing high ambition on climate change and the low-carbon economy has undoubtedly increased markedly. We have a presence on the international climate stage, and we were struck this year by how many countries are beginning to echo Scotland's messages, in particular the need to provide certainty in a framework for investment to drive low-carbon growth.

Durban has been widely hailed as a success for EU climate diplomacy, and its leadership position is underpinned by progressive EU countries such as Scotland setting high climate change ambitions. The fact that 120 countries formed a coalition behind the EU's roadmap was key to securing the Durban platform agreement, which keeps the major emitter nations at the negotiating table and now has a timetable. Agreement was also reached in Durban on the establishment of the green climate fund. However, although the overall result was far better than expected, we acknowledge that concerns remain about the shortfall in pledges to limit global warming to 2°C.

Returning to the climate justice theme of today's debate, I note that on the radio this morning Alan Miller and Mary Robinson suggested that this is the first ever parliamentary debate worldwide on the concept. All of us in the chamber are playing a role in that first.

What is climate justice and why does it matter? The Mary Robinson Foundation—Climate Justice aims to secure global justice for the many victims of climate change who are usually forgotten: the world's poor, disempowered and marginalised. By the way, I should point out that that does not exclude people in our own communities. This is not simply an international issue.

The following definition, provided by the foundation, captures the essence of the climate justice agenda:

"Climate Justice links human rights and development to achieve a human-centred approach, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its resolution equitably and fairly."

Such an approach to combating climate change focuses on people, is informed by science and seeks both to protect the vulnerable by supporting developing countries to increase their resilience to the impacts of climate change and to ensure that they have access to the benefits that come from the developed world's transition to a low-carbon economy.

What is the global problem that the climate justice agenda seeks to put right? Speaking in Edinburgh last September, Al Gore set out his belief that clear evidence from events in Pakistan, China, South Korea and Colombia shows that climate change is directly responsible for extreme and devastating floods, storms and droughts. He said that nearly every climate scientist actively publishing on the subject now agrees that there is a causal link between carbon emissions and the increase in intense and extreme weather events across the globe. Via television and the internet, we are all familiar with the effects of extreme weather events, but those events are experienced in all-too-vivid reality—and all too often—by those in developing countries.

Of course, there are examples of such severe effects being felt in the developed world, too; I think, in particular, of the increased death rate among older people in France during an unexpectedly very hot summer a couple of years ago. In the Pakistan floods of 2010, 20 million people were affected; several hundred thousand homes were damaged or destroyed, 6 million people were left without access to clean water, and 3.5 million children were at risk of contracting deadly water-borne diseases. An increase in extreme weather events, driven by climate change, will further drive widespread climate injustice.

Al Gore praised Scotland's leadership on climate change and the First Minister has received the South Australia international climate change leadership award. It is important that we capitalise on Scotland's enhanced international profile on

climate change to make the case for those on the front line of climate impacts. In his speech to the Central Party School in Beijing in December, the First Minister joined Mary Robinson in championing climate justice and highlighted in particular the gender dimension to the issue. In situations of poverty, women suffer more than men from the effects of climate change. In the less developed world, it is generally women who travel increasing distances to forage for diminishing quantities of wood and who go further to get water for their families and villages. We must take account of the fact that the impacts are differential.

As I said at the outset, the First Minister and Mary Robinson sent a joint message to the UNFCCC, calling for climate justice to be reflected in the outcome of the Durban talks, and the First Minister has also urged world leaders to make this year the year of climate justice.

Our actions go beyond simply championing a concept. For the past two years, we have been strengthening Scotland's support for developing countries on climate change. The Scottish partnerships that were announced in Copenhagen and Cancún support developing countries on renewable and clean energy through, for example, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute. Our international development fund has supported the University of Strathclyde's work on community solar power in Malawi. To coincide with the Durban conference, the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs and I announced the next call for project proposals to the international development fund for renewable projects of a value of up to £1.3 million in the countries of Zambia, Rwanda and Tanzania. Most recently, the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs announced a significant contribution to our efforts on climate justice—a £1.7 million programme of renewable energy activity in Malawi, one of the world's poorest countries, to help set it on the road to green growth.

I will say a bit more about our support on climate change mitigation, in particular through the Scottish Government's international development fund, which is already bringing Scotland's world-renowned knowledge and expertise in the area of renewable energy generation to communities in vulnerable countries such as Malawi. In a fast-developing world, it would be easier for countries such as Malawi to adopt high-carbon solutions to their energy needs, but it is imperative that, as they aspire to western standards of living, they benefit from our knowledge and go straight to cleaner, low-carbon energy, rather than duplicating our processes and causing further damage to the climate. In addition, that will give them the opportunity to acquire leading-edge skills

that may well, in time, surpass those in what we term the developed world.

As I have mentioned, a great example of that is the work that is being done in promoting sustainable energy and providing access to reliable electricity in rural areas of Malawi as part of the University of Strathclyde's renewable energy acceleration programme, to which the Scottish Government awarded more than £1.7 million in February. The programme has multiple benefits, including those of reducing poverty and tackling climate change, which are two of the key themes of climate justice. The project will enable disadvantaged communities to be empowered to address their own energy needs and to develop their own renewable energy projects, which will provide access to more reliable electricity for rural towns and villages. In the comfort of the western world, we forget how little reliable electricity there is in the less developed world.

By providing research technology, collaboration, educational and training support and entrepreneurship, the University of Strathclyde will work with the people of Malawi to develop their renewable energy capabilities and climate change policies, thereby putting Malawi on the path to green growth. In addition, the programme will provide support at an institutional level in Malawi to support the formation of policies, including Government policies, for renewable and community energy projects. Our approach and expertise fit with the European Commission's priorities as set out in "An Agenda for Change", as well as the work of the United Nations high-level group on sustainable energy for all.

In addition to providing increased support for climate change mitigation, we have already recognised the need to enhance our support for climate adaptation. In our manifesto last year, we committed to establishing an international climate adaptation fund. Given the clear link between the need for adaptation in developing countries and climate justice, I can announce today that we are renaming that commitment as Scotland's climate justice fund and that we will launch the fund in the next few months.

I said to the Parliament in December, ahead of the Durban talks, that we believe that action is needed now to grasp the opportunities that are presented by higher ambition on emissions reduction to drive and incentivise investment in new low-carbon markets, and to deliver our energy security, environmental and climate justice objectives. I hope that the Parliament agrees that Scotland can make a meaningful contribution to championing and delivering for climate justice worldwide.

I move,

That the Parliament understands that it is poor and vulnerable people in developing countries who are most affected by climate change and are least equipped to respond to it; supports Scotland acting as an international model of best practice on climate change and promoting the moral, environmental and economic reasons for action by other countries; strongly endorses the opportunity for Scotland to champion climate justice, which places human rights at the heart of global development, ensuring a fair distribution of responsibilities, and welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to ensuring respect for human rights and action to eradicate poverty and inequality, which are at the heart of Scotland's action to combat climate change both at home and internationally and strengthening Scotland's support for developing countries on climate change as part of Scotland's international profile.

09:29

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I am delighted that the Parliament is discussing climate justice and that we are all part of a global first. That is extremely important. I fully support the sentiments that the minister expressed: the poor and vulnerable of the world are at huge risk unless we collectively change our behaviour. We are not just witnessing but living the greatest on-going silent crisis in human history. The crisis is of such magnitude that we could be blinded by its complexities and forget that there are solutions.

I thank the minister for his analysis of climate justice, for his gender analysis and for the information on our commitment to Malawi and other international commitments that Scotland is making. The focus that the minister described must also be directed at activity at home, to ensure that the world-leading climate change targets that were set by all parties in the Parliament are met and that the move towards a low-carbon economy is fair to all the people of Scotland.

Climate justice is a deeply complex issue. Climate change knows no boundaries. It cannot be controlled by individual Governments and its effects cannot be mitigated by people working alone. Although the effects of climate change are skewed, they are indiscriminate and threaten us all. We live in a global village in which everyone has a responsibility to protect our planet for future generations. If we are to combat climate change, there must be a common endeavour. There must be a sharing of knowledge, ideas, technology and skills, and there must be a shared vision, to help all people in the most vulnerable places on earth.

The First Minister spoke on the issue during his recent visit to China. He said that we introduced our targets

"to set our own house in order, to be part of the solution not the problem, but also to lead by example."

Those sentiments are correct. To deal with climate change globally, we must lead by example. That means that we must redouble our efforts to reduce

emissions and work with local government, public services, business, communities and trade unions to respond to the growing threat.

For those reasons, we were disappointed by the Government's decision to cut the active travel budget by almost 40 per cent. I acknowledge that the position improved after cross-party work, but the budget has still been cut by 20 per cent. Demand reduction is also imperative. The target to eradicate fuel poverty by 2016 is jeopardised by Scottish Government budget cuts.

The Scottish National Party commitment to work with partners to build a Scotland-wide adaptation fund—I think that the minister said that it is to be renamed the climate justice fund—is welcome. Scottish Labour thinks that the Government should take forward the initiative and work with the UK Government to find leverage to put greater pressure on global financial institutions to contribute funds. Given that the Scottish Government is only to co-ordinate the fund, perhaps the minister will talk about the steps that can be taken to ensure that the private sector invests in it. I am sure that Patrick Harvie will talk about such issues when he speaks to the amendment in his name.

The climate challenge fund is another good initiative that the Government has championed. A few weeks ago, Humza Yousaf and I attended the launch of an awareness-raising booklet by the first steps initiative in Glasgow. The initiative comes from a black and ethnic minority group, who expressed to me and to Humza Yousaf their concern that in the current set-up only communities of place are entitled to apply to the fund, so communities of interest are precluded from applying. We asked the Government to look at the issue, working with Keep Scotland Beautiful to ensure that the fund can benefit the widest possible number of people in the next application phase. Equality must be at the heart of the fund.

I highlighted that issue because it is important that we ask ourselves whether we are setting the best possible example in all areas. There are many good initiatives that the Scottish Government is taking forward, but if we are cutting back on the very programmes that encourage transition to a low-carbon future, are we setting the right example for others to follow?

We support the Government's ambitious renewables targets, but constant reassessment is necessary. There has been much debate in relation to wind farm applications. I am glad that, from April, there will finally be a dedicated community benefit register. However, the very structures of ownership are a climate change issue. When communities are empowered by joint ventures, virtual turbine ownership or co-operatives, the attitude to wind farms is different

from the attitude when a multinational company is involved, often not with the best community benefit. I ask the minister and the Scottish Government to be sure that, as we begin to consider seriously the development of marine renewables, we learn from the concerns of communities and work together to develop an inclusive vision for the future. Needless to say, that applies to renewable heat, green transport and all other new ventures.

Our amendment emphasises partnership working with local authorities, public services, business and individual communities. I draw members' attention to a model that is not from Scotland, but from China, where there is a pilot involving 25 cities through which buyers of new energy vehicles will receive joint subsidies from central and local Government. In Shenzhen, there is a plan to have 2,000 more green public vehicles on the road in 2012, which will reduce pollution and provide transport links for the community. Perhaps China can teach us a thing or two. Does the Scottish Government really always work in partnership? For instance, it could give direction to the national health service on local food sourcing to address issues of carbon miles or freshness and to help develop local employment. That was highlighted to me by a constituent, Greg Flowerdew, as part of a medical school project.

I raise those issues because it is essential that our environmental transformation does not in any way become stagnant and that we constantly refresh it in pushing forward. In the words of WWF Scotland, the publication "Low Carbon Scotland: Meeting the Emissions Reduction Targets 2010-2022: The Report on Proposals and Policies", which should be the guiding document on our path towards reaching our climate targets,

"falls well short of providing confidence that these targets *will* be hit"

and

"fails to commit to the ... step-change in policy action described as necessary by the UK CCC",

which is the UK Committee on Climate Change. The new report on proposals and policies for 2023 to 2027 will be carefully scrutinised by many people, not just those in the Parliament.

As we call on the Government to ensure that Scotland's domestic plans are in place, so we support the Government's position in the motion. We need to find ways forward together to help the most vulnerable internationally to deal with the ravages of climate change. I thank the minister for giving an update on Durban. We will provide as much support as possible to the work in the lead-up to Rio. We are interested in continuing dialogue with the Scottish Government where appropriate.

Kofi Annan, in his introduction to “The Anatomy of a Silent Crisis”, spoke passionately of the risk to the millennium goals and the all-encompassing threat to the economy, health and safety that is presented by climate change. My colleague Neil Findlay will speak of the importance of the green economy here in Scotland and of green skills. While those skills grow our economy here, it is important that we find ways in which to export that knowledge to the developing world and to share it with them. All too often, the west speaks of the importance of the developing world not following in our footsteps with its own industrial revolution. However, the “Do as we say and not as we do” approach simply will not work, unless we back it up with the offer of shared technology and innovation so that, as the minister highlighted, countries can develop their own technologies for the future.

As we join together on 31 March to switch off our lights for earth hour, let us remember that it is not just a gesture, but that it is about people coming together to celebrate the appreciation of our precious world and to call for action to protect it. We have a stake in the future of our planet. We are all on the same side in the fight for climate justice. Let us work together, share what we know and push ourselves further so that Scotland can truly be a beacon for the world to follow.

I move amendment S4M-02156.1, to insert at end:

“, and calls on the Scottish Government to redouble its efforts to reduce emissions and target climate change in Scotland by working with local authorities, public services, business and individual communities to ensure that all are equipped to respond to this growing threat in a manner that puts environmental justice and equality at its heart, developing new and transferrable skills and encouraging the sharing of knowledge internationally to benefit the world”.

09:39

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): When the Parliament united to pass the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009—a good piece of legislation that brought together all sides of the political debate to vote yes when it came to the moment—we did something that very few other jurisdictions had been able to do. “We—political parties that often fall out over other issues, and that wind each other up—united over the underlying principle” were not always united on how we wanted to implement the 2009 act or on how we would get to the low-carbon future, but we were united on the principle and on the objective of reaching that future. If the Parliament unites on today’s motion and, I hope, on the amendments, we will have done something even more interesting. We will be a Parliament that brings together political parties to recognise that we need to make radical change

in the way in which we run our economy, and to take responsibility for that globally.

Scotland has a historical responsibility as one of the countries that created the modern world and the enlightenment. In coffee shops and taverns up and down the Royal Mile, people put together the ideas that underpinned the modern world and the industrial revolution. We bear a responsibility for the beneficial consequences as well as the harmful and destructive ones. We have an historic opportunity to live up to that responsibility—not to wait for global action, but to lead it. If we can unite on a motion that discusses that responsibility in climate justice terms, that will be significant, so I welcome the Government’s motion.

The human rights approach that is mentioned in the motion is important. I welcome the support for that debate from Mary Robinson and Alan Miller, which the minister mentioned. I think that they understand not only the present but the future challenges around the world, of food, energy, population, health, migration, the impact of climate change on economies—not only domestic national economies, but local economies—which cannot be avoided, in whole or in part, and their resilience to climate change, which will be happening, as well as attempts to address the underlying poverty and inequality.

The paper from the Scottish Human Rights Commission that was circulated to members before the debate calls for a human rights impact assessment to go alongside an environmental impact assessment. We should endorse that call.

I am glad that the motion is not too self-congratulatory about Scotland’s track record; rather, it is aspirational about the role that Scotland can take on. Before we live up to those aspirations, we have far more to do domestically on energy, transport, and food. Too often our priorities benefit those who are already doing okay, particularly when we look at how we spend our money in Scotland. They benefit those who are already able to consume the energy that they wish to consume, to eat the food that they wish to eat, and to travel in their chosen manner. We place a much lower priority on those who do not have those options. Globally, the trade and competition rules that are imposed by the wealthy countries, which all too often benefit the wealthy countries, perpetuate unsustainable energy use and inequality around the world.

The two specific items that I included in my amendment are the adaptation fund and consumption-based targets. I welcome the minister’s commitment that the Scottish climate justice fund will be launched soon. I encourage him to use his closing speech to give us a little more detail about what that fund will involve. It must be additional to what the Scottish and United

Kingdom Governments are doing on international development, and it must be informed by an equalities and human rights analysis, including the gender analysis that the minister mentioned in his speech. It must also support locally led projects. Any private sector additions to the fund must not be seen as an offset or an excuse for those companies that contribute to take less action on mitigation. I encourage the minister to endorse those principles in his closing speech.

On consumption-based targets, one of the changes that was agreed to during the passage of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 was the inclusion of a duty on ministers to produce a report for each year from 2010 to 2050, setting out, as far as is reasonably practicable, the greenhouse gas emissions that are produced by or otherwise associated with the consumption and use of goods and services in Scotland.

The three aspects of our responsibility on climate change are the emissions that we produce in Scotland; our consumption, or offshored emissions; and the extraction. If we dig up the fossil carbon, it will end up in the atmosphere. We will have to address all three of those aspects. The legislation achieves the first, consumption targets will achieve the second, and the third will be for later debate.

In closing, I again welcome the debate and the concept of adaptation debt proposed by the World Development Movement, and I ask the minister to say something about what he regards as Scotland's share of that debt. Not included in my amendment, but highly relevant, is the question of how to fund all this action. I urge the minister to give the Scottish Government's support to a measure such as the Robin Hood tax, which would allow all countries around the world to make their contribution fairly, from both private and public sources.

I move amendment S4M-02156.2, to insert at end:

“, and calls on the Scottish Government to announce a timescale for the creation of a Scotland-wide climate adaptation fund as outlined in the SNP manifesto and for the development of a system of consumption-based reporting targets as specified in section 37 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009”.

09:45

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am pleased to take part in the debate, which is, I think, the first major debate that we have had on the climate justice angle of climate change policy. I thank the various organisations that have provided briefings for us today, including Oxfam and Friends of the Earth Scotland.

The Scottish Conservatives recognise that climate change is one of the gravest threats to the planet, and that urgent and co-ordinated action is required at home and abroad to cut carbon emissions and decarbonise the world economy. We also recognise the moral duty that countries such as Scotland and the UK, and indeed the rest of the developed world, have in being aware that it is often the least-developed countries that suffer most from, but are least able to respond to, the effects of climate change, which in many cases they have done little to cause.

There are many examples of countries that need international support to tackle the impact of climate change on their people's lives, including Bangladesh, Nepal, Mozambique and large parts of sub-Saharan Africa. The desperate plight of individuals who have lost their families and homes in flooding, or have died from hunger, is all too often etched on our television screens. The Mary Robinson Foundation wants a human-centred approach, and that approach is right and civilised, and will count.

There is no doubt in my mind that weather patterns have changed. On Loch Awe, where I live, last year's rain gauge managed over 140in—nearly double the normal amount. Fishermen in the North Sea are catching fish from southern waters that are moving north in search of food, attracted to the cold waters. That is causing the displacement of native stocks and big problems for quota allocation within the common fisheries policy. Even in this country, where recent gales have caused endless damage, there have been floods in many parts of normally dry England while other parts, such as the south-east, are suffering severe drought. It is obvious that changes are occurring even in our own green and pleasant lands and heather-covered hills, and we must all do something about it, starting with saving as much energy as we can.

Returning to the justice theme, the UK Government is to be commended for its commitment to climate justice, demonstrated by the £2.9 billion of international climate finance that it has announced, specifically to help developing countries to pursue low-carbon growth and adapt to the impacts of climate change. It is also to be praised for seeking to drive private sector investment into tackling climate change in developing economies, noticeably through the capital markets climate initiative. The CMCI aims to unlock the private sector's ability to help to meet the estimated \$100 billion of new green investment that it is estimated will be required annually by 2020 to tackle climate change in developing countries.

Greg Barker, the UK minister with responsibility for climate change, is correct to argue that in

general terms private sector finance is an essential component of climate solutions, while recognising that, as there will be some places that private finance will never reach, international governmental support will also be required.

Claudia Beamish: We certainly agree on the need to leverage in private finance, but will the member clarify how the UK Government will be sure that it is the people of the countries into which the CMCI is looking to put private finance who will really benefit?

Jamie McGrigor: That subject would take far too long to cover in this debate, when I have only a minute or two, but I will come back to Claudia Beamish on it.

If, as the motion suggests, Scotland is to act as a model of best practice, we must meet our climate change emissions reduction targets and our carbon reduction targets. Energy is a very big element in that. We are positive about renewables, but we remain clear that the Scottish Government's energy policy needs to be broader and more diverse. The secure and affordable low-carbon energy supply that we all want must come from a balanced mix of energy provision, in which nuclear power plays a part.

We are clear that preserving our environment must not be seen as being in conflict with economic growth; it can go hand in hand with sustainably growing our economy and those of developing nations. Sustainable economic growth and free trade remain the key way of lifting the world's poorest people from poverty.

I was struck by comments that I read in a recent interview with Professor Sir David King, who is the head of the University of Oxford's prestigious Smith school of enterprise and the environment, which is doing excellent work in advising the Governments of developing countries such as Rwanda on how to develop sustainable transport systems and economic growth. When he was asked whether the main responsibility for cutting carbon lay with consumers, businesses or Governments, he said:

"You cannot separate responsibility ... Voltaire has a fitting quote: 'No snowflake in an avalanche ever feels responsible.' We're all responsible, whether we are consumers, producers, or in government."

I concur. I add that politicians and Governments in the developed world have an extra responsibility to assist the developing world in dealing with the challenges and threats of climate change that face the world's poorest nations, which are least able to cope with that on their own.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that the debate is a bit oversubscribed. You will have a maximum of six minutes, but please do not feel

obliged to take six minutes. If you take an intervention, it will be included in your six minutes.

09:52

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): My view in this important debate is that climate justice cannot be left to others. We can see the symptoms of extreme weather patterns before our eyes. On 4 January, Scots once again faced hurricane-force winds, as 100mph gales battered the country and caused widespread damage and disruption. The wind speeds on that day exceeded those of the gales on 8 December last year, which pawky Scots dubbed "Hurricane Bawbag". However, the subject is very important and much less jokey than that.

The debate allows us to home in on the fact that the global impacts start right here. We can see that from not just the gales, but a story in *The Observer* last Sunday, which said:

"Food prices to soar as drought hits key crops ... Most of the south-east of England was officially declared to be in drought last week, and large swaths of the Midlands and south of England were confirmed as 'at risk', with hosepipe bans and other restrictions likely to be introduced soon.

Farmers are particularly at risk as the spring growing season approaches."

Even in south-east England, we can see symptoms that are magnified in many other parts of the world.

On 29 February, *The Economic Times* reported:

"The record-breaking cold that gripped Europe this winter could be tied to a surprising culprit, a steep decline in sea ice in the Arctic following a warming of the polar region ... Using ... observational data and computer modelling",

scientists have claimed that, when the Arctic sea ice melts, that results in

"changes in atmospheric conditions, increased moisture levels to colder temperatures and increased snowfall across North America, Europe and Asia."

Those are the symptoms that are on our doorsteps.

Oxfam has pointed out that, in relation to disasters in many parts of the world, women make up 20 million—80 per cent—of the 26 million people who are estimated to have been displaced by climate change. Women were hardest hit by the disasters in Bangladesh—the death rate of women was almost five times higher than that of men, because women had not been taught to swim and did not receive warning information.

That shows the extent and range of the issues. As the Scottish Human Rights Commission has pointed out, the complex range of climate change issues directly or indirectly affect human rights, including the right to life, the right to adequate

food, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, the right to adequate housing, the right to safe drinking water and sanitation, and many others. Our debate on climate justice gives us an opportunity to show how we can add, through the climate justice fund, to the international fight against the problems of climate change, and conduct that fight here, at home.

The First Minister was praised by the Scottish Human Rights Commission and others when he went to China to make his remarks about human rights. We have to think about the impact of our activities on other parts of the world. The United Nations has a programme for reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation. We know that many of our farmers import soya from South America. We have to ask what impact that has on the biodiversity of the areas in which it is grown. Although REDD stands for “reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation”, there is another meaning, which is “reaping profits from eviction, land grabs, deforestation and the destruction of biodiversity”. That is a common problem. We must ensure that we conduct ourselves in a fashion that sends a signal that this country takes seriously the effects that we have on others.

Following Durban, a tremendous effort has been made to move forward in the way in which we count carbon. That will help other countries, too. Peat soils can now be measured, and they will be. They cover just over a fifth of Scotland’s land area and we have two thirds of the UK’s blanket and raised bog habitat, so we have a major job to do. Scotland’s deepest peats store about 6,500 megatonnes of carbon, which is 10 times the amount that is stored in the whole of the UK’s forest biomass, as I pointed out in a debate on peatlands in November 2010. We can measure our peatlands to help us to reduce our emissions, but we have to invest to ensure that they remain wetted and are part of the global fight against climate change. They are that big.

I will finish with some brief remarks on local action. A farmers co-operative that is based in the Black Isle is spearheading a drive to develop locally owned, small-scale wind energy projects across the Highlands. Highland Business Services Ring, which is based at Tore, is better known for using its buying power to help its 1,100 members to secure better terms when they buy fuel or tractor parts.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Mr Gibson, you really must come to a conclusion.

Rob Gibson: However, the aim of its new social enterprise is to maximise the benefits of renewable energy in retaining as much income as possible in the local economy. That is a model for

Scotland and many other countries in the climate justice debate.

09:58

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): When Claudia Beamish asked me to take part in this debate, I did not realise that it would be the first time that the issue has been discussed in a Parliament anywhere in the world. I am pleased that I acceded to her request. I cannot disagree with any of the statements in the Government’s motion or the sentiments that have been expressed by speakers in the debate so far. It is indeed the poor and vulnerable in the poorest countries of the world who will be, and already are, worst affected by climate change.

In the previous debate on climate change, before the minister went to Durban, I expressed the hope that he would bring back good news. I am pleased to hear that he had some good news to bring back to us, although perhaps not the progress that we would all wish. Drought, famine and flooding devastate entire communities, wiping out agricultural production and displacing people who lived in the affected areas. As others have said, it is often women who are worst affected. The grossest injustice is that 90 per cent of the effect of climate change is felt in developing countries while the poorest 50 countries contribute less than 1 per cent of the emissions that are the cause.

I do not know whether other members have had this experience, but in speaking to constituents I sometimes hear people express the view that, in a time of economic hardship when we are suffering from cuts, we should not send money overseas. We should remember that we pollute and people overseas suffer. If we needed just one reason to justify expenditure on international aid and development, it would be that such expenditure is in recompense for the damage that the profligacy of the industrial countries has inflicted on the poor in the rest of the world.

However, we will not be judged by the high-minded sentiments of our motions and amendments in the Parliament, by the radical Climate Change (Scotland) Bill that we all passed in 2009 or by the awards that are given out to our politicians; we will be judged by what we do and what we achieve. Without that, it will all be empty rhetoric and any claim that Scotland champions the tackling of climate change to protect human rights will be seen to be hollow.

Claudia Beamish referred to the cuts in the active travel budget. Active travel is an important way in which we can make a contribution. As the Minister for Housing and Transport said in his new year message, short journeys can often be made

on foot, and walking is a great way in which to stay active, clear one's head and reduce one's carbon footprint all at once. So it was disappointing that the active travel budget was reduced significantly in the budget this year, although some changes were made later. We must all look at the balance between new road building and active travel and other carbon-reducing measures. We face that choice and must make a decision.

I recently met WWF, which raised with me a particular concern about traffic volumes. In the 2006 publication, "Scotland's National Transport Strategy", our aspiration was to stabilise the volumes of vehicle traffic at 2001 levels by 2021. However, on page 44 of the "Infrastructure Investment Plan 2011", which was published in December, we are told to expect an increase of 15 to 20 per cent in vehicle kilometres by 2020. It may be envisaged that the bulk of those vehicles will be electric; however, WWF has estimated that there would need to be something like 1.5 million electric vehicles travelling on Scotland's roads by 2020 in order for us to meet our 2020 emissions targets, and the increase in the necessary infrastructure, such as charging points, might be difficult to achieve by then.

As other members have said, it is the poorest countries across the globe that suffer the most from the effects of climate change. However, we have the same inequality, even in this country. As Rob Gibson said, although we have had a fairly mild winter this year, we are seeing the effects of climate change. Climate change for Scotland means, ultimately, a diversion of the jet stream that keeps our climate mild, meaning that we will have worse storms and colder winters as climate change takes effect. We also know that energy costs have increased and that around 35 per cent of Scottish households now live in fuel poverty—that has been highlighted in BBC programmes fairly recently. Energy Action Scotland has estimated that meeting our 2016 target to eradicate fuel poverty will require investment of £200 million per annum. I am not arguing that all of that must be public sector funding, as that would not be possible, but it is a lot of money at a time of recession and there are particular difficulties—as was shown in the case of the family in East Lothian that was highlighted over the weekend—with some of the older buildings in Scotland for which cavity wall insulation is not an option.

This is also, however, a potential win situation because it offers a big opportunity, given the scale of the necessary investment, to create jobs and employment in what are often referred to as the green industries. It is also an opportunity to increase the standard of living of some of Scotland's poorest households as well as to tackle an important source of our greenhouse gas

emissions, which is what we should be concentrating on. I support the Labour and Green amendments. I also support the Government's motion. We must all take the necessary actions, as individuals, agencies, businesses and Government, to achieve the outcomes that we all talk about.

10:03

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate on climate justice. As Elaine Murray and others have said, it is a privilege to participate in the first parliamentary debate on climate justice in the world. What a credit that is to the Scottish Parliament.

I thank all those NGOs that have provided us with extremely helpful and comprehensive briefings. On this occasion, those have come not just from what we might call the usual suspects—the environmental NGOs such as Stop Climate Chaos Scotland and Friends of the Earth Scotland—but from the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund and Oxfam, representing the international development aspect. We have also heard from human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and the Scottish Human Rights Commission.

That breadth of input is fitting because, as the minister reaffirmed in his opening remarks, the Scottish Government is committed to combating climate change not only here at home but internationally—through initiatives that will ensure that our efforts to tackle climate change will also secure climate justice.

The NGOs have encapsulated the ideas that lie behind climate justice. SCIAF has said that

"climate change is more than an environmental issue. It is an issue of global justice."

Amnesty International has said:

"Respect for the environment and respect for human rights are inextricably bound together."

A few minutes ago, we heard from Rob Gibson the appalling fact that women had died because they could not swim. Human rights are fundamental to this debate. As Oxfam said,

"we must see the fight against poverty and the fight against the effects of climate change as interrelated efforts."

The minister's announcement this morning of the planned establishment of the climate justice fund is therefore welcome. The announcement reflects a clear SNP manifesto commitment from last year, and it is the result of continuing work with business, charities and NGOs. As we have heard, the official launch of the fund will take place next month. I hope that today's debate will inform the discussions that I imagine are still taking place on

the details of the operation of the fund. We have heard thoughtful contributions this morning—from Claudia Beamish and Patrick Harvie in particular—and they have shown that we are all here, as one, to do what we can to combat climate change here in Scotland and to participate in international efforts across the globe.

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): The Scottish climate justice fund is very welcome. Does the member agree—and perhaps the minister could deal with this when he sums up—that we could consider funding wind turbine manufacture in Scotland? That could assist with what we are trying to do—and we could export the ideas as well.

Annabelle Ewing: The member strays on to the important area of the green energy reindustrialisation of our country. I am sure that the minister will be happy to take up the point. I hope that the minister will also be able to confirm that at the heart of the climate justice fund will be financial programmes that will secure locally led efforts to build resilience through sustainable initiatives—in the important sector of agriculture, for example.

The Government has a commendable track record. I will take up Patrick Harvie's point by saying, without being self-congratulatory, that it is important to understand our achievements to date. The Malawi renewable energy acceleration programme has been mentioned. That programme has been led by the University of Strathclyde in our great city of Glasgow. We have also contributed to the publication of a report to help the Maldives, where people face potentially catastrophic difficulties with climate change. The report was produced by Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen. Jamie McGrigor mentioned the wonderful University of Oxford; many Scottish universities are also contributing to the debate.

The Scottish Government clearly recognises Scotland's international responsibilities to help to secure climate justice for some of the poorest and most vulnerable people on the planet. That is entirely in keeping with Scotland's sense of the common weal. The establishment of a climate justice fund is a natural extension of that intrinsic Scottish characteristic.

I believe that today's debate will make a significant contribution. It is interesting to note what Scotland has already managed to achieve under a devolved Government whose budget, sadly, is still controlled from London. I urge members to consider what Scotland could achieve if we took the opportunity to become an independent country with control over all of our resources.

10:10

Paul Wheelhouse (South Scotland) (SNP): Climate change is the most critical challenge that we face for the future of our planet. It is recognised in the United Kingdom's strategic defence review and is seen as the principal threat to the UK's national security.

The adverse effects of climate change are already evident, as other members have mentioned. No one is immune to its effects, but some nations are clearly much better equipped than others to respond to the challenge. Scotland can adapt, but the global nature of the threat requires the widest possible co-operation among all countries to achieve an effective, co-ordinated international response.

Human rights are at the heart of the climate justice concept. As the minister said, the Mary Robinson Foundation—Climate Justice has highlighted the need for

“sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its resolution equitably and fairly.”

I concur with Rob Gibson, Elaine Murray and Jamie McGrigor that the scale of the global climate challenge is already clear in relation to our own climate. I have seen the evidence for that myself, having visited the Met Office.

Which human rights do we mean? The Scottish Human Rights Commission cites the right to life, the right to adequate food, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, the right to adequate housing and the right to safe drinking water and sanitation. However, adaptation and mitigation measures can themselves have a negative impact on human rights and exacerbate discrimination and inequity. As the SHRC puts it:

“For instance, cultivation of biofuels can lead to land use change from forestry to agriculture, diversion of water resources, and cause community displacement.”

Amnesty International has welcomed this debate on climate justice and the opportunity that it provides to address important concerns about human rights. It recognises that the Scottish Government understands the link between the environmental consequences of development and human rights. Climate change is more devastating to those who are already economically disadvantaged and vulnerable throughout the world.

The SHRC states that it is important to note that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change reaffirmed that parties should fully respect human rights in all actions related to climate change. Its briefing goes on to state that nation states have a responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil human rights in the context of climate change, which has three levels: international, national and local. It goes on to state

that nation states should ensure policy coherence at all levels in discharging their legal duties to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. In that respect, Scotland is already showing leadership on the global stage. The minister has been at the heart of that and I commend his work.

The climate justice agenda is also well recognised by the First Minister, who stated in January, in advance of the UN conference that will take place in Rio in June:

"I believe we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enshrine this important principle—that economic development should be linked to human rights—in global energy policy, ensuring that countries and communities least able to cope with the extreme weather events climate change brings are not further disadvantaged."

The SHRC states:

"Scotland is increasingly recognised as a global leader in addressing climate change. There is huge potential for Scotland to be a model of international best practice by becoming a low carbon economy which supports sustainable economic growth and promotes climate justice domestically and internationally."

In Friends of the Earth's excellent briefing for this debate it states that it has used what Scotland is doing in terms of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 in workshops and lectures in Brussels, Helsinki, Madrid and Budapest to encourage others to follow our example.

Amnesty International maintains that Governments and companies throughout the world have a duty to ensure that their own nations' development does not have an adverse impact on human rights and that Governments hold companies to account for any such violations.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Does the member agree that the involvement of any Scottish commercial company or university in a developing country must take place for humanitarian reasons and the right reasons, and not just to seek another business opportunity?

Paul Wheelhouse: I agree with that sentiment. Indeed, Amnesty International makes that very point in its briefing. The activities of UK-based transnational corporations outside the UK have come under scrutiny in instances in which they have been responsible for, or contributed to, human rights abuses. Amnesty International has identified several key cases and it is following up on them. They include cases in relation to the Niger Delta, the Lubicon Cree people of Alberta, western Canada, and the activities of bauxite mining companies in Orissa in India. In all those instances, Amnesty International believes that there has been a negative impact on human rights.

Amnesty International is calling on Governments across the world to be more transparent about and

responsible and accountable for their impact on human rights. I presume that Neil Findlay shares that sentiment.

However, as the minister has indicated, the Parliament and the global community can rely on the Scottish Government to continue its lead role and, through the climate justice fund that has been announced today, encourage others to take responsibility for the impact of their nations on the vulnerable people of the world.

For the sake of all of us in this global village, I strongly support the Government motion and the sentiments that have been expressed across the chamber today.

10:15

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): In a speech that he recently delivered in China, the First Minister said that climate justice is "vitally important", adding that it must be

"at the very heart of the decisions we make on energy policy and economic and social development in the coming months."

As has been previously mentioned, he went on to say:

"I believe we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enshrine"

the

"important principle ... that economic development should be linked to human rights".

The first part of those comments reminded me of the words of the former First Minister, Jack McConnell, who said in 2002 that he believes that

"the biggest challenge for the 21st century is to combine economic progress with social and environmental justice."

That was 10 years ago, and the Scottish Government has yet to introduce that combination of social, economic and environmental justice.

In 2009, the UK ratified the Aarhus convention. On backing the convention, the UK stated that it understands the right of every person

"to live in an environment adequate to his or her health and well-being."

The UN Aarhus convention, which Scotland has signed and ratified through the UK and the EU, requests the implementation of three pillars. Those three pillars give individuals the right to be informed and have access to information about the environment, the right to participate in environmental decision making and the right of easy and effective access to justice if the former rights are denied.

The Scottish Labour Executive met the first two principles of the convention with the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and the

Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. It is now 2012. Why has the Scottish Government not yet set legislation that meets the third pillar of the Aarhus convention?

The third principle ideally should be protected by the implementation of judicial review. Access to that remedy can often be the only way to challenge an executive act that might cause climate injustice. Judicial review allows a petitioner to challenge otherwise unconstrained administrative decisions and to ensure that the rule of law is adhered to for the benefit of the people and the environment.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Mary Fee: I am really sorry, but I have a tight six minutes and have a lot to get through.

Climate justice has not received special status in Scotland. The Gill review into the Scottish civil courts says that the current law on standing for judicial review is too restrictive. If a petitioner were able to challenge decisions that cause climate injustice, it could lead to a broad change in administrative practice. Further, if there were a high-profile case, it could raise public awareness of a particular environmental injustice and educate the public at the same time.

Scottish Labour has always pushed for more to be done to reduce our carbon emissions, and it was a Labour Government in Scotland that first introduced renewables targets in the Scottish Parliament. Labour members have continued to support the Scottish Government's general approach to climate changes issues. However, why has the SNP reduced the annual carbon emission targets from the proposed level of 3 per cent a year to 0.3 per cent this year?

The effects of climate change can be seen every day. From the polar ice cap melting in the Arctic to the prolonged droughts in the deserts of sub-Saharan Africa, climate change is having a genuine effect on our planet. It is reported that, in 2008 alone, more than 20 million people were displaced because of natural disasters. In Scotland, we have a varied geographical landscape, and climate change will affect us all in a variety of ways, whether through flooding or—dare I say it?—heat waves, which are something that Scotland, at its best, lacks.

The impact of climate change globally will hurt the poorest countries and the poorest in our communities. The effects on health and wellbeing will be staggering for the poorest, and there is no justice in that, as it is not the poorest who have caused the threats that lie ahead.

We must act on the final stage of the Aarhus convention and ensure that we meet all the

requirements, so that not just the Donald Trumps of the world, with their tens of millions of dollars, but the poorest, who will be hit hardest, have the chance to challenge an environmentally damaging decision or act.

Climate injustices impact directly and indirectly on human rights: the right to life, to adequate food, to the highest attainable standard of health, to adequate housing and to safe drinking water and sanitation. Thankfully, those issues do not affect the lives of 99 per cent of people in the UK. However, they affect the lives of millions of people around the world, and if we do not do something about climate injustice now, it will affect our country in the next century.

Scotland is a relatively small country, with a relatively small population. However, we can set an example for the rest of the world to follow by acting on our promises, not by grandstanding.

10:20

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I welcome the debate. Where we lead, I hope that other legislatures throughout the world will follow by having such debates. It is clear that those of us in the developed world have a role to play in that regard.

There is great consensus among members on all sides of the chamber this morning. That is as it should be, because the climate change agenda is shared by all. Patrick Harvie made that point with regard to the way in which the Parliament passed the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. I welcome the announcement of the climate justice fund, and I look forward to the details emerging in the coming months.

A good starting point for any contribution to the debate might be to ask what is meant by climate justice. We can probably come to an answer by focusing on the flip side, and looking at the effects of what could be termed climate injustice.

A number of briefings were sent to members in advance of the debate. SCIAF sent us a particularly good briefing that set out some of the facts and figures on the impact of climate change. It stated:

"The food security of an estimated 2.5 billion people dependent on agriculture in the developing world is threatened by changing climate systems"

and

"150,000 deaths per year are already attributed to climate change globally."

It also stated:

"Between 75 and 250 million people in Africa alone are projected to be exposed to increased water stress due to climate change over the next decade"

and

"Many millions will be displaced by the end of the century."

Oxfam made many of the same points, and stated:

"The UN estimates that climate change could increase the number of people facing water scarcity by 1.8 billion and increase those facing coastal flooding by many millions."

Those are some of the statistics on the effects of climate change and what could be termed climate injustice. We should remember that behind those words are real people living real lives. Many people are already living a fragile existence, which is being made more fragile still by the effects of climate change.

In that regard, it is absolutely right that we seek to make this year a year of climate justice, as the First Minister has suggested ahead of the UN conference on sustainable development.

I will focus on the efforts that the Scottish Government has made so far on the climate change agenda elsewhere in the world. It is engaged in Malawi and the Maldives in particular, where it is encouraging knowledge sharing and the creation of partnerships between academic institutions in those countries and in Scotland.

Scotland has been assisting the efforts of the Maldives in its ambition to become the first carbon-neutral state. In August 2010, a report was published on developing the Maldives' potential for marine energy, with which Robert Gordon University assisted. The Scottish Government has awarded approximately £1.7 million to Malawi as part of the climate justice agenda, to help its renewable energy acceleration programme.

It is important, as the motion states, that the issue of climate justice is rooted firmly in the human rights agenda. I see Professor Alan Miller, the chair of the Scottish Human Rights Commission, in the public gallery. He has said:

"climate justice places human rights at the centre of economic decision making and seeks to redress the unfairness of people in developing countries feeling the impact of climate change which they did not cause."

It is important to look in more detail at how human rights interact with the climate justice agenda—a connection that is perhaps not that obvious to some. The Scottish Human Rights Commission sent us a briefing in which it points out that

"Human rights standards and principles ... have the potential of informing and strengthening policymaking in the area of climate change"

and that states have a responsibility to work to that end.

Amnesty International sent us a very good briefing—I have to say that because it was prepared by my wife and she would be very upset if I did not. I should declare that my wife works for Amnesty and that I am a member of that organisation. Amnesty's briefing talks about the involvement of some UK-based companies in human rights violations throughout the world. Paul Wheelhouse has already talked about that, so I will not repeat the point.

I welcome the debate and the work that has been done so far. However, we should not rest on our laurels and must consider what else can be done. In that regard, I return to the SHRC's briefing, which says that we have to engage internationally to secure climate justice. The SHRC has also suggested that we have an international conference in Scotland later this year or next year to demonstrate our adoption of the climate justice agenda. I would be interested to hear what the minister has to say about that.

I close by echoing Patrick Harvie's point. We need to consider a financial transaction tax—the so-called Robin Hood tax. That could help domestic finances just as much as it could contribute to the climate justice agenda. As the Oxfam briefing concludes:

"If introduced it could well be the most (if not only) popular Tax ever".

10:26

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I am glad to speak on climate justice for the first time for the Liberal Democrats in this or any Parliament. I am happy that the Scottish ministers had a place in the UK's Durban delegation. As Scots, we should be proud that Scotland has an opportunity, within the UK, to play a prominent role on the international stage.

The effects of climate change do not respect international borders and will impact on countries in all corners of our planet, with varying degrees of severity. The reality is that countries in the developing world are being disproportionately affected by climate change, largely because they are ill-equipped to deal with its consequences. The sad irony is that the worst affected have done the least to cause the problem.

Article 25 of the universal declaration of human rights states:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care ... and the right of security in the event of ... circumstances beyond his control."

Sadly, there are far too many people in the developing world to whom article 25 is merely a fictional piece of writing—people such as the

millions in east Africa who are experiencing starvation due to drought, and the millions in south Asia displaced by devastating floods. It is those people who ensure that climate change and human rights will for ever be inextricably linked. Indeed, Oxfam has spoken of the fights against poverty and climate change as “interrelated efforts”. I welcome the fact that our Parliament and Parliaments throughout the world are beginning to view climate change as akin to an issue of justice.

Rarely do I find myself agreeing with the First Minister, but I agreed with him when he spoke in China of developed countries having an “ethical obligation” to share the benefits of on-going economic development—economic development that led to such carbon-dependent wealth creation. He was also correct to speak of the importance of delivering climate justice and of linking economic development to human rights.

Some time ago, we proposed the development of an overseas climate change team to assist developing countries to adapt to the impacts of climate change, deal with climate-related disasters and adopt low-carbon technologies. The focus should be on climate adaptation to assist those in developing countries who are in desperate need of the intervention that their own Governments—for whatever reason—are unable to provide.

We should all therefore welcome the Government’s announcement in December of the establishment of a Scottish international climate adaptation fund, or climate justice fund, as it is now known. I am keen to hear what progress there is in the Government’s discussions with

“partners in business, charitable foundations and non-governmental organisations”

that last year’s SNP manifesto stipulated.

The Liberal Democrats will support the amendment in the name of Patrick Harvie as we, too, wish a timescale for the creation of the fund to be announced. We shall also support Claudia Beamish’s amendment, which addresses the involvement of the wider Scottish community.

Scotland need not be independent to be the “good world citizen” that the First Minister recently talked about. It is important that we do our bit to tackle climate justice. We must be an exemplar of good practice in our domestic attempts to tackle climate change to act as a model for the rest of the world.

The environmental lobby has lined up to praise our ambitious Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. The Scottish Liberal Democrats were proud to engage constructively with the Government on that legislation. However, environmentalists are all united in agreement that the act will mean little

unless we deliver on the targets to which we committed ourselves.

As we all know, the 2009 act has committed us to reducing carbon emissions by 42 per cent from 1990 levels by 2020. However, our built environment is something of a barrier to our attempts to drive down emissions. Currently, homes contribute around 27 per cent of our total carbon emissions. WWF Scotland estimates that 85 per cent of today’s homes will still be in use by 2050, and it is clear that our emissions levels will not be significantly altered without targeted intervention in the condition of many of Scotland’s existing homes.

The Government has various schemes to tackle that issue: the energy assistance package, the universal home insulation scheme and the new £50 million warm homes fund. Such measures are welcome, but the Government estimates that the cost of achieving the carbon reduction targets will be £16 billion between now and 2020, so there is a lot to do.

That is why the Government should reconsider the independent budget review’s recommendation to restructure Scottish Water, which would unlock substantial funds by generating a one-off capital receipt. We would use that capital by investing £250 million of it into massively accelerating the insulation of homes in Scotland, including homes in the private rented sector and hard-to-treat properties.

I am happy to have spoken in the debate and support the amendments and the motion.

10:32

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): As the newest member of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, I feel privileged to speak in this debate on climate justice.

I agree with virtually everything that has been said. I say “virtually” because I take political exception to one or two comments: Jamie McGrigor’s comments on the continuation of nuclear energy, and Jim Hume’s comment on Scottish Water.

Apart from that, we have had a consensual debate in which members have highlighted many important points about the recognition of the injustice that has befallen many third-world countries because of our insatiable greed and our thirst over many decades for a lifestyle that they cannot imagine. Our lifestyle caused the problem, and the lifestyle that we continue to enjoy exacerbates it.

We welcome the Scottish Government’s many initiatives to reduce Scotland’s carbon emissions.

Jim Hume was right to mention the programmes for home insulation and so on.

We all have a responsibility in this area, and Patrick Harvie was right to say that we must show an example and do all that we can to reduce our emissions, which will have an impact on the global situation.

I will not repeat everything that has been said about tsunamis or other aspects of global warming and the impact that they have had on various countries, but I associate myself with my friend and colleague Annabelle Ewing's congratulations to all the NGOs on the excellent briefings that they provided. They have highlighted to us the fact that this is a human rights issue. Just in case Mrs Hepburn is listening, Amnesty International's briefing was excellent.

To be serious, however, I think that the crux of the matter is that we have a responsibility to those less fortunate and more vulnerable than ourselves. We cannot ignore their plight. In that respect, I associate myself with Elaine Murray's comments about those who wonder why in these times of great hardship and austerity we continue to provide funding to countries overseas. We are quite right to do so; after all, we must take responsibility for our actions.

We have a bright future. Through the curriculum for excellence, our schoolchildren are learning about recycling and saving energy—and, indeed, saving the planet. Old Rayne primary school in my Aberdeenshire West constituency has just received its fourth green flag award; it is the first school in my constituency to achieve that distinction and I believe that it might well be the first school in Scotland to do so. Many positive things are happening and we must not only think about what we as individuals and responsible adults can do but learn from our children. I was quite impressed when a parent of one of the Old Rayne primary schoolchildren told me how they had been made aware of how often they leave the lights on in their home; their child told them that they had to go to bed because they were burning too much electricity. It was only about eight in the evening. Of course, children can sometimes go too far.

Like Claudia Beamish, I will certainly be switching the lights off on 31 March. My wife tells me that I sometimes need to switch them on, but there is always a good side to these things.

We are going in the right direction and I believe that Scotland can be an exemplar of good practice. I welcome the minister's announcement of the climate justice fund and would certainly like to hear more information about it. As someone who enjoys walking as a pastime—and as a way of getting from A to B—I think that more of us

could probably reduce our carbon footprint by following the example of many of our children and taking up cycling and walking. In trying to find a way forward, we should all make a commitment to ourselves to reduce our carbon footprint.

10:38

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): It is a great privilege to take part in this first ever Scottish Government debate on climate justice. Christian Aid Scotland estimates that, if the average world temperature rises by just 2°C by 2050, 250 million more people will be forced to leave their homes, a further 30 million people could go hungry as global agricultural yields go into recession and 1 to 3 billion people will suffer acute water shortages. Of course, those are worst-case scenarios but, in talking about climate change, we must stress that this very serious issue could drastically alter the ways in which people live their lives. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, climate change will have a major effect on human wellbeing, causing hunger, displacement and social dislocation. We must not forget that this is a distinctly human issue.

Scottish Labour pushed for radical action with the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, which requires the Government to meet the target of a 42 per cent cut in emissions by 2020. If we are going to meet the target, Scotland needs to redouble its efforts.

Although emissions fell by 7 per cent in 2009, the Committee on Climate Change's recent report attributed that to the recession rather than to any real action by the Scottish Government. It also found that, in 2010, the UK's emissions rose by 3 per cent, and it suspects that the same will have occurred here, although the Scottish data are not yet available.

We must question whether the Scottish Government is serious about the issue, given the reduction in its annual carbon emission targets from the proposed level of 3 per cent per annum to just 0.3 per cent in 2012. To Labour members, it does not look as if the Government is serious about climate change or is willing to take the radical steps that are required to deal with it.

On climate change, we should be thinking globally but acting locally. In my area, the Big Lottery Fund has just awarded £99,800 to Eglinton Growers. That money will be used to create community gardens and more than 80 allotment plots, which will be available for the residents of Kilwinning and Irvine. As well as promoting health and wellbeing, the project is a practical example of sustainable communities and it embodies an idea that the Government should be promoting. I hope

that it will do so through the climate justice fund that the minister announced earlier.

We should be working with councils to ensure that, where possible, they are protecting the environment and sourcing food for schools locally. North Ayrshire Council catering department sources local produce, when that is possible. Last year, around 15.5 per cent of the total food spend was sourced from Ayrshire-based companies, and the council hopes to improve on that. It has also signed up to the carbon reduction commitment and the Carbon Saver Gold Standard, which involves reducing its carbon emissions over a three-year period.

In addition, Labour-held North Ayrshire Council promotes eco-schools, which my colleague mentioned. Twenty-four schools have achieved silver awards and a further four have won bronze awards. At the 2010 Scottish education awards, Lawthorn primary in Irvine won the most sustainable school award for dramatically reducing the amount of energy, water and resources that it uses and its global footprint. It is important that we encourage climate change awareness in our children, because they will inherit the planet.

On a wider scale, we must protect our peatlands. The West Scotland region as a whole has a lot of peatland. For example, Clyde Muirshiel park is 60 per cent peatland, and there are large areas of peatland on Arran. Such areas are vital for carbon capture, and it is essential that they remain wet to absorb the carbon. That could be under threat if our climate dries out. It is hard to believe that we could have a dry climate, but that is where we are heading.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature estimated that, in 2010, Scotland's peatland stored 3 billion tonnes of harmful gases and that about 80 per cent of the UK's peatland area was in Scotland. If that land is not maintained there could be dire consequences for climate change, so we should maintain and protect as much peatland as possible.

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment recently upset the farming industry with the Government's commitment to increase woodland cover in Scotland to 25 per cent of the country's landmass by 2050. He was forced to backtrack by describing what had been a target as an "aspiration". Can the minister clarify whether the planting of 10,000 hectares with trees is a target or an aspiration?

We need to ensure that Scotland is at the forefront of the fight on climate change, and the Government needs to ensure that it is serious about tackling climate change by reducing emissions and working with local authorities, public services, businesses and communities to

ensure that everyone is doing their bit to tackle the issue effectively.

10:44

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in the first Parliament debate on climate justice and I am particularly pleased that the focus is on climate justice. As we have heard from other members, Scotland is a pioneer when it comes to tackling climate change, which is why we have an added responsibility in the world to aid nations that do not have the means to contribute as much to the global effort.

When we talk about climate justice we are explicitly acknowledging, as we should, that climate change is fundamentally and inescapably an ethical issue. It is about the many ways in which the adverse effects of climate change are undermining human rights and inflicting harm on the poor and disadvantaged, in countries that bear no responsibility for creating the problem and whose institutions and finances are such that they are singularly ill-equipped to mitigate its effects.

That is why I am pleased that the Scottish Parliament embedded in legislation the most ambitious climate change targets in the world, on which we are well on the way to making progress. It is also why I welcome the First Minister's call for world leaders to make 2012 a year of climate justice, ahead of the UN conference on sustainable development in Rio in June.

If we are to succeed in our aspiration to deliver climate justice, we need to influence others. Our influence can be brought to bear particularly at European Union level, where a wide range of legislation that impacts directly on climate change is enacted. In December, the European Commission published its "Energy Roadmap 2050", which set a target to cut emissions by more than 80 per cent by 2050. The target will require almost complete decarbonisation of energy production in the EU and is entirely consistent with the policy of the Scottish Government and this Parliament. Scotland is uniquely well placed to contribute to the target, constituting as we do an estimated 25 per cent of total EU renewable energy potential.

Neil Findlay: Will the member give way?

Aileen McLeod: I want to make progress, but I will come back to Neil Findlay if I get a chance to do so.

As we make progress by encouraging the investments that are required to exploit such a tremendous economic resource, we will contribute positively to the delivery of climate justice across the world. In that sense, Scotland and its Government are investing in global climate justice.

An aspect on which the EU could and should be performing better is the emission trading system; we must address the failings in the regime. Currently the ETS is failing to provide the incentives that energy companies need if they are to invest in long-term low-emissions sources of energy. The oversupply of carbon-emission allowances, coupled with the effects of economic recession and energy-saving measures, has led to a dramatic fall in the market carbon price, which has virtually eliminated the incentive for companies to invest in carbon-free energy sources.

There is little doubt that the problem has the potential to derail the EU's target to reduce emissions overall by 20 per cent by 2020—let alone the increased target of 30 per cent that the Scottish Government advocates. If it is to tackle the problem, the EU must introduce measures that will push up the price of carbon, thereby providing an incentive for companies to invest in technologies—renewables, in particular—that reduce emissions. Any such action at EU level would help Scotland to achieve its target of a 42 per cent reduction by 2020. I am therefore pleased that the European Parliament's Committee on Industry, Research and Energy voted this week to adopt an amendment to the energy efficiency directive that will allow permits in the ETS to be withheld so that the price will rise and investment in renewable energy sources will be stimulated.

It is regrettable that, as is becoming increasingly clear, we are unlikely on our current trajectory to prevent climate change, so greater efforts must be devoted to mitigating the impact of climate change on vulnerable countries and communities. That is why the Scottish Government is committed not only to enhancing the climate challenge fund but to creating, with others, Scotland's first climate justice fund. I welcome the minister's announcement in that regard.

There is no doubt that adapting to climate change will be one of the defining global challenges of the century. There will be a scientific and, no doubt, an economic challenge, but the dominant aspect will be the perhaps unparalleled ethical challenge that climate change will pose for us all, especially those of us who are better prepared for, and less directly affected by, a process that for many people, in the world's poorest countries and most vulnerable communities, will be disruptive and almost certainly destructive.

If society as a whole is to rise to the ethical challenge that climate change poses and deliver climate justice, much will be required of us all. Simple everyday actions have a part to play in reducing our carbon emissions. As Margaret McDougall said, we must think globally and act

locally. This week I joined my South Scotland colleague, Claudia Beamish, to help care students at Dumfries and Galloway College launch their lug a mug project, which encourages staff and students to buy a reusable mug rather than use disposable cups for their coffee, as a practical way of helping the environment and promoting sustainability.

This week also saw the publication of "A Flourishing Scotland", which sets out Scotland's voice ahead of the Rio+20 summit and is a result of work that has been undertaken by organisations in the public, private and third sectors. I commend all those who are involved, particularly Cifal Scotland and the Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research.

To conclude, I hope that we will support this important motion, because that will send a key message that Scotland's Parliament accepts the ethical challenge of helping to secure climate justice and, in doing so, underlines its international responsibility and its commitment to a more sustainable future.

10:50

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): The Scottish Parliament understands that poor and vulnerable people in developing countries are most affected by climate change, but are least equipped to respond to it. Scotland presents itself to the world as a forerunner in the fight for climate justice by acting as a model for best practice on climate change and by promoting moral, environmental and economic reasons for action by other countries. I compliment the minister on his announcement on the climate justice fund.

The impacts of climate change already affect people in the global south through droughts, flooding and many more events that cause devastation to communities and to countries' growth. The developed world should do its best to cut greenhouse gas emissions, but it is now widely accepted that the developed world's attempts to battle climate change and climate injustice are just not good enough, which puts the third-world countries at a further disadvantage in their ability to develop while combating the effects of climate change. Scotland must pave the way for the global north and set an example to the rest of the developed world. We need to continue to cut greenhouse gas emissions, but we must also seek to correct that gross injustice by allowing the third world to develop in the way that the global north did while, where possible, aiding those countries—which cannot afford the luxury of green technology—to do that sustainably.

A 2005 Friends of the Earth report revealed that people who live in deprived areas in Scotland

suffer disproportionately from industrial pollution and poor water and air quality. Further, more than a third of households now suffer from fuel poverty, and the poorest households—which include households that are unlikely to own a car—are actually most likely to suffer from poor air quality as a result of congestion. We must take action to tackle that, whether through insulating homes, reducing traffic or producing reduction action plans for communities. Because 25 per cent of emissions come from the home and everyday life, we must do all that we can to encourage a holistic approach domestically, as well as championing the issues internationally.

We need to develop a fairer community at home and abroad, because our domestic activity will help to shape our identity as a country in the fight for climate justice. We can do that by continuing to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions while doing what we can to provide support for those who are most at risk in developing countries, so that the world continues to grow, but in a sustainable and equal manner. Scotland reaps revenue from its beautiful surroundings, which are tourist attractions; its fisheries, which are already depleted; and its forestry and agriculture.

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, coupled with Scotland's ambitious renewable targets set the standard for Scotland. Friends of the Earth has used the Scottish approach as an example for other nations to follow. We want to continue to have influence in that way with regard to climate justice. The entire Parliament must feel an obligation to tackle the issue and to listen to our citizens, who are calling for change. Non-governmental organisations such as the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, Friends of the Earth, Stop Climate Chaos Scotland and Amnesty International are prominent in showing their support for Scotland becoming a front runner in the process. It is important that we keep our links with international groups, which we can help to spread the message of Scottish support, and that we work together with them in the fight.

There should be a strong consensus throughout Scotland. We can push for support abroad, but we also want to implement the ideology domestically. As a leading nation in the industrial revolution, which has played a part in climate change, Scotland must now become a leading nation in a new revolution for climate justice. Climate change is fast becoming a humanitarian crisis. We have seen an increased in natural disasters such as floods and droughts, food and water scarcity, and disease, and there has been increased conflict over resources, and many other issues. Many countries in the global north throw themselves at the chance to help in the aftermath of a large-scale crisis such as a natural disaster. Rather than sending aid to clear up the mess, we should be

helping to prevent it from ever happening in the first place, and helping those who have already been affected to adapt to their new surroundings.

The world is continually warming because of the greenhouses gases that remain in the atmosphere for long periods, so we must act now, not later. We must treat climate justice as we would any other human rights issue so that, as an international topic, it can be treated in a way that allows for discussion and harmony between national and international efforts to address the global challenge in a co-ordinated and human-centred way.

It is our obligation to ensure that the principles of climate justice are implemented throughout all policy areas internationally and nationally, as well as to encourage a human rights approach to climate justice. Not only should Scotland continue to create innovative and effective policy domestically, it must put the same effort into multinational agreements to fight for climate justice.

10:56

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): My colleague, Claudia Beamish, said that I would speak on the green skills agenda. I am sorry to have to disappoint her on this occasion, but I am sure that I will get the opportunity to enthral members on that subject in the near future.

Climate change and environmental justice, and the development of policies in those areas, is of vital interest locally, nationally and internationally. I welcome the debate because it is a reminder to us all that there is a wider world out there that goes way beyond the narrow confines of this Parliament. It goes beyond national boundaries and shows us that, whether they are fishermen in the Western Isles or pastoral farmers in the Sudan, human beings across the world have shared interests and common concerns, and we need co-operative solutions for them.

The concept of climate justice—or, more appropriately, climate injustice—is not difficult to comprehend. By adhering to a flawed and often brutally uncompromising economic system, the west has grown wealthy at the expense of people in the developing world by exploiting their human and natural resources to satisfy our demand for material goods. The impacts of our actions will not be felt some time in the distant future when even the youngest of us—such as me—will be long gone. They are being felt here and now. According to Oxfam, almost 300,000 deaths a year are caused by the effects of climate change.

The bulk of those deaths do not occur in the United States, Europe, or Scotland, but in the poorer countries of the developing world: 50 of the

world's poorest countries are said to have contributed less than 1 per cent of global emissions, but bear nine tenths of the social and economic consequences. Those with the least responsibility for causing climate change are the ones who suffer the most from its consequences. That, of course, is not climate justice but climate injustice on an industrial scale.

Climate change has its deniers. Right-wing commentators and neo-con think tanks that are funded by the likes of Exxon and Mobil spew out their propaganda just as readily as their sponsors spew out emissions. Increased incidence of drought and water scarcity, floods, violent weather patterns, desertification and food insecurity have not been dreamed up by left-wing conspiracy theorists; they are happening across the globe here and now.

Scotland is not immune from the impact. We have witnessed more unpredictable weather patterns, warmer winters, and wetter summers, and we can see that our infrastructure struggles to cope. Just as climate change affects the less developed countries around the world, when a big developer wants to exploit minerals and land resources in Scotland, it is the poorer communities that are often targeted, whether it be for a landfill site, incinerator, or open-cast coal mining. The absence of any third-party right of appeal in this country's planning system is a clear injustice that must be addressed if we are serious about promoting environmental justice at home.

Successive Scottish Governments have carefully considered climate change and how to adapt to and mitigate its effects. The Government's climate change targets are laudable, but it is one thing to set targets and another to implement them.

Let us take renewables. I have said this before and I will say it again: our approach to renewables represents a missed opportunity. Had we sought to take control of our own renewables industry, we could have had the financial benefits stay in Scotland. We could have developed a substantive domestic green economy, with much of the accrued surpluses being reinvested in tackling fuel poverty and in developing further renewable technology.

John Finnie: Does Neil Findlay accept that devolution of control of the Crown estate to Scotland would be a significant step in that regard?

Neil Findlay: It might be, and we can debate that matter when it comes up.

Instead of seeking that control, we have allowed our wind resources to be handed over to foreign multinationals and venture capital firms based in France, Spain, Italy, Holland and Denmark—an

approach that does not resonate with the declaration that we are

“a model of international best practice”.

At some point, we will all have to face up to the questions whether to build more or fewer roads, to cut or increase cycling and walking budgets, and to promote or reduce expenditure on public transport. That is genuinely not a partisan point.

The World Development Movement argues that we in the west have accrued an adaptation debt because of our contribution to climate change internationally. It is calculated that our share of that debt is £22 billion over 40 years. I am not arguing that we immediately write a cheque to settle that, but it is morally right that we develop policies that try to repair some of the damage that we have inflicted. We should provide expertise and capability to assist countries in the developing world. I hope that the minister will refer to that in his summing up.

As a member of the cross-party group on Cuba, I think that we could look at how that small country offers—free of any profit motive—its expertise in, for example, health, education and organic farming to other countries. At a time when the global capitalist system is in crisis, it depresses me no end to hear Mr McGrigor tell us that free trade would be the salvation of the world.

Scotland has been a world player in so many fields in past centuries, and I hope that over the next ones we will be seen as pioneers whose actions have environmental justice as a core philosophy, unhindered by balance sheets, corporate greed and further exploitation.

11:02

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): It is an honour, as many other members have said, to speak in a landmark debate. Perhaps my participation is slightly tarnished by my having to come last in what has been a largely consensual debate.

I return to a point that was made by Elaine Murray, and which has not had as much attention as it deserves. I come back to it not in contention, but more in agreement and to highlight the point. The difficulty that we sometimes have with members of the public, in our surgeries, on the street or in opinion polls, is that they can be slightly more sceptical than is desirable about international support, whether in the form of aid or on climate issues. In a way, the inconvenient truth about the consensus that we have in civic society and political parties is that there is that greater level of doubt. A YouGov poll on 21 June 2011 found that 43 per cent of Scots would scrap the UK's international development budget entirely.

I am glad of the consensus here and the support that we have, and of the continued prominence that we give to the issue, but let us not act complacently; let us be aware that there is still an argument to be made and that we have some difficulties in making progress. The YouGov poll also asked whether aid should be given to countries where there is corruption, and used other Trojan horse questions to try to influence people. I believe that we have a moral duty and are required to profess it at opportunities such as this, and any time we are confronted by members of the public asking why we send money abroad.

I am glad that Aileen McLeod brought in the term “ethical”—I do not think that it was used before her speech, but it sums up where we are on the issue. The question is ethical. I will draw a little bit of a distinction between two ethical principles that have been conflated a lot. To use reductionist language, one school of thought says, “This is bad—we can do something about it.” A separate principle is, “This is bad—we caused it.” Those two distinct analyses give rise to different levels of obligation.

In relation to poverty, the causation of underdevelopment or the global south—whichever term people choose to use—is debated. In relation to climate change, the question is a lot clearer. I am drawn to the World Development Movement’s phenomenal statistic—which I have no reason to doubt—that the UK emits more carbon dioxide in one year than Bangladesh has emitted in its entire history. When we have spent 200 years polluting our way to prosperity, the issue becomes not noblesse oblige—helping because we can help—but helping because we caused or contributed greatly to the problem, so we have an obligation to help.

I was quite drawn to the minister’s comment about allowing the Malawis of this world to skip the high-carbon phase and go straight into clean technology. That almost takes me back to some of the difficulties that arose over the Kyoto protocol, to which countries refused to sign up at the start because it made allowance for developing countries to increase their emissions in some circumstances. Countries that did not want to make sacrifices were eager to argue that countries that were a lot less fortunate should make cuts, too, although they were in no position to do so. For example, I believe that the average greenhouse gas footprint of an Indian 10 years ago was one tenth of that of a person in the United Kingdom. Given that, saying that developing countries should have no scope to increase emissions is a bit awkward.

Lots of actions are happening. If I can be allowed a plug, I will say that time for reflection on 14 March will be taken by—I apologise for my

pronunciation—Esther Wanjohi, who is from Kenya and is in Edinburgh as part of an exchange with the eco-congregation at Saughtonhall United Reformed church. Along with the climate challenge fund and eco-schools, eco-congregations are at the forefront of the work that is happening to mobilise grass-roots opinion and ensure that the country comes with us.

To be ultra-local, the City of Edinburgh Council has just become the first local authority in Scotland to set a firm target for its spending on active travel. I hope that other local authorities will follow it. As councils spend £475 million a year on transport, it would help if activist groups and MSPs put a little bit more pressure on them to meet their obligations on active travel and other environmental targets.

This has been the first debate on the concept of climate justice from the country that had the first carbon assessment of a budget and, if not the first act on climate change, certainly the best. We are many countries, but we are one world. We are not separated by national boundaries; our responsibilities cross them.

11:08

Patrick Harvie: Ah, consensual debates. Don’t you love them, Presiding Officer? Maybe sometimes. We should probably admit that we have a bit more fun with a good old-fashioned argument in the chamber, but the debates in which we unite on a piece of text, and in which we all agree consensually and make speeches that reflect the other excellent contributions across the chamber are interesting.

Dennis Robertson was the first member to point out that consensus is not always absolute. As we have heard, there is a good consensus on the ambition, just as there was in the debates on the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill. There is consensus on not just the scale of the ambition but its range, which incorporates a human rights approach, and there are attempts to reclaim the term “human rights”, which has sometimes been co-opted by the right wing in politics and turned into a bogey-man term. Members have also endorsed the need for poverty and inequality to be at centre stage in the climate change debate, and the need for a scale of moral responsibility.

There has been criticism on some of the specifics: about precisely which emissions targets are set; about the balance between road building and active travel, which several members mentioned; about whether to keep Scottish Water in the public sector, as I believe we should, but which Jim Hume questions; about the role of nuclear power in the energy mix, which Jamie McGrigor questioned; and about the delivery of

environmental justice and the relevance of the Aarhus convention, for which Mary Fee correctly argued.

Other issues have not been mentioned in the debate. For example, we heard little about the consumption targets that are mentioned in my amendment, although I hope that we will hear more about them in the minister's closing speech. It is all too easy to talk about the progress that we have made towards a 42 per cent reduction based on a 1990 baseline, but we have made progress because of the extent to which we have offshored emissions over the years. We are still consuming in much the same way. The consumption targets are necessary if we are to accept the full moral responsibility that so many members talked about in their speeches. I hope that we will hear something from the minister about the timescale.

Even in consensual debates after which we sign up to the text at the end of the day and pass a motion with unanimous support, there are sometimes ideas bubbling away under the surface that are contested, and assumptions that are not shared. Sometimes they bubble as fiercely as the most furious knife-edged budget debate of old, even though they are not so clearly spoken. Jamie McGrigor's speech was a good example of that. He began strongly, talking about a human-centred approach, about the perception of climate change occurring right now, even in Scotland, and about a much sharper perception of that globally, and he restated his party's support for the emissions targets that were included in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. He began so strongly with all that great consensual stuff, but towards the end, as Neil Findlay pointed out, we heard that free trade is the best way in which to achieve an end to poverty and inequality and to prevent climate change, and that preserving the environment must go hand in hand with economic growth. Those are contested ideas. From my point of view, a world that seeks to achieve climate justice and sustainability needs to challenge those ideas and find its way towards a new economic system.

Last Monday, the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee and the Scottish Trades Union Congress held an event at which we heard much argument on that—some of it from Oxfam, which will soon launch the humankind index on which it has been working, and some of it from the Church of Scotland. As someone who is occasionally described as one of those dangerous and aggressive militant secularists, I aggressively urge everyone to read the report of the Church of Scotland's commission on the purposes of economic activity. It comes from a different starting point to mine—which is not spiritual in any way—but I cannot disagree with its conclusion. It states:

"We have allowed elements of our social and economic system to degrade human beings and the environment instead of seeking a holistic approach to life. This is no time for business as usual. We need to put aside the argument that ethical principles are too idealised to put into practice or that economic practices are too unruly to be disciplined by principle."

I urge members to read it.

We heard some of that agenda on Monday and Tuesday last week, but on Wednesday the committee heard from the Council of Economic Advisers how important it is that we get back to "business as usual" as soon as is humanly possible. There are still contested ideas. We are likely to agree on the text of the motion and the amendments to it, but beneath the surface there remain profound questions, which are as yet unanswered, about the scale of change in our economy, about our society and about our politics, which a climate change agenda and a climate justice agenda demand of us.

Jamie McGrigor: Will the member take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: I regret that I do not have time for an intervention. I am at the end of my speech.

The debate will go on for many years to come.

11:14

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): This has been a refreshing debate. I thank the minister for working constructively with the UK Government rather than taking the usual approach that we have come to expect. I also thank him for reporting back to this Parliament on the outcomes of the Durban conference, as well as highlighting the significant effect of climate change on women and children.

I commend Rob Gibson for reminding us of the importance of our peatlands.

I am delighted to tell Neil Findlay that this right-wing party is very much in accordance with the tone and content of the debate. However, he will not be surprised to hear that we are not in line with nationalising the renewable energy sector. I thank him for the work that he does on renewables and his commitment to giving local communities the consultation that they deserve.

We are pleased to support putting climate justice at the heart of decisions on energy policy and economic and social development; therefore, we will support the motion and the amendments. It is right that we all support our model of best practice, because climate change poses a long-term threat to political stability and economic growth. There is a real need for countries, governments, businesses and individuals to work together to address the issue.

As other members have said, those who are least responsible for climate change often experience its greatest impacts. As Oxfam puts it:

“poor communities living in developing countries are the most affected by climate change, yet have done the least to cause it.”

Oxfam further states:

“Developing countries are the ones left paying the price for the developed countries’ unsustainable ecological debt.”

I welcome the minister’s announcement of the climate justice fund, which we look forward to hearing more about over the next few months.

One of the excellent briefings that members received for the debate suggests that the fund could be used to support investment in growing more weather-resistant crops; raising homes above the ground; developing early-warning systems for floods, hurricanes and other disasters; and establishing agroforestry and conservation farms as well as creating natural flood barriers. The United Nations states that every \$1 that is invested in pre-disaster risk management in developing countries can prevent \$7 in losses. That is certainly a worthwhile investment.

The UK Government will drive forward proposals for new sustainable development goals at the summit in June. As Jamie McGrigor said, the Westminster Government is to be commended for its commitment to climate justice, which is demonstrated by the funding that it has announced of £2.9 billion in international climate finance specifically to help developing countries to pursue low-carbon growth and adapt to the impacts of climate change. That commitment has been given despite the very tough budget situation at Westminster.

Although the volume of greenhouse gas emissions here fell by more than 28 per cent between 1990 and 2009, there is a recognition that much more remains to be done. As others have said, given that we have the most progressive climate change legislation in the world, it is worth monitoring our progress along the way. Members will not be surprised to hear that, as the deputy convener of the Audit Committee, I look to the Audit Scotland report, “Reducing Scottish greenhouse gas emissions”, which was published in December and raises several issues relating to the Government’s progress—in particular, the commitments that were made under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

A public engagement strategy was required under the 2009 act. However, according to Audit Scotland, two months ago:

“The Scottish Government developed the Public Engagement Strategy independently of its plans for reducing emissions and there is limited connection between them.”

Audit Scotland also highlighted the

“separate engagement and communications activities in policy sectors, such as in energy, transport and agriculture.”

According to Audit Scotland,

“The Scottish Government has committed to reporting progress against”

actions, but

“there is no system in place for it to do so.”

The report says:

“the Scottish Government has been developing a system of scorecards which is intended to provide the Emissions Reduction Programme Board with more immediate management information about”

policy and progress. I think that we all welcome that, but in December, the system remained under development and was not fully connected to the Government’s national performance framework. Audit Scotland stated:

“The scorecards have not been made publicly available and this reduces the transparency of the Scottish Government’s performance management arrangements for reducing emissions.”

We all support the Scottish Government in leading the world as a model of best practice, but there is a need to get arrangements in place so that we can all check the commitments that we and the Government have made, check progress, and provide essential information, as promised in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

11:20

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am pleased to close this debate on climate justice on behalf of Labour. As a broad movement, we have always been concerned with the interconnectedness of nations, the impact of our actions on others, and a global perspective on tackling poverty and inequality. We have always been concerned with working to address not just unfairness at home, but inequality and injustice throughout the world.

The debate has been wide ranging. Mary Fee talked about environmental justice, Paul Wheelhouse highlighted issues around human rights, and Dennis Robertson talked about the importance of engaging young people in future challenges. We have heard many thoughtful, considered and powerful speeches that have demonstrated the breadth of issues—from green vehicles in China to drought in south-east England—that are connected to climate justice.

All the topics that have been raised are interconnected, and they all contribute towards the action that we must take at home and abroad if we are to play our part in delivering climate justice.

Many members have highlighted the complexity in actions in one part of the world affecting other parts of the world. Rob Gibson spoke about the consequences of deforestation and the growth of soya, and Jamie McGrigor highlighted the changes in fish stocks. Our mackerel fleet are currently dealing with that.

I welcome the fact that the Government motion highlights the extreme vulnerability to climate change of communities in developing countries. Evidence shows that they carry the burden of the consequences of global activity, although they are the least equipped to deal with it. Many members have made that point. There will be challenges at home, and the principle that the poor will suffer most is as true here as it is anywhere, but the context in which we in the western world think about how we will cope with the effects of climate change is far removed from that in developing countries, where increased temperatures and unpredictable weather mean the difference in people's ability to access water, grow crops and protect their homes and communities from flooding.

The International Food Policy Research Institute has calculated that 12 million more children under the age of five will be consigned to hunger by 2050 because of climate change. We have much greater capacity and resources to deal with those challenges, and we must do all that we can to help developing countries to prevent the preventable, and build capacity and provide support to deal with what is in some cases, unfortunately, the inevitable. I think that Aileen McLeod made that point.

This June, the United Nations conference on sustainable development will take place in Brazil. The minister may want to say what the Scottish Government's aims in relation to that conference will be and what Scotland's involvement might be. The Government's motion certainly recognises the opportunity for Scotland to provide leadership on the issues. Our climate change legislation provides the context for us to do that. Scotland's ground-breaking legislation provides a lead for other countries, and members of Stop Climate Chaos Scotland have been proud to promote that legislation as a blueprint for other countries, but the Government's motion misses the need for us to be clear about the action that must be taken at home. Both amendments address that.

We need to be clear that meeting Scotland's climate change challenge is not the ambition of one party; it is the ambition of all of us. All the political parties contributed to the debate on climate change legislation, and we should not forget the role that the environmental groups and activists played in Scotland in shaping it. We all have ownership of the legislation, but the

responsibility for delivery falls on the Government, and concerns remain that we lack detail on how progress will be made at the rate that is needed.

In the briefings that we received for the debate—I thank all the organisations for their contributions—it is clear that there are concerns about the action that is being taken and the pace of change to deliver on climate change commitments.

Claudia Beamish talked about the importance of the forthcoming revised report on proposals and policies, and Stop Climate Chaos Scotland has highlighted the need for the new report to be

“sufficiently credible, ambitious and transparent.”

The existing RPP was welcomed. Friends of the Earth described it as

“a serious document containing a number of costed measures”,

but expressed concern over funding and implementation, highlighting in particular transport and energy efficiency in homes.

Elaine Murray highlighted the issue of fuel poverty and the need to address housing emission levels, a campaign that is currently being undertaken by WWF.

The UK Committee on Climate Change recently highlighted transport as a particular concern. A recent Audit Scotland report stressed that

“Transport depends more than any other source of emissions on proposed new policies to achieve emissions reductions”

and raised concerns about “optimistic assumptions”. That point was also made by Mary Scanlon. That is why there was such concern when the Scottish Government made cuts to the active transport budget, and why concerns remain that, while the RPP requires almost £500 million for low-carbon transport measures for 2012-13, the Government is funding less than 10 per cent of what its own climate action plan says is needed. We need to have confidence in what the contribution of other partners will be, if we are to make progress.

Annabelle Ewing said that we have to recognise the progress that has been made so far, but that progress is sometimes difficult to fully understand. The recent positive figures noting a fall in emissions for 2009 were dampened when it appeared that they were more the result of recession and less activity than of any Government action. We need change to be positive and to be embedded, and we need to change practices and behaviour if we are to see any lasting benefit from those figures.

No one can accuse this Government of not being optimistic, but Stop Climate Chaos Scotland is right to say:

“The Scottish Climate Change Act is to be commended, but it will mean little if we cannot deliver on the targets it commits us to.”

At the beginning of my speech, I talked about the interconnectedness of the issues raised by members of all parties this morning. Following this debate, members will have the opportunity to highlight WWF’s work on earth hour, and a photograph will be taken immediately after this debate. Yesterday, as part of Scottish environment week, I hosted a seminar in the Parliament on exploring Scotland’s past. Plantlife Scotland gave a presentation about the humble twinflower and described how the organisation had studied past woodland management to better understand and then create the conditions in which the twinflower could flourish. However, it was Plantlife Scotland’s description of why it did that that has stayed with me. It was to make the plant population more robust and to give it a better chance of surviving in the future. That aim seems to encapsulate this morning’s debate and our commitment to climate justice.

Elaine Murray: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The standing orders of this Parliament indicate that members should treat each other with respect. Will you rule that, if members wish to have a chat and a laugh together, perhaps they should do so in the coffee room or the bar, not in the chamber when other members are speaking?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): You have made your point, but it is not a point of order. I call the minister, who has until 11:40.

11:28

Stewart Stevenson: Thank you, Presiding Officer. Scotland’s international climate change agenda has always been to act as a model of international best practice. We are an industrialised nation and have a moral duty to play our part in tackling climate change and helping those who have contributed least to the problem to mitigate and adapt to our changing global climate.

We must not forget that it was our process of rapid development and industrialisation—which Marco Biagi and other members have referred to and from which we benefit today—that caused the carbon emissions that have ultimately resulted in the changing global climate. There can, therefore, be no doubt that we in the industrialised world are best placed to mitigate the effects of climate change, and we have a moral duty to do so.

The climate justice approach must focus on what we can do to help those in the developing world, who have done the least to cause the

problem but who are now the hardest hit by its effect. Given Scotland’s ambitious, world-leading legislation, which we all supported in the chamber, it is fitting that we are also leading the way in putting climate justice at the heart of our policy making in this area. I congratulate every member who has participated in the debate on their distinctive and interesting contributions. A number of issues have been raised that had not been part of my thinking before. I will take them away and think about them, even though, in the limited time that is available to me, I will not be able to deal with everything that has been said.

We will continue to seek to influence the EU and the wider international community to increase their ambition on climate change. However, even if global emissions of greenhouse gases stopped right now, climate change would continue for the next 30 or 40 years—past and present emissions determine that that is the case. That is why we must not forget the importance of adaptation and climate justice in the future.

Claire Baker asked about Rio+20. We have asked the UK Government for a place on the UK delegation. Places will be limited, so I do not know what the answer will be. I believe that the Welsh Government also seeks to be at Rio.

I congratulate SCIAF on having already commented on today’s debate. Its press release says:

“Today’s debate in the Scottish Parliament demonstrated cross-party support for the concept of climate justice, and a clear recognition of widespread public concern about the impact of climate change around the world.”

We can all share, momentarily, in the lustre of at least being part of a debate. We have to move to the point where we can share in dealing with the problem.

Part of Patrick Harvie’s amendment relates to consumption. Officials have been exploring how best to meet the section 37 reporting duty. Work on estimating Scottish consumption-based emissions has now been contracted out, and we plan to publish the results in respect of data up to 2009 before the summer recess. We are the first country in the world to do anything of this kind, so it is quite a formidable challenge. I will not overclaim with regard to the perfection of the analyses, but I think that we have made a very good start.

Patrick Harvie: I acknowledge that the collection of that data is a work in progress. Can the minister confirm that, following the publishing of the 2009 figures, such reporting to Parliament will become part of the normal reporting cycle of climate change targets?

Stewart Stevenson: I prefer at this stage to say that we will report on each year’s progress. The

timetable for doing so is something that I will return to later.

Claudia Beamish opened her speech by saying, rightly, that there is a need to change behaviour and that we are talking about what is essentially a silent crisis. I found myself absolutely in agreement with that. She said that the effects are skewed and indiscriminate; others pointed that out, too. She also referred to the First Minister's speech in Beijing in December. We have to set our own house in order and we have to set an example.

I was not aware of the example of 25 cities in China going for new eco-vehicles. I will look into that. When I was in China a couple of years ago, I visited an electric vehicle factory and found that the US Government had an order of 400 electric vans, which were just waiting to be shipped. China is doing much more than we sometimes imagine. If we are not careful, it might end up taking up many of the economic opportunities that exist.

Patrick Harvie rightly pointed to the great enlightenment figures who have contributed to modern thinking and whose statues and memorials we can see around us, particularly as we go along George Street and Princes Street. We should perhaps also remind ourselves that Adam Smith's grave lies a few hundred metres from the door of the Parliament.

In response to one point that was made, I say that the Scottish climate justice fund will be in addition to any funds that are already allocated. We will hear more about that later.

I am glad that the Conservatives have participated in the debate in such a positive spirit. Jamie McGrigor said that climate change is one of the greatest challenges, and we absolutely agree with that. He personalised the issue by talking about the rainfall on Loch Awe: 140in is a formidable amount of rain. It is okay, Jamie—the rain was falling only on you; the rest of us were being treated quite differently.

Rob Gibson pointed out that we are expecting food prices to soar because of drought in south-east England—in Lincolnshire in particular—where there are areas of highly productive arable land. That situation will be repeated throughout Europe. As I said in my opening speech, climate change is not simply an issue for the third world: it will affect us directly, too.

Neil Findlay: The minister is going through the members who contributed to the debate. Jamie Hepburn described how the financial transactions tax could help on the issue of climate change. Can the minister explain why the two SNP MEPs did not support the tax in Europe?

Stewart Stevenson: I hope that Neil Findlay will support this Parliament having the full powers of a normal independent country so that we can participate in that sort of thing, but I do not want to be particularly political today.

Elaine Murray correctly highlighted the problems of drought, famine and starvation. Annabelle Ewing, among others, highlighted the importance of climate change for women and the effect that it has on them.

Paul Wheelhouse mentioned that even the UK's strategic defence review identified climate change as a threat to military stability. I had not been aware of that, but it is another interesting take on the issue.

Mary Fee spoke about Jack McConnell's work in setting renewables targets. I respect and recognise the continuity in our activity on climate change, although I personally admire Jack McConnell most for his anti-smoking efforts.

We talked about 0.3 per cent as the target for the current year; the target for the following year is of course 9.86 per cent. Jamie Hepburn mentioned that Alan Miller is watching us, and I am delighted that he is here to see the first debate in a Parliament anywhere in the world on the subject of climate justice.

Jim Hume said that, as a member of the United Kingdom, we can engage internationally. That is correct, although we could do much more in a different environment—but we should not spend too much time on that today.

Dennis Robertson referred to curriculum for excellence, and mentioned the achievement of Old Rayne primary school in his constituency. That is typical of what is happening in schools throughout Scotland. The idea that children are now sending their parents to bed early so that the lights go out to make a positive impact on climate change is a new one, but not necessarily a bad one.

In response to Margaret McDougall's point, we have been supporting allotments through the climate challenge fund, so we are doing quite a lot in that regard. We are supporting 8,100 hectares of forestry this year, and moving towards our target of 10,000 hectares per year. Last year we supported just over 5,000 hectares. In response to Aileen McLeod's point, I shall be lugging a mug as people in Dumfries have been doing.

We have heard excellent contributions from members on all sides of the Parliament. Members have raised a huge range of issues, from the Crown estate to national defence, so the debate has been wide ranging. The debate is but a start: inevitably, in the first ever debate on climate justice in a Parliament, we cannot cover the subject in its entirety. However, we will certainly

ensure that others see all the contributions that have been made today.

Throughout history, we have as a nation been at the forefront of innovation. Our strong engineering background has put us in the vanguard of past industrial revolutions, and we have reaped the rewards as a high-carbon country. We are now at the forefront of a green industrial revolution, and we must ensure that in reaping the rewards of that low-carbon revolution at home, we take with us those who are less fortunate than ourselves and let them benefit from our innovation, knowledge and expertise in those emerging economies.

In making 2012 the year of climate justice, we must influence others to do the same. Again I quote Mary Robinson, who said:

"Climate change is a matter of justice. The richest countries caused the problem, but it is the world's poorest who are already suffering from its effects."

She went on to say that

"the international community must commit to righting that wrong."

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): That concludes the historic first debate on climate justice.

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:40

Constitution (Negotiations)

1. Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether there are constitutional issues on which it will not compromise in negotiations. (S4O-00729)

The Cabinet Secretary for Parliamentary Business and Government Strategy (Bruce Crawford): We are consulting the people of Scotland on the nature of the referendum on independence. We are happy to listen to the views of the United Kingdom Government on that and we are ready to work with it to agree a clarification of the Scotland Act 1998 that would put the referendum effectively beyond legal challenge through an order under section 30 of the 1998 act.

However, the referendum on independence will be made in Scotland and therefore for the UK Government to attach any strings to it is not acceptable.

Gil Paterson: This week, another organisation was established to campaign for additional powers for the Parliament as a substitute for independence. Others said that there are lines in the sand that they would not cross, only to find them blown away with wind from the south. Is the Government open-minded about including such proposals in the forthcoming referendum should further detail on them be provided?

Bruce Crawford: We believe that it is right that the people of Scotland be able to determine the form of government that is best suited to their needs. That is why the Scottish Government's consultation paper, published on 25 January, seeks views on the inclusion of a second question in the referendum.

As we have consistently said, the Scottish Government's preferred policy is independence. However, we are willing to consider including a question about further devolution if there is sufficient support for such a move. It is simply a matter of listening to the democratic and sovereign voice of the people of Scotland.

Gil Paterson implied that the line in the sand has washed away. Alex Fergusson said this week that the line was meandering. Whichever it is, it is the Tories' line in the sand. I see that Murdo Fraser is the only Tory here today—probably the Tory who, more than anyone else, supports more powers for

the Scottish Parliament. I apologise to Mary Scanlon, who has just come into the chamber.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Does the cabinet secretary agree that if an option such as devo plus were included on the ballot paper and endorsed in a referendum, the Scottish Government would find itself in a very weak negotiating position if the UK Government had not previously supported that devo plus or devo whatever option? In those circumstances, would the Government not find itself forced to compromise on a wide range of issues?

Bruce Crawford: Patrick Harvie raises an interesting point, but as we have made clear all the way through the process, what is important here is the voice of the people of Scotland, their sovereignty and what they want the future of Scotland to be. That is how we will decide what is on the ballot paper. That should be the determining factor at the end of the consultation process, depending on what the consultation says and on the contributions from other stakeholders. I will bear in mind Patrick Harvie's point, though.

Tyre Dumping (Rural Areas)

2. Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to combat the dumping of vehicle tyres in rural areas. (S4O-00730)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government works closely with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and zero waste Scotland on the specific issue of waste tyres. Recent joint SEPA and local authority initiatives targeting illegal operators have resulted in significant reductions in the instances of illegal tyre dumping. For example, in 2010 in the North Lanarkshire and Glasgow areas, operation aspen resulted in a 71 per cent reduction in incidents. There are other examples.

Colin Beattie: The dumping of tyres in the rural areas of my constituency is endemic. It is not unusual to encounter 30 or 40 tyres distributed along a rural road. Does the cabinet secretary agree that measures for the better control of safe and appropriate disposal of old tyres need to be put in place, which would also allow the tracking of individual tyre disposal?

Richard Lochhead: The member makes a good point. I am happy to investigate the details further. We all accept that the illegal dumping of tyres in the countryside is a blight on our landscape that we should tackle. A lot of good work, involving many local authorities and agencies, is taking place to curb illegal fly-tipping, of which dumping of tyres is a major component. If

further measures need to be taken, I will investigate them. If the member wants to write to me with some ideas, that would be helpful.

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary acknowledges that dumped tyres are an eyesore in rural areas. They present a significant health risk and encourage insect and rodent infestation. I look for his support in encouraging a campaign similar to those that he mentioned to be carried out throughout our rural areas and, perhaps, in other local authority areas.

Richard Lochhead: The member has my support. There are other examples of good initiatives that have good results. For instance, in 2011, operation indigo led to instances of tyre dumping in East Ayrshire falling from up to 200 tyres a month to only a few sporadic incidents.

Such initiatives work, and we should all support them in our local areas. I will certainly check what the situation is elsewhere in Scotland.

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): Does the minister acknowledge that there are facilities for recycling old tyres in all sorts of civil works but that it is sometimes felt that the regulations that SEPA and other agencies enforce are overly difficult? Perhaps, if the regulations could be simplified, it might make some of the issues easier to deal with and enable better recycling of old tyres.

Richard Lochhead: If there are ways in which the regulations can be simplified, I would be happy to consider them. I urge the member to write to me with examples of how the regulations are the barrier to the proper disposal of tyres.

There is a market for used tyres and it is only right that those who wish to dispose of them pay for doing so because, in this country, we believe in the polluter-pays principle. Therefore, we must have regulations in place but, if they can be simplified, I will consider that.

Youth Employment (Education and Training)

3. Margaret Burgess (Cunninghame South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that the education and training of young people is appropriate to meet the future needs of the economy. (S4O-00731)

The Minister for Youth Employment (Angela Constance): Ensuring that our young people have the right skills to meet the short and long-term needs of Scottish employers and the wider economy is a key aim of our work in reforming post-16 education. In particular, we are working closely with employers and employer bodies to determine how we can better reflect their ambitions in the provision that is delivered across the learning landscape.

Margaret Burgess: Irvine royal academy in my constituency has recently joined forces with the University of Glasgow in a partner school programme that will provide an innovative approach to the theory and practice of teaching. It will also lead to better links between the community, local schools and the university.

Does the minister agree that linking schools and universities in that fashion will benefit pupils and students by raising aspirations, widening choices and increasing their future employment prospects?

Angela Constance: Yes, I do. Margaret Burgess is right to showcase the innovative partnership that is taking place in her constituency between Irvine royal academy and the University of Glasgow. It will secure for parents and pupils in North Ayrshire the benefits of some cutting-edge practice that exists elsewhere in the world, for example in the United States and Australia. That aligns very much with the well-received Donaldson report on career-long teacher learning and will have far-reaching benefits for our children.

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): What impact will the Government's decision to remove all funding from the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils Scotland have on its ability to square the needs of the economy with the training needs of young people?

Angela Constance: This afternoon, I have a meeting with the joint skills committee of Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council. That is about ensuring that the various sector skills councils throughout Scotland meet the needs of learners first and foremost and meet the needs of employers.

In my view, the landscape is currently cluttered. My priority is ensuring that the precious funding that the Scottish Government has goes to the front line and young people.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): As the minister might be aware, last year 30,000 jobs were lost in the construction sector, with skills lost to the industry as a result. Does she share my concern that the outstanding, modern, purpose-built facility for carpentry and joinery at Jewel & Esk College is now under threat because of merger proposals, and can she assure me that students in Midlothian and East Lothian will continue to enjoy the benefits of that facility instead of being forced to go to the other side of Edinburgh to learn?

Angela Constance: I am happy to look very closely at Mr Hume's concerns on behalf of his local college and the young people in his constituency. I am very interested in the construction industry—after all, it is an important industry for our young people—but I ask the

member to bear in mind the fundamental point of post-16 reform and the regionalisation of colleges, which is to better meet the needs of our young people and employers and to ensure connectivity between the world of work and the world of education.

Economic Activity (Rural Areas)

4. Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to promote economic activity in rural areas. (S4O-00732)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Scottish Government recognises the particular challenges faced by Scotland's rural areas and is committed to promoting economic activity in those areas through a range of actions, including supporting rural businesses and key rural industries; developing Scotland's renewable energy resources and capabilities; establishing four enterprise areas; improving the transport network; and making it a priority to improve Scotland's digital infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, through the allocation of more than £250 million of public funding.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank the cabinet secretary for setting out the actions that the Scottish Government is taking to promote economic activity. However, as he will be aware, one of the key costs of doing business in rural Scotland is the sky-high rate of fuel duty. Will he take this opportunity to confirm that it is time for Scotland to have control over excise duty to allow us to set rates that do not penalise rural Scotland in the way that successive London Governments have been doing for decades?

John Swinney: I am delighted to confirm to Annabelle Ewing that the Government's objective is to secure those powers and responsibilities. Scotland's rural areas have faced particular challenges with regard to fuel costs and it is important that any measures that are taken are effective in reducing the costs of rural motoring and transport activity. Of course, our investment in digital infrastructure will enable individuals to develop business activity in rural Scotland and I am delighted that we were able to allocate additional resources to that priority in the recent budget. I am only sorry that the proposal was not more widely supported by all groups in this Parliament.

Fire and Rescue Service (Location)

5. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will consider the interim operating base at Perth community fire station as the permanent base for

the proposed single fire and rescue service. (S4O-00733)

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Roseanna Cunningham): Why do I get the feeling that Murdo Fraser is being a little mischievous with that question? As he probably already knows, that will be a matter for the Scottish fire and rescue service itself to decide in due course and I am sure that it will look at all the available options very carefully. Until then, Perth community fire station will provide a convenient, cost-effective venue from which a small senior management team can lead the new service from 1 April 2013. Because the station is not currently a service headquarters, basing the new service at Perth will help to ensure that there is no disruption to the public or senior officers.

Murdo Fraser: I thank the minister for her response; indeed, I can think of no one better qualified to express an opinion on the issue. I am sure that she agrees that, with its central location in Scotland, its good transport links and its affordable accommodation, Perth—which I hope this year will be confirmed as our seventh city—is the ideal place to host the national fire and rescue service headquarters. Does the minister also agree that as far as efficiency and service continuity are concerned, it makes a lot of sense to establish the permanent base in the same location as the temporary base?

Roseanna Cunningham: Murdo Fraser is tempting me to put myself into the position of the new Scottish fire and rescue service. No doubt he would be the first to complain if I started to make its future decisions for it.

That said, I can confirm that in considering possibilities for interim headquarters we looked very closely at precisely the issues that the member highlighted and, in the end, only a fairly small number of communities ticked all the boxes. I have absolutely no doubt that the new Scottish fire and rescue service will look at exactly the same issues and, for all I know, might reach the same conclusion.

Carer Information Strategy (Funding)

6. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether carer information strategy funding will continue in and after 2012. (S4O-00734)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Yes, I can confirm that we will allocate £5 million to national health service boards in 2012-13 to work with partners to continue to support carers and young carers through the carer information strategies. That money is on top of the £13.9 million for CIS that has been provided over the four years to March

2012. I advise the member that NHS boards should continue to plan on the basis of CIS funding being available in 2013-14 and 2014-15.

Graeme Dey: The minister will be aware of the benefit of local carer information strategy funding for carers centres and carers themselves. However, carers organisations have to apply for that lifeline financial support on an annual basis, even when it is directed towards continued activity and projects that are already acknowledged to be successful. Would the minister support health boards in offering such organisations three-year funding to enable them to plan more effectively?

Michael Matheson: The member correctly points out that CIS funding has assisted considerably in helping to support organisations that work with carers and young carers. As a Government, we are continuing that work with our NHS boards and other partners to ensure that we provide the range of support that is necessary to assist carers, who carry out an invaluable job in society.

It is for individual boards to decide how they wish to allocate the funding and it is possible for boards to award funding on a three-year basis, although any funding for future years would continue to be subject to parliamentary approval. Boards can allocate funding on a three-year basis if they choose to do so.

Business Rates Incentivisation Scheme (Aberdeen)

7. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Aberdeen City Council regarding the business rates incentivisation scheme. (S4O-00735)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The business rates incentivisation scheme was approved by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and all 32 local authorities, including Aberdeen City Council.

Kevin Stewart: The cabinet secretary knows that I am a great fan of the business rates incentivisation scheme. I cannot wait for 1 April, when it becomes a reality.

Does the cabinet secretary have any plans to further reward local authorities that invest the income from the business rates incentivisation scheme in encouraging even greater sustainable growth?

John Swinney: The business rates incentivisation scheme is an example of how the Government is trying to involve local authorities more closely in the process of encouraging and delivering more sustainable economic growth in

Scotland. It will enable local authorities to take decisions that will support an increased level of development activity. That is a particular priority, given the economic conditions that we face.

We will, of course, monitor the success of the scheme as it takes its course after 1 April. I hope that it attracts the active participation of all local authorities in Scotland in supporting our work to encourage economic growth.

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Meetings)

8. Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. (S4O-00736)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): John Swinney and I met the secretary of state on 15 September 2011 to discuss the United Kingdom Welfare Reform Bill and related matters. A further meeting is planned, and there has been correspondence and telephone discussion in the intervening period.

Anne McTaggart: Given that the Welfare Reform Bill has now passed its final hurdle in the House of Lords, what discussions have ministers had about the impact that the bill will have on working families in Scotland, particularly those in receipt of working tax credit?

Nicola Sturgeon: We continue to have discussions about the detail with the DWP. As Anne McTaggart will be aware, the Welfare Reform Bill is a piece of enabling legislation. The devil is in the detail and much of the detail is not yet known and understood. We will continue to have discussions to consider the implications for Scotland, particularly around passported benefits. The Scottish Parliament's new Welfare Reform Committee will have an extremely important scrutiny role to play, too.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Before we come to First Minister's question time, members will wish to join me in welcoming to the gallery the Hungarian ambassador, His Excellency János Csák. [*Applause.*]

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S4F-00511)

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

Johann Lamont: We all continue to be shocked by the revelations that are coming from the Leveson inquiry about phone hacking, pay-offs and the inappropriate relationship between journalists, police and politicians. It would be naive to dismiss those as London practices that stop at the border. What steps are being taken to learn from the Leveson inquiry? Did the First Minister discuss the matter when he last spoke with the chief executive officer of News Corporation, Rupert Murdoch?

The First Minister: A statement was released yesterday on the meeting that I had with the chairman of News Corporation, Rupert Murdoch. In terms of meetings with Rupert Murdoch, I think that an open statement, which says what was discussed, is probably a pleasant change from past practice in the Labour Party.

On the serious point and on the Scottish input into Leveson, Johann Lamont should know that the chief constable of Strathclyde Police will appear at the Leveson inquiry later this month, to talk specifically about Scottish police force liaison. I strongly support the police action that has been taken, just as I support the Leveson inquiry itself.

Johann Lamont said that we must assume that there are Scottish aspects to this, but it is important to remember that, although a range of newspapers and newspaper groups was involved in the widespread malpractice in the press that the Information Commissioner reported at the end of 2006—I will gladly place the information in the Scottish Parliament information centre—there were very few Scottish examples or, indeed, English regional examples.

We must be vigilant, and it is right and proper that Strathclyde Police is pursuing the matter and appearing at the Leveson inquiry, but it is also fair to say that the evidence that we have so far is such that that co-operation is the way that we should go at the moment. We stand ready and willing to act, because the criminal law must be upheld, north and south of the border.

Johann Lamont: Fine words must be tested against the action that we take. We know that the

police are not the only people who leak stories to Rupert Murdoch. The first edition of the Scottish *Sun on Sunday* revealed the date of the referendum—Saturday 18 October 2014—citing a Government source. For the sake of a front-page splash, the date was leaked before the consultation was completed, before the Parliament was told and before the people of Scotland had their say. Has the First Minister, who of course wrote a column in the paper's first edition, thought about who might possibly have been the source of such a mutually serving leak? What steps has he taken to determine the source of the leak?

The First Minister: We would never, ever encounter a situation in which a Labour politician had a column in *The Sun* newspaper.

On the serious point, I direct Johann Lamont to my remarks on the radio on Sunday morning. I will quote them exactly. I said:

"It is a possible date, of course, because we said it'd be in the autumn of 2014, but we also said we're considering a Saturday, as opposed to a Thursday, to increase turnout. But we're only a month into a three-month consultation. I think the last check I've made we've got 2,700 responses already, so we're heading towards perhaps upwards of 10,000 responses to the consultation. Once all these are in and analysed, then we'll announce what the date will be, not until after the consultation."

That is what I said last Sunday and that still pertains today.

Johann Lamont: I am sure that, in the First Minister's world, that sounds believable, but it is testing credulity to the point of destruction. Just a few weeks ago, I read out the First Minister's cringeworthy letter to Fred Goodwin, backing the deal that broke the bank. This week, we have been reminded how far the First Minister was prepared to go to accommodate Donald Trump. That did not end well, although apparently, First Minister, he still likes you. I will not embarrass the First Minister by reading out his musings to Rupert Murdoch—or Sir Rupert, as the First Minister likes to address him—but it seems that the First Minister has finally learned that theatre tickets and golf DVDs will not get a reply but a good exclusive will. Despite what the First Minister says, the editor of *The Sun* says that the date is 18 October 2014. He is so sure that he told Twitter:

"See what odds you can get on 18/10/14. We're right."

Is the First Minister saying that the editor of *The Sun* is wrong?

The First Minister: The First Minister is saying that Johann Lamont is wrong. The position is as I read out a few seconds ago. I do not know that citing Donald Trump is Johann Lamont's strongest suit at present because, as I understand it, Donald Trump's ire seems to have been roused because he believes that he was given an assurance by my predecessor, Lord McConnell—although he was

not a lord at that stage—that he would block planning permission for the test wind farm off Aberdeen. I have no way of knowing whether such an assurance was given but, if it was, it should not have been, because First Ministers cannot determine wind farm applications in Scotland.

There is a serious issue about renewable investment in Scotland. The front page of today's *Press and Journal* cites the thousands of jobs that are being created in the drive towards renewables. I hope that, as we progress that argument against whoever might criticise it, we will have the support of Johann Lamont and her colleagues, even if we cannot count on the support of Lord McConnell.

I have tried to be extremely restrained so far on relationships with newspapers, but I must now read out a quote about the attendance at News International's summer party. It states:

"At News International's summer party in London on Thursday night, guests including David and Samantha Cameron drank Moët & Chandon champagne and ate oysters. Labour leader Ed Miliband and shadow chancellor Ed Balls sheltered from the inclement weather in a giant canopy at the Orangery in Kensington".

Given the enthusiasm among the Labour Party leadership for drinking the champagne and eating the oysters—incidentally, all you get in Bute house is a cup of tea and a Tunnock's caramel wafer—some people might think that there is more than a trace of double standards emanating from the people's party.

Johann Lamont: The First Minister's restraint is admirable but, in the middle of all that, I do not think that we got an answer. Simply asserting that I am wrong does not dispute the fact that the editor of *The Sun* says that he is right. The First Minister is trying to make people believe that the exclusive in *The Sun* had nothing to do with him. His defence is, "It wasnae me and it wasnae just me." That will not do.

It is said that we can tell a lot about a man by the company that he keeps. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Order.

Johann Lamont: What does it say about the First Minister's judgment if he is prepared to compromise the referendum for Sir Rupert, to compromise our planning system for the Trump and to compromise Scotland's economic future for Fred the Shred? We all know that Sir Rupert ran with Sunday's story on the First Minister's nod. After five years of asking, will the First Minister simply confirm what date he intends to hold the referendum? Just name the date.

The First Minister: I will stick to my position of having the consultation with the Scottish people. I have an update for Johann Lamont; there are now more than 3,000 responses to the consultation.

We will consider the responses to the consultation, although we have not had one from the Labour Party yet. I understand that it has submitted a response to the Tory-Liberal coalition Government's consultation—no great surprise there. The Labour-Tory alliance has continued right through Westminster to this chamber and even to Stirling Council in the past week. We will have the consultation and then we will announce the date, which will be determined by this Parliament in the best interests of the Scottish people.

Johann Lamont's remark about the company that we choose is extraordinarily rich coming from a Labour Party that pursued a 15-year courtship of News International and only decided that dreadful things were going on after *The Sun* stopped supporting the Labour Party in politics. That is hardly a position of high principle.

The serious issue for us all is to back the police inquiry and the Leveson inquiry. It is remiss of a party that, according to the previous Prime Minister, knew about these activities in 2007—that is what he said in his House of Commons speech last year—yet still consumed the champagne and the oysters, to now attack a meeting to determine jobs and the economic footprint of Scotland, and at which there was no champagne and no oysters. We have a police inquiry and the Leveson inquiry and, quite rightly, News International has said that it will leave such practices behind. The Labour Party that was prepared to support and court newspapers when it knew about the malpractice is in no position to criticise anyone in this chamber or across the body politic.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S4F-00490)

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

Ruth Davidson: As the debate on Scotland's constitutional future grinds slowly on we, as parliamentarians and as a Government, have a duty not only to examine the shape of Scotland's future but to address the serious problems that are facing our country right now. The First Minister and I disagree on many things, but there is one serious area of policy in which something is universally accepted in the Parliament—that drugs destroy lives and damage communities. The Scottish Conservatives are proud of their part in creating a new drugs strategy for Scotland in 2008, and I recognise the personal commitment of my predecessor, Annabel Goldie, on the issue. What evidence is there that the programmes that

the Government has directed in rehabilitation or recovery are achieving results on the ground?

The First Minister: I begin my answer by acknowledging that it would be foolish for any politician to claim success in the battle against drug abuse. In the past year, illicit drug use among the general population of 16 to 59-year-olds has been falling. That is quite clear from the statistics. In 2006, it was at 12.6 per cent, in 2008-09, it was at 10.3 per cent, and in 2009-10 it was at 9.8 per cent. Encouraging information about other aspects of drug abuse is also being reported.

Nonetheless, although drug misuse among young people in Scotland is falling according to the statistics, it is still an enormous problem that requires the joint effort of all members of Parliament across the parties. I have no doubt about that. That is why I welcomed the input of Ruth Davidson's predecessor on the issue and why I welcome the input of members from across the parties who contribute, along with the Government, to doing what we can as politicians to attack this great difficulty.

Ruth Davidson: I welcome that response and the encouraging signs that we are seeing, but I am sure that the First Minister will agree that the picture that he paints is in no way complete. The national health service figures that were released this week show that the number of babies who are born to drug-abusing mothers has almost doubled in the past four years. As a nation, Scotland spends £28 million a year on methadone treatment, and in prison, which is a closed society in which we would expect to see a degree of control, the number of prisoners who are taking methadone every day has reached a record high, with no attempt being made to reduce intake in the vast majority of cases. In the previous session, the Parliament agreed that a focus on rehabilitation and recovery was the appropriate drugs strategy to pursue. That was the job of Parliament, but to implement the strategy is the job of Government. When will we start to see much more wide-ranging results?

The First Minister: We achieved consensus on "The Road to Recovery: A New Approach to Tackling Scotland's Drug Problem", and I hope that, while being aware of the difficulties, problems and challenges that we still have to overcome, as part of that consensus we do not start to undermine the success that there has been. The road to recovery strategy put methadone in the broader context of care, treatment and recovery for the first time, and the statistics back that up. I have been looking at the most recent treatment figures and can say that the cost of methadone has remained broadly stable since 2006-07. The increase in cost in 2010-11, to which Ruth Davidson alluded, is due to the fact that, for the

first time, the Government can report accurately on the supervision fees that are paid to pharmacists. This is the first time that that has been possible.

An issue that came up in the cross-party discussions about the road to recovery was the need for a better understanding of the statistics. Given that we introduced the ability to get a handle on what is happening, it is not helpful to point to something that is clearly the result of the action that we took and somehow describe it as a failure of the road to recovery. In my view, it is one of the successes of the road to recovery, because one of the things that have to be done when tackling any problem is to have an honest assessment of its scale. For the first time, we have the statistics that give us that honest assessment, and that should be welcomed across the chamber.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): In the light of the findings of Oil & Gas UK's "2012 Activity Survey", does the First Minister intend to have discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the detrimental impact that the United Kingdom Government's oil taxation policy is having on the economies of Aberdeen and the rest of Scotland?

The First Minister: This is a hugely important issue. The oil and gas industry is indeed a major success story in Scotland. As the latest impact and activity survey makes clear, the sudden unannounced changes in the UK Government's taxation policy meant that what otherwise would have been an unheralded and unprecedented boom in activity in oil and gas was marred by a fall in exploration activity. Company after company has directly attributed that to the policies of the UK coalition Government.

Knowing that, and seeing the evidence, I hope that the points and policies that we, along with the industry, have been urging over the past year, regarding building in incentives for the exploration of marginal fields and the extraction of additional oil from discovered fields, will feature in the upcoming budget. Any reasonable person would determine that the UK Conservative-Liberal Government's oil and gas industry taxation policies have not been good for the industry and, far more important, that they have not been good for jobs in Scotland either.

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): In the light of Angela Constance's description of youth unemployment as "endemic", does the First Minister agree with Skills Development Scotland's decision to offer voluntary severance to about 150 members of staff, including 60 per cent of its key front-line workers in North Lanarkshire? Some 9.8 per cent of 16 to 24-year-olds in that area currently claim jobseekers allowance, a percentage that is well above the Scottish and UK averages.

The First Minister: I have often heard Labour members in the chamber criticising the policies and direction of Skills Development Scotland. The reality is that Skills Development Scotland is placing more people on training schemes and is having magnificent success with modern apprenticeships. It has successfully placed 25,000 people in modern apprenticeships this year, which is 60 per cent more than in the position that we inherited in 2007. We should judge Skills Development Scotland on the efficiency with which it delivers its services to the young people of Scotland. That is the key to judging its success.

Frankly, it ill behoves a party that voted against modern apprenticeships in Scotland last year and combined with the Conservative Party to do the same thing again this year to have any commentary on the modern apprenticeships position or on SDS's excellent work in delivering the magnificent total of 25,000 modern apprenticeships, which give young people in Scotland a job, training and hope.

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am sure that the First Minister is aware that Dunfermline Athletic's players have been paid only 60 per cent of their wages today because of a situation that relates to cash flow from Rangers. Is he prepared to make representations to administrators on behalf of Dunfermline and other clubs? What steps can the Scottish Government take to assist clubs in that situation?

The First Minister: The answer to the first question is yes. Many of us realised that the developing position at Rangers would have ramifications throughout Scottish football; Dunfermline Athletic is an early instance of that. I will be delighted to meet Dunfermline Athletic to offer any help that the Scottish Government can offer. Of course, matters that the club is directly concerned about will not necessarily be in the province of the Scottish Government's powers—I am sure that the member understands that fully. Nonetheless, we are delighted to meet organisations that get into difficulties, such as Dunfermline Athletic, to discuss any efforts that the Scottish Government can make to help them with their position. All the clubs in Scottish football are vital and valuable, and we should try to assist them all when we can.

Schmallenberg Virus

3. Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the First Minister what steps have been taken to deal with Schmallenberg virus if it spreads to Scotland. (S4F-00492)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I thank Alex Fergusson for raising a hugely important issue. I know that people in his constituency are

paying particular attention to it, as wider rural Scotland is.

It is important to emphasise that no cases of the virus have been reported in Scotland thus far. However, we remain vigilant. As soon as the Scottish Government became aware of the emerging disease, it alerted key stakeholders through a conference on 20 January and held a follow-up meeting on 27 January. The Scottish Agricultural College wrote to vets at the beginning of January to alert them to the disease's symptoms and to encourage the reporting of suspicious cases. As Alex Fergusson is well aware, the Moredun Research Institute has been ready to test samples since 27 January.

Alex Fergusson: I thank the First Minister for his response and for acknowledging the importance of early reporting of any symptoms of the virus.

Last November, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment agreed to establish a strategic management board to oversee veterinary surveillance, which was a main recommendation of the Kinnaird report. Another of the report's key recommendations was that the board should consider a phased reduction in the number of disease surveillance centres, of which we have eight across the country. Can the First Minister ensure that no steps are taken to reduce the number of disease surveillance centres without the widest possible consultation and an absolute guarantee that the service's speed and quality will not be adversely impacted by any changes, given the importance of early detection, diagnosis and reporting in combating Schmallenberg virus and other similar diseases?

The First Minister: Yes, I can. Alex Fergusson will appreciate that it is exactly to get that assurance that we are considering the review's recommendations. He can be absolutely certain that we will ensure that adequate surveillance is in place and is retained for future needs.

This is perhaps an opportunity to get a wider audience for saying that farmers and vets are being encouraged to exercise vigilance and to report suspect cases voluntarily. Testing is provided free of charge by the Moredun institute. That approach is working well. At this early stage of the lambing season, three suspect cases have been reported, but the tests have all proved negative.

Childcare Provision

4. Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to improve childcare provision. (S4F-00496)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Government has announced a significant investment in early learning and childcare, which includes £4.5 million towards early learning and childcare for looked-after two-year-olds and a further £4.5 million to promote community-based solutions to family support and childcare. That is drawn down from the wider £270 million early years change fund, which will accelerate and prioritise spend in the early years across the whole public sector.

Maureen Watt: I know from what the First Minister has said that he is fully aware of how important it is to the economy that parents can access good-quality childcare. It enables parents to go to work and it is hugely important in our efforts to ensure gender equality in the workforce.

Recognising that childcare in Scotland is partially controlled by funding mechanisms that are determined by Westminster, does the First Minister agree that one of the most damaging things that the United Kingdom Government could have done is to reduce the childcare element of the working tax credit from 80 per cent of costs to 70 per cent, which will cost the families that rely on it more than £500 a year? Does he agree that, if such a cut is the coalition's priority, it would be far better for everyone if responsibility for benefits policy was in the hands of this Parliament and Government?

The First Minister: That strikes me as a substantial and well-argued point. I was genuinely surprised by the muttering from the Labour benches. I presume that that is a Tory budget policy that Labour would not have supported if it had come to this Parliament. It has had a substantial impact on working families in Scotland.

I was interested in and concerned by the costs of childcare and day care that were reported on Monday. I had a look at the figures. It is certainly true that the costs for out-of-school clubs and childminders in Scotland are above the English average, but it should also be said that the cost of nursery provision both for children aged under two and for those aged two and over is below the English average, and significantly below it in many cases. We should be aware of that, but we should also be aware that there is a wide divergence in the cost and availability of childcare in various parts of Scotland. We should determine, unitedly, to address that.

I was particularly pleased to see the comments from Malcolm Chisholm MSP after the inspiring early years task force meeting, in which he expressed particular thanks to Harry Burns and others. I am pleased that politicians can unite across party lines on the issue, as we should.

Maureen Watt makes an important point. Perhaps all of us should aspire—as the report this week said—to the situation in the Scandinavian countries, which have by far the highest standards of childcare provision and represent a benchmark. It is a reasonable point to make that Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland all control their tax and benefits policies, and all, of course, are small, independent European nations.

Children's Hearings System

5. Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the First Minister whether the timetable for reform of the children's hearings system has been changed. (S4F-00503)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): No, it has not changed. September is still the target, and indeed the project board agreed yesterday that that target remains achievable. I assure Drew Smith that we will always listen to people on the ground who share our interest in the continued good working of the system and the successful delivery of the reforms, which is the vital thing.

Drew Smith: The national convener of Children's Hearings Scotland was removed from her post at the beginning of December 2011. A week later, I asked the First Minister whether the timetable was on track, specifically for area support teams to be in place in January 2012. He said:

"I can give the assurance that the timetable has not slipped and will not slip".—[*Official Report*, 15 December 2011; c 4770.]

This weekend, it was reported that the board, which suspended the national convener, is drawing up contingency plans to retimetable the reform process.

If there is a problem at Children's Hearings Scotland, the Minister for Children and Young People should account to Parliament for it. However, if there is not a problem, when will the national convener be allowed to return to her post to get on with her job of supporting some of the most vulnerable children in our society and leading a hearings system the backbone of which consists of volunteers, who are left worrying about the mess that the children's minister has allowed to develop at Children's Hearings Scotland?

The First Minister: Drew Smith should understand that neither I nor the children's minister can comment on a live employment issue for which Children's Hearings Scotland is responsible. That is a fundamental element of what we can and cannot do in a parliamentary system.

To be helpful to the member, I will try to provide a bit more detail. There are 10 projects within the

overall delivery programme and nine of them are on track. The tenth project relates to the establishment of the area support teams, which must be agreed by local authorities and does indeed, in some aspects, require the national convener of Children's Hearings Scotland to be in post.

As I stressed to the member, I cannot discuss the suspension of the national convener because it is a live employment issue that lies within the province of Children's Hearings Scotland. The Scottish Government has seconded a senior official to work with Children's Hearings Scotland, but there are certain functions that, by statute, must be performed by the national convener, hence the reassurance that I tried to give the member, in my first answer, that we will listen to the people on the ground. I further reassure him that the children's minister will keep the chamber fully informed of the progress to delivery of the reforms.

Given the excellence of the participation in the children's hearings system over the years, all members will be pleased to know that the last recruitment campaign for children's panel members, in January and February, yielded the highest-ever number of responses. There were more than 10,000 applicants, which represents a 30 per cent increase on previous campaigns. All of us in the chamber should welcome that as a signal of the enthusiasm that exists for the children's hearings system.

Lockerbie Bombing (Inquiry)

6. Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether, in light of comments in the recently published biography of Abdelbaset Ali Mohamed al-Megrahi, the Scottish Government considers that an inquiry into all aspects of the Lockerbie bombing is now urgent. (S4F-00502)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The only appropriate forum for the determination of guilt and innocence is the criminal court. As the Cabinet Secretary for Justice made clear yesterday, an appeal route remains open although, of course, the matter cannot be determined by the cabinet secretary. The cabinet secretary also explained the position regarding an inquiry staged by this Parliament.

Christine Grahame: Can the First Minister clarify who might have a locus to pursue any posthumous appeal on behalf of Abdelbaset al-Megrahi?

The First Minister: The primary locus would be thought to lie with the relatives of Mr al-Megrahi. However, as the cabinet secretary maintained

yesterday, it is a matter for the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission.

On the important issue of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the publication of the commission's report, one of my greatest frustrations was to hear Mr Ashton claim that the Scottish Government is somehow trying to delay or prevent the full publication of the statement of reasons to the court. Nothing could be further from the truth. For the past three years, we have enthusiastically pursued a way to get the full report into the public domain. Given that, as the cabinet secretary said yesterday, we have now had television documentaries and a book that seem to be based, in part, on a partial explanation of what is in the full statement of reasons, my own view is that the case for full publication is irresistible. The full contents of the SCCRC report should now be made available to the public, hence the cabinet secretary's renewed attempt with Kenneth Clarke to provide the protection from data protection provisions that would make that possible. I make one last observation. If the Parliament controlled its own data protection, we could do that very quickly indeed.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland)

(Lab): Mr Salmond and Mr MacAskill have told us often, since the event, that the release of Mr al-Megrahi on compassionate grounds was not dependent on the withdrawal of his appeal. Can the First Minister tell us today whether they ever made that clear to Mr al-Megrahi and, if so, when?

The First Minister: Lewis Macdonald totally failed to land a blow on the cabinet secretary yesterday, so I do not think that he is entitled to a rematch today. Kenny MacAskill made the position absolutely clear yesterday. If the member had thought up better questions yesterday, perhaps he would not be so frustrated today.

12:34

Meeting suspended.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Infrastructure and Capital Investment

Transport Infrastructure Investment (North Ayrshire)

1. Margaret McDougall (West Scotland)

(Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what investment in its transport infrastructure North Ayrshire will receive in the next five years. (S4O-00739)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil):

On 8 February, the Minister for Housing and Transport announced that work to progress the £28 million A737 Dalry bypass would get under way with an initial investment of £10 million. That funding will allow the scheme to progress through its preparatory stages and begin construction, subject to satisfactory completion of the statutory processes.

A road improvement scheme at the Den near Dalry is in preparation, and approximately £2.3 million has been allocated for the current structural maintenance programme in North Ayrshire in this spending review period.

In addition, a road safety route action plan on the A737 has been commissioned. The first phase is complete and works are currently being implemented on site.

Subject to the availability of funding and finalisation of the detailed design, preparations are also under way for an estimated £14 million improvement to Brodick pier to be completed by 2015.

Margaret McDougall: I thank the minister for that full answer. I have some concerns that some of the money for the Dalry bypass may have come from cancelling safety improvements to the Head Street and Barrmill Road junctions on the Beith bypass. Will the minister confirm that road safety has not been compromised to fund the project?

According to Transport Scotland, the project will cost £28 million. Will the minister provide information on when it will start, given that the £10 million is intended to allow it to progress to the construction stage?

Alex Neil: The £10 million also includes the initial construction phase. We will continue into the further spending round to ensure that the job is completed.

It is absolutely not the case that the project is being funded by reallocation of funds from road safety. Indeed, the figures show that there has been a reduction of something like 70 per cent in road safety problems throughout Scotland.

We are also making substantial progress on road safety in North Ayrshire, including—as I said in my initial reply—implementing the road safety route action plan on the A737. We are tackling road safety as well as building a bypass for Dalry.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): The cabinet secretary's announcement of additional investment in North Ayrshire is extremely welcome. Is he aware that Ms McDougall said on her website:

"This £10 million is of course a welcome investment, and it's also an achievement following my continued lobbying since joining the Scottish Parliament last year"?

Will the cabinet secretary confirm that Ms McDougall had no influence on the decision to build the Dalry bypass? Does he agree that she has a bit of a cheek to try to claim credit for the decision to construct the bypass when she voted against it in this chamber on 8 February, despite it being the policy of the ruling Labour administration in North Ayrshire, where she remains one of the party's 12 councillors?

Alex Neil: I am never one to meddle in the politics of a part of Scotland outwith my constituency. All that I can say is that we have taken the right decision and are proud of the fact that, after many years of waiting, it took a Scottish National Party Government to make the decision to build a Dalry bypass.

Homelessness (2012 Target)

2. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the latest statistical bulletin shows that the Scottish Government is meeting its 2012 homelessness target. (S4O-00740)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government and its partners in local government are committed to achieving the 2012 target. The latest statistical bulletin shows that we are making excellent progress towards the target, with 90 per cent of applicants assessed as homeless being accorded priority. That is a 3 per cent increase on figures for the same period in 2010.

Jackie Baillie: I thank the minister for that response and welcome the progress, but I am sure that he will acknowledge that nearly 50,000 people presented as homeless in the past 12 months, so the challenge continues.

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has said that welfare reform could lead to an

additional 3,000 homeless presentations in Scotland alone. What measures is the Scottish Government taking to prevent homelessness arising from the welfare reform changes?

Keith Brown: I do not deny for a second that some more work needs to be done, but it is worth taking a bit of time to recognise the effort that is being put into the issue by local government in particular. The figures are the lowest recorded homelessness figures for a decade. That is a tremendous achievement, not least because, as Jackie Baillie said, we are having to deal with the early consequences of welfare reform, particularly changes to housing benefit.

It is the case that COSLA and different ministers in the Scottish Government have made a series of representations to the United Kingdom Government on the issue. We have also provided additional funding so that the housing hubs, which have been the source of some success on homelessness targets, can undertake work to mitigate the effects of welfare reform.

Given welfare reform and where we are in the economic cycle, our progress towards the homelessness target underlines the strength of the achievement so far, albeit that there is more to be done.

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): Over the Christmas period I visited the Bethany Christian Trust winter shelter that operates in Aberdeen. The co-ordinators of the shelter were keen to comment that the number of people using the shelter had reduced significantly and they pinpointed the work being done by Aberdeen City Council, which has now implemented a prevention team on homelessness, as a key factor in that. Does the minister welcome the 56 per cent reduction in homelessness applications in Aberdeen for the period April to September compared with that of the previous year? Does he agree that that is testimony to the fine work of the prevention team and that other local authorities should consider implementing such a team?

Keith Brown: I am more than happy to do that. The 56 per cent reduction to which the member referred was a remarkable achievement by Aberdeen City Council and was the highest figure in Scotland in that regard, although great work was done in many other local authorities as well. The member is right to point to the work of the homelessness hubs, which were established by my predecessor as minister, Alex Neil, now the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment. They have really helped councils, but in particular Moray Council, which has a particular issue.

Having the target has been very important and we are all signed up to it, but the prevention work

has brought real dividends for the councils that have grasped it. I hope that that good work and best practice will be exemplified across the rest of the country during the course of this crucial year of 2012.

Ayr to Stranraer Railway Line

3. Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its priorities are for the development of the Ayr to Stranraer railway line. (S4O-00741)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): Stena's move to Cairnryan has provided the opportunity to refocus rail services to better meet local needs. The December 2011 timetable goes some way towards that, with some quicker direct rail services. The recently formed Stranraer waterfront task force will look at local priorities to further promote Stranraer and the surrounding area as a destination in its own right to help grow passenger numbers and help deliver social and economic benefits to the local area.

Adam Ingram: I was encouraged to hear from the minister that a working group has been established with the remit to bring forward implementation of a short-term action plan for the Ayr to Stranraer line. Can the minister comment on a parallel but unconnected initiative at this time to establish a stakeholder group or forum that will include elected members, community organisations and local business interests and will focus on rail regeneration in the south-west of Scotland? Clearly, we do not want duplication of effort, but can the minister envisage a complementary role for a strategic body such as that?

Keith Brown: I think that we would generally welcome the establishment of a strategic rail partnership such as the member described. The wider the engagement that we have with the railways, the better the services that will be provided. Indeed, the "Rail 2014" consultation explores options for third-party involvement in the operation and management of stations—I know from a meeting earlier with the member and one of his colleagues that he and the group are interested in that—and in the development of service provision.

In addition to the working group that I mentioned, which is chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment, a rail sub-group has been established by the Stranraer waterfront task force to explore issues around service provision and how to increase patronage. I am sure that the member will be interested to know that that group includes key stakeholders such as ScotRail, Network Rail, the south of Scotland transport partnership,

Dumfries and Galloway Council, South Ayrshire Council, Wigtownshire Chamber of Commerce, the Stranraer to Ayr line support association—SAYLSA—VisitScotland and Transport Scotland.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): The minister rightly mentioned local concerns about Stena's move to Cairnryan and he will appreciate that those local concerns have been somewhat exacerbated by the fact that Stena now buses its foot passengers to Girvan rather than to Stranraer to catch the train. I understand that Stena has approached the Government to say that it would be willing to consider busing foot passengers to Stranraer if the rail timetable were altered slightly to coincide with ferry sailings. What steps can the Government take to facilitate that? If there are steps that it can take, is it willing to take them?

Keith Brown: That is just one of the issues that is being explored by the cabinet secretary through the task force and the rail sub-group that I mentioned. I was in Stranraer quite recently to talk about that very issue and other issues to do with the future of the station. The issue will be taken up by the cabinet secretary, who will receive the rail sub-group's report.

Forth Replacement Crossing (Tendering Process)

4. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what the tendering process is for work related to the Forth replacement crossing project. (S4O-00742)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): We have ensured that the contractual arrangements for the Forth replacement crossing provide all possible opportunities for Scotland's firms and workforce to benefit from the huge public investment that is being made in this essential infrastructure project.

The main contractor must advertise all subcontract work that is to be tendered so that Scottish companies are fully aware of opportunities to bid. However, as it is not a public procurement process, that is entirely a commercial matter for the main contractor.

John Mason: Can the cabinet secretary confirm that he would oppose any move towards protectionism or the restriction of free trade, as proposed by Labour? Does he agree with Strathclyde partnership for transport that the best deal for its new escalators is offered by Czech company Otis? Does he agree that exporting companies such as Dewar's whisky and Scottish Leather Group in my constituency, which export much of their produce, would be hugely damaged if trade were restricted, especially in regard to valuable jobs in Scotland?

Alex Neil: The member makes some very valid points. The suggestion that we should suspend the Forth crossing contract is absolute economic madness, would result in many Scottish workers being made redundant and would cost the Scottish taxpayer an absolute fortune.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): In relation to the Forth replacement crossing, what is the total value of the contracts that have included community benefit clauses, which are in line with European Union rules and are common practice throughout the EU?

Alex Neil: The main contract is subject to substantial community benefit requirements, which include the provision of apprenticeships and training places and a range of other requirements. One of the restrictions that we face is in our ability to place community benefit contracts throughout the supply chain of a major contract. That is an issue that I intend to address in the sustainable procurement bill.

Rail Services (West of Scotland)

5. John Scott (Ayr) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what the tendering process—I beg your pardon.

To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to improve rail services in the west of Scotland. (S4O-00743)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): For a second, I was worried.

The Scottish Government is committed to improving rail services in Scotland, including the west of Scotland, and our record on delivering improvements is undeniable.

Those improvements include the substantial completion of the £169 million Paisley corridor improvements programme, the forthcoming £1 billion Edinburgh to Glasgow improvement programme and the west of Scotland strategic rail enhancement programme, which will offer better opportunities to enhance connectivity for the heaviest rail demand patterns in and around Glasgow. As I mentioned earlier, we have also established the Stranraer task force, which will explore local priorities for the future of Stranraer through improved connectivity.

John Scott: The minister will be aware of the extra capacity that now exists on the Ayr to Glasgow rail line following the completion of the work at the Shields junction. Given that the route utilisation strategy for Scotland envisages growth in passenger numbers of between 48 and 74 per cent on its interurban services in the next 15 years, and that the Ayr to Glasgow line already carries a similar number of passengers to the service between Glasgow and Edinburgh, will he

now support a 15-minute service between Ayr and Glasgow, including a more frequent service to Barassie in my constituency?

Keith Brown: Despite the extra capacity that the member mentions, there are a number of competing demands. He will be aware that through the “Rail 2014” consultation, which has just concluded, a number of representations have been made about capacity. I am happy to say that a definitive response will be given as part of our response to the “Rail 2014” consultation, and I will be happy to provide the member with more information on that, if he would like.

Fuel Poverty (Collective Bargaining Energy Schemes)

6. Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what it is doing to promote collective bargaining energy schemes as a means of tackling fuel poverty. (S4O-00744)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): Shopping around for the best deal on energy can bring significant savings for households. Many households need help in accessing the most appropriate tariff; the marketplace is confusing. I have brought forward discussions between the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and Scottish Government procurement officials, to find solutions. I am also asking the Scottish fuel poverty forum to provide fresh thinking in the area.

The most sustainable way to reduce bills is to ensure that a property is well insulated and has an efficient boiler. Yesterday I announced just under £2 million of further funding for the universal home insulation and boiler scrappage schemes, to help households in that regard.

Jenny Marra: I thank the cabinet secretary, but I understood him to be talking about tariffs and other measures, although I asked specifically about collective bargaining energy schemes. I am happy to give him more information about such schemes if he would like me to do so, because it is estimated that they reduce household fuel bills by 20 per cent, which I am sure he agrees would have a significant impact on households in fuel poverty and could lift some households out of fuel poverty.

Will the cabinet secretary engage with me on the proposals and consider recommending collective bargaining to local authorities and housing associations?

Alex Neil: I will be more than happy to engage with Ms Marra on the issue. We have had meetings with SFHA, Link Housing Association and our procurement officials, to discuss how to take matters forward. Housing associations that have registered Scottish charity status are eligible

to join the national electricity contract for Scottish public bodies and can receive significant savings. That is one option in relation to initiatives of the kind that Ms Marra is talking about.

In all such initiatives, the barrier is in persuading the end user—tenants, in particular—to switch supplier, because people are often reluctant to do that. However, I am happy to meet Ms Marra and to receive other ideas on how to take the matter forward.

Affordable Housing Programme (Targets)

7. Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West)

(SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it is meeting its affordable housing programme targets. (S4O-00745)

The Minister for Housing and Transport

(Keith Brown): We have been clear that we aim to deliver at least 30,000 affordable homes during the next five years, despite the tightest budget settlement since devolution. Funding for our 30,000 homes is sufficient and on track. We will be able to report on our progress in the first full year of this parliamentary session when the official statistics for 2011-12 are published, towards the end of May.

Dennis Robertson: The minister will be aware that on 24 February, at the Rural Housing Service conference, Grampian Housing Association and Huntly Development Trust entered into a unique and innovative partnership, which will result in affordable housing being built in the Huntly area and in investment in other projects. Will the minister take the opportunity to congratulate Grampian Housing Association and Huntly Development Trust on their innovative partnership and will he agree to visit the project with me in the near future?

Keith Brown: The Scottish Government welcomes Grampian Housing Association's ambitions for the development of community renewables projects and in particular the recent partnership agreement with the Huntly Development Trust. The member will be aware that around the country there are tremendous examples of work being done by housing associations, for example to provide homes that are adapted for people who have particular needs and in relation to energy efficiency, which is crucial. I will be delighted to join Mr Robertson on a visit to Huntly to find out how the partnership plans to invest in the area are going.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): Will the minister say how much of the affordable housing target will be met through the national housing trust? Is he aware that concern has been expressed in rural areas, such as Dumfries and Galloway, that the return on mid-market rent will

not be sufficient to enable the necessary loan commitments to be paid off? Has the issue been explored with housing associations?

Keith Brown: In two advanced national housing trust projects, which were initially met with scepticism of the kind that Elaine Murray described in relation to her area, the experience has completely transformed people's views. The approach will contribute to the delivery of affordable homes. Our target of 30,000 houses includes 5,000 council homes and at least 20,000 socially affordable homes, and I am confident that we will achieve the target. The national housing trust is an important part of that and we will continue to develop it. I know that there are qualms about the approach, but I think that we are overcoming them.

European Commission (Public Procurement Processes)

8. John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will provide an update on its discussions with the European Commission regarding public procurement processes. (S4O-00746)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil):

I have recently written to the European Commission on two issues relating to public procurement. Following my meeting with John Park in November last year, I wrote to the Commission to seek clarification on whether public bodies can make payment of a living wage a criterion in a public procurement process or a condition of a public contract in a way that is compatible with European Union law.

Last month, I wrote to the Commission to press for a change to EU public procurement rules to allow public bodies to take account of local economic impact in their contract award decisions and for a significant increase in the thresholds at which advertisement in the *Official Journal of the European Union* is required. Despite chasing up those bits of correspondence, I still await responses from the Commission.

John Park: If the cabinet secretary needs a hand chasing up those replies, he should just give me a shout and I will see what I can do. A recent article in the *Financial Times* about tendering for the crossrail project favouring the UK states:

"While the tender will not have an explicit 'made in Britain' clause, the document will require bidders to explain how their proposal will benefit the UK economy."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): We need a question, Mr Park.

John Park: Given the comments that the cabinet secretary made last week about his representations to UK ministers on the issue, will

he update us on the position between the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments on procurement?

Alex Neil: The UK Government has not supported us in the EU procurement policy review on either of those propositions—on the living wage or on local economic impact being a criterion for deciding how to award contracts. We will continue to press our colleagues in the UK Government, because I believe that those measures would be beneficial to every country in the United Kingdom and the European Union. We will continue to press the UK Government on that, but Labour members have more influence over the Tories than we do, so perhaps they could help us on that.

Culture and External Affairs

Europe (Emerging Democracies)

1. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will consider establishing closer working relationships with the emerging democracies in Europe in order to share best practice. (S4O-00749)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): As I am sure that the member will agree, Scotland has a great deal to learn from its European partners and a great deal to offer, including to European Union candidate and potential candidate countries. We have always been clear that we want to play our role in shaping Europe's future, to build closer relations with individual European partners and to develop closer economic, educational and cultural links. We continue to explore new and innovative ways of doing that while building on our past successes.

Willie Coffey: The cabinet secretary will be aware that we recently had visits to our Parliament from the republics of Montenegro, Macedonia and Kosovo. The common message from them is that they see Scotland as a good example of a country that has reliable and effective scrutiny mechanisms to hold our Government to account, which is something that they clearly wish to develop further. Will the Scottish Government consider regularising our association with those countries, using technology and other means, to allow the dialogue and sharing of good practice to continue?

Fiona Hyslop: I am interested to hear of the Parliament's activity. Much of the question is about the Parliament's activity, so the Presiding Officer might want to consider some of those points.

The important contribution that we make is valued and recognised elsewhere. We are a constructive player in global affairs. We contribute

expertise on a number of areas, including climate change, inequalities and renewables, and we are always ready to assist possible states, states that are building into democratic free states and those that aspire to different positions. However, some of the points about scrutiny might be for the Parliament. Clearly, on independence, the Government would be able to play an even greater role.

BBC Scotland (Service Reductions and Job Losses)

2. Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what representations it has made to BBC Scotland regarding the proposed service reductions and job losses at Radio Scotland and what the outcome has been. (S4O-00750)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government has made numerous representations to BBC Scotland and to the BBC trust on handling in Scotland the cuts that have been forced on the BBC by the coalition Government's imposed licence fee settlement. Most recently, the First Minister and I met the trust's chairman, Lord Patten, for a positive meeting last month, at which we all agreed on the need to ensure that the BBC is properly equipped and staffed to properly cover Scottish news and current affairs at an absolutely pivotal time in the country's history. We now need that common ground and agreement to be reflected in practice. I hope that we will have all-party support for that in the debate later today.

Sandra White: As the minister said, we will debate this subject tonight in my members' business debate and the information that I have just received will be useful in shaping that debate.

Does the cabinet secretary share my concern that, if the cuts continue, the quality of programming will suffer?

Fiona Hyslop: That is a critical issue and we will have a chance to debate it later.

People have expressed concerns about radio and the Education and Culture Committee has taken evidence on that. It is a real concern because, if the democratic process is to be successful, it is important to have media scrutiny and quality journalism. That is precisely why members from all parties have raised their concerns and Sandra White has raised the issue at First Minister's question time. I look forward to this evening's debate, which can be a message from all members of this Parliament to the BBC.

Contemporary Arts Initiatives (Aberdeen)

3. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what dialogue it has

had with Aberdeen City Council on the potential for funding new contemporary arts initiatives in the city. (S4O-00751)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): Creative Scotland, Scotland's national agency for the promotion of the arts, has established a formal place partnership with Aberdeen City Council. Place partnerships are a key tool that Creative Scotland uses to develop its relationships with local government and to share good practice and celebrate different strengths across Scotland. Creative Scotland has invested £250,000 in Aberdeen City Council as part of its work to develop a set of strategic actions to develop cultural provision in the city that I expect will include new contemporary arts initiatives.

Richard Baker: The business case for the Union Terrace gardens project says that Creative Scotland has been involved in the plans for a contemporary arts space in that proposal. Has Creative Scotland committed any funds to the development, as it did to the previous proposal for a contemporary arts centre in the gardens from Peacock Visual Arts?

Fiona Hyslop: Creative Scotland is represented on the Aberdeen city gardens project group, and in informing and influencing the strategic content of the proposed granite web. Creative Scotland wants to make sure that a contribution is made to the contemporary arts scene in Aberdeen in particular. As an arm's-length body, Creative Scotland seeks to support projects that it considers to have artistic merit. If the member wants me to, I can find out from Creative Scotland what financial arrangements have been made, but I cannot give him an answer to that just now.

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): The referendum on the city garden project is taking place in Aberdeen. I have cast my vote for the project but we will see what the people of Aberdeen decide at the end of the day. As well as the creative arts centre in the city garden project, funding for the art gallery is included in the tax incremental financing business case. Following the outcome of the referendum, will the minister meet me and other interested colleagues to discuss how we move forward, depending on the outcome of the referendum?

Fiona Hyslop: It would be wise to await the outcome of the referendum, which, I believe, closes today. I am sure that members will bring representations to me on the creative future of Aberdeen.

I am pleased that Peacock Visual Arts is continuing to receive £262,000 a year from Creative Scotland in support of its activity.

It might be wise to wait for the referendum result. I am more than happy to meet members at any time although, as I explained to Richard Baker, Creative Scotland is taking the lead in its relationship with Aberdeen City Council and is taking forward what I hope will be a vibrant future for Aberdeen, regardless of the referendum result.

V&A at Dundee

4. Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what impact the V&A at Dundee will have on the community of Angus. (S4O-00752)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The 2010 V&A at Dundee business case estimated that the V&A at Dundee could attract 500,000 visitors initially, and 300,000 a year thereafter, with a total net employment impact by 2019-20 of 354 jobs to Dundee city region, 336 to Dundee and 30 to Scotland.

Work is being done to maximise the impact of the V&A at Dundee on the surrounding region. A meeting between neighbouring local authorities, including Angus Council, and VisitScotland on 10 January 2012 sought to identify areas for collaboration, tourism, promotion of the region, and cultural opportunities. That was followed up by a VisitScotland and V&A at Dundee industry event this week which aimed to bring the tourism and creative sectors more closely together in the year of Creative Scotland, and to allow businesses to network and to discuss opportunities, collaboration, issues and priorities for their individual businesses and for Angus and Dundee as a destination.

Nigel Don: I thank the cabinet secretary for her comprehensive answer, which has given me everything that I wanted to hear at this stage—I just hope that it all works out. Does she also feel that there are cultural opportunities from which our universities and schools can benefit? Are there plans to ensure that the V&A is open to everyone, far and wide, and that proper communication will follow?

Fiona Hyslop: The Universities of Dundee and Abertay are founding partners in the project, so there will be university involvement on a whole number of levels, including economic and cultural involvement. There will also be an interactive web resource and a learning resource space to help educational links with schools, not just in Dundee and Angus, but across Scotland.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary's long-standing and continuing commitment to the V&A at Dundee. The cultural and economic benefits of the V&A to not just Dundee, but Scotland as a whole, are

clear. Can she talk about some of the benefits of the construction and development phase of the V&A at Dundee, particularly given the 36 per cent cut that Scotland has received from Westminster?

Fiona Hyslop: The investment from the Scottish Government in particular, and from the other partners, means that the project will be a substantial boost to the construction industry. As a magnet for activity, the V&A has drawn in and attracted activity to other businesses in Dundee, and the project itself will create construction jobs. It is important at difficult times to do big things, and that is exactly what we are doing at the V&A.

Antarctic (Scotland's Role)

5. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to raise the Antarctic, and Scotland's role there, with the United Kingdom Government as part of any future discussions on devolution or an independence settlement. (S4O-00753)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scotland Bill proposes to remove this Parliament's responsibility for Antarctica. The Scottish Government believes that the proposal is unnecessary and disproportionate. However, recognising that our responsibility has never been exercised, we have not opposed that part of the bill.

Kenneth Gibson: I thank the cabinet secretary for her response. However, does she agree that we should not just hand the responsibility back, and that any agreement on Antarctica should be part of discussions to help return the 15,000 square kilometres of Scottish waters that were agreed in the Continental Shelf (Jurisdiction) Order 1968, but which were transferred unilaterally from Scottish to UK jurisdiction under the Scottish Adjacent Waters Boundaries Order 1999 just weeks before the Scottish Parliament came into being? The 1999 order was subsequently endorsed by unionist MSPs acting in London's interest, thus denying an independent Scotland the rights to oil, gas and minerals below the sea bed of the waters concerned?

Fiona Hyslop: Mr Gibson has set out an imaginative approach to negotiations in this area. He also draws attention to the sell-out of the 1999 order for Scotland. However, the proposed linkage between Antarctica and the boundaries of Scottish waters is not one that we have made.

Colin Keir (Edinburgh Western) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary acknowledge the University of Edinburgh's pioneering research, which recently led to the discovery of fjords in Antarctica? The discovery not only sheds light on ice formations and the impact on sea levels, but demonstrates

that Scotland continues to be at the forefront of world-leading science projects.

Fiona Hyslop: That is one of the reasons why there was an issue with Antarctica. In recent years we have co-operated with the UK precisely because of some of the University of Edinburgh's work. As an Edinburgh MSP, Colin Keir is absolutely right to draw attention to the really important work on climate change that the school of geosciences at the University of Edinburgh is carrying out. It is also working with other universities and other international operations. That is an example of excellence in our universities and of our will to collaborate and co-operate wherever we can.

Children (Cultural Visits)

6. Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what it is doing to encourage parents to take their children to visit art galleries, theatres and museums. (S4O-00754)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government is committed to widening access to culture and increasing cultural participation. We encourage all the national cultural bodies, companies and national collections to contribute. I will give a couple of examples.

National Galleries of Scotland provides free, regular and special events for families with children. In the recent half-term week about 1,000 people took part in such activities, with more than 850 visiting the reopened Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

As part of its outreach work with families, the National Theatre of Scotland is working with Queens Cross Housing Association in Glasgow to encourage families to attend its open doors event in April and to take a behind-the-scenes look at theatre.

Museums Galleries Scotland is working with local museums to ensure that the 2012 festival of museums offers stimulating activities for all ages this May.

Family-friendly activities are planned at the Stirling Smith art gallery and museum, the Kinneil museum in Falkirk and the Andrew Carnegie birthplace museum in Dunfermline.

Annabel Goldie: I had no desire to wear the cabinet secretary out; I thank her for her response. She might be aware of an English survey of 2,000 parents of five to 12-year-olds, which reported last month that 40 per cent of those children had never been to an art gallery and 17 per cent had never been to a museum and that a quarter of the parents had never taken their offspring to the theatre. Is the situation the same in Scotland?

Fiona Hyslop: We have had research carried out, which was published last Christmas. I am happy to share that research with the member and to send it to her. What was interesting in that longitudinal survey was the fact that, regardless of parental income and activity, as long as youngsters had participated in cultural activities—not just made visits—they were more likely to participate as adults. The information is complex, but I am more than happy to send it to the member.

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Is the cabinet secretary aware of the annual arts festival that is organised by the youth arts and literary guild? In Airdrie this week, there has been a display of artwork produced by pupils in high schools throughout North Lanarkshire. Does she agree that such community-run festivals are a fantastic way of introducing young people to the concept of art galleries?

Fiona Hyslop: I agree with the member and I hope that the festival goes well. She is right: we must find different and inspiring approaches, and community-led festivals are sometimes the first step to introducing youngsters to cultural experiences. I hope that the weekend's activities go well.

Historic Buildings (Disposal)

7. Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive who has the right to dispose of historic buildings that have been gifted to communities. (S4O-00755)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): As I am sure Elaine Murray appreciates, the answer depends on the particular circumstances, such as who owns a property and the conditions on which it was gifted to the community concerned.

Elaine Murray: I will clarify the question a little more. I am thinking of an area where there might be a conflict between members of a community, such as community council members, and a local authority about a building that is held in the common good. In the cabinet secretary's view, who has the right to determine whether such a building should be disposed of or used in an alternative manner?

Fiona Hyslop: Under the common good, it can be the use of a property rather than necessarily its ownership that has been gifted. That can cause issues. A council might have been gifted ownership as well as use. If we are talking about only the use of a property as being common good, that is perhaps a different matter.

The subject is complex. Perhaps looking at the different parts of local government legislation that determine the position might help the member. I

can send her some of the relevant documentation, if that helps her to access it. We could be here not just all day but all week discussing the common good and the issues that relate to it.

Culture and Arts (Youth Employment)

8. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs is doing to support employment opportunities for young people in the culture and arts sector. (S4O-00756)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The culture sector has an extensive reach to Scotland's young people through creative education programmes and because it is an exciting area in which to work and learn new and valuable skills. Apprenticeship projects are in place in heritage and culture organisations. Historic Scotland will employ an additional 30 apprentices in traditional skills over the next three years—10 are to be employed in this financial year—and there are further apprenticeship opportunities in the National Records of Scotland and Creative Scotland.

The five national performing companies provide vocational training in the performing arts, internships and roadshows on employment opportunities and career planning. The Museums Galleries Scotland internship programmes have attracted huge numbers of applicants. Recently, more than 3,000 young people applied for the 20 paid internship programme places that were on offer in local museums across Scotland.

Kezia Dugdale: I know that the cabinet secretary appreciates young people's huge appetite for jobs in the sector. Does she therefore share my concern that young people might have fewer opportunities to realise their dreams and hopes of jobs in such areas because of cuts that her Government has made to college budgets?

Fiona Hyslop: There is an appetite to ensure that we provide opportunities in all the cultural sectors. The Government is investing more in the college sector than the previous Administration did. The creative industries have been an important area. Through difficult times, employment opportunities for young people who come through the college sector into the creative industries have been quite successful relative to other areas.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Tavish Scott did not lodge question 9. I apologise to Neil Findlay, who lodged question 10, because we must move on to the next item of business.

Living Wage

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on the living wage in Scotland. I call on Joe FitzPatrick to open the debate on behalf of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee.

14:55

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP):

I start by thanking the committee clerks for their diligent work during the inquiry, which resulted in the important report—"Report on the Living Wage in Scotland"—that we are discussing today. I also recognise the input of Kezia Dugdale and Mark Griffin, who are no longer members of the committee but were involved in the early stages of the inquiry.

Our short-term inquiry into the living wage was held in December and January and we published our report on 3 February. We worked hard as a committee to achieve consensus, and I hope that our report helps to move the agenda forward in an informed way.

Usually, we would wait until we had received the Government's response before we brought a debate on a committee report to the chamber, but we hope that today's debate will feed into the Government's response, as part of the Presiding Officer's programme for change. Although we look forward to hearing what the minister has to say, we understand that that will not be the Government's final response.

The aim of our inquiry was to consider the benefits of a living wage for individuals, families and communities. We looked at the introduction of the living wage by local authorities and explored the extent to which procurement can include criteria that are linked to payment of the living wage.

The living wage is intended to address in-work poverty by providing an income level that enables households to adequately provide for themselves. It is set at £7.20 per hour, which is £1.12 above the United Kingdom's national minimum wage of £6.08 per hour for adults. The figure of £7.20 per hour, which equates to about £14,000 a year, is not an arbitrary figure that was plucked out of thin air. The committee received evidence from Donald Hirsch of the centre for research in social policy at Loughborough University, who explained that the living wage is based on a calculation of the minimum income standard for the United Kingdom.

The minimum income standard is an estimate of the minimum income that households need in order to have a minimum acceptable standard of

living as defined by members of the public. It is based on regular research on what the public think, and it is supported by expert knowledge. It is important to note that the standard covers needs and not wants. It is largely made up of necessities such as food and shelter, and not luxuries. However, it is also about people having what they need in order to have the opportunities and choices that are necessary to participate in society. Good examples are swimming lessons and birthday presents for children. Technically, they are not essential, but they are included in the calculation as the public consider them necessary for the normal upbringing of a child, and it could be argued that their absence is detrimental to a child's development.

Some 550,000 adult employees in Scotland are paid less than the living wage. That is a lot of people who would benefit if the living wage was adopted. Although our inquiry focused on local government, it revealed that a higher percentage of employees in the private sector earn less than £7.20 per hour—the figure is 28.1 per cent—compared with employees in the public sector, where the figure is 3.9 per cent. We also identified a disparity between men and women, with 22.6 per cent of women earning less than £7.20 per hour compared with 14.6 per cent of men.

The committee heard that those 550,000 Scots largely work in sales and customer service positions or as labourers, cleaners or catering assistants. The Scottish Government has been at the forefront of implementing the living wage, and all Government staff, agency staff and national health service staff already receive it. About 15,000 private sector workers have already benefited from the adoption of the living wage, but that leaves about 18,000 directly employed staff in local government who earn less than £7.20 per hour.

We heard that a number of local authorities are actively considering joining, or have recently made the decision to join, the seven councils that are already paying a living wage. I was pleased to learn that Dundee's Scottish National Party administration has asked officers to examine its implementation in Dundee City Council.

As part of our inquiry, the committee also took evidence from the private sector, which, as I have said, employs the majority of those who are paid less than the living wage. It is fair to say that the witnesses were largely apprehensive about the living wage and raised concerns over its impact on jobs and over businesses becoming less competitive. The Confederation of British Industry Scotland went considerably further, claiming that the living wage would have a longer-term impact on local labour markets and on the affordability of service provision, and that it would have a

disproportionately negative effect on young people. The committee was keen to hear the evidence base for that, but CBI Scotland did not accept the invitation to appear before the committee to answer questions on its written submission.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):

Does the member agree that there was also a lot of scaremongering before the national minimum wage was introduced, which has been shown to be largely false?

Joe FitzPatrick: That is exactly the point that I was going to make. At the time of the introduction of the minimum wage, the CBI stated that

“even a low minimum wage would reduce job opportunities and create major problems for wage structures in a wide range of companies”.

It went on to warn of price rises, business closures and unemployment as workers were “priced out of jobs” when we were suggesting a minimum wage of £3 an hour. However, in 1999, six months after the minimum wage was introduced at £3.60, the CBI admitted to the Low Pay Commission that there was little evidence of an adverse impact on jobs or prices.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I am sure that the member is old enough to recall the CBI making similar comments when we stopped sending children up chimneys to sweep them.

Joe FitzPatrick: I cannot remember that far back. I defer to the member.

In fact, in the five years following the introduction of the minimum wage, the unemployment level in the UK fell from 6.3 per cent to 4.7 per cent. We all know that correlation is not causation, but the committee received no firm evidence that increasing wages has an adverse impact on jobs. One of the reasons for that is that greater disposable income for workers leads to increased growth, which is something that the committee looked at in considering the impact of the living wage on local economies. People at the lower end of the income scale tend to spend more of their disposable income than those at the higher end. In submissions that were received by the committee, it was generally argued that the benefits of the living wage would feed into local economies and benefit local businesses, as recipients would generally spend the extra income locally.

The committee received some positive comments on the living wage from the business sector. Perhaps tellingly, they came from London, where the living wage has been implemented successfully, with Greater London Authority staff receiving the living wage along with some 3,000 employees from the private sector, including employees at Unilever, JP Morgan and Barclays.

People might think that, of course, people who work for Barclays would be paid more than the living wage, as bankers get paid huge amounts of money. However, I am not talking just about the folk at the top of those companies; I am talking about cleaners and catering staff in London receiving a minimum wage that is set at a higher level than in the rest of the UK. That has come about as a direct result of evidence from London that the introduction of the living wage makes business sense. The committee heard evidence from Transport for London that the living wage has had a positive impact on recruitment, retention, absenteeism and staff morale.

After looking at the impacts on businesses and communities, we turned back to the impact on the most important group: the individuals on low wages. Evidence that we gathered showed that a living wage would increase low-paid workers' disposable income, with a corresponding effect on their standard of living and morale. Questions were raised over the effectiveness of the living wage because of the possible loss of other benefits, including passported benefits such as free school meals. However, we were unable to find any evidence to suggest that the majority of recipients would not experience a positive outcome from receiving the living wage.

In fact, if we look at the correlation with the minimum wage, the same potential is there, but there is always the opportunity for continual assessment of passported benefits and so on to ensure that people benefit from the minimum wage. I think that we could do the same to ensure that people benefit from the living wage.

Another important facet of our inquiry was procurement. The committee heard that guidance on whether local authorities can specify payment of the living wage as a condition of the award of contracts under the European Union procurement directive is insufficiently clear. As a result, no local authorities that implement the living wage have managed to extend it and to impose such conditions in contracts. They have preferred to enter into voluntary arrangements, which are only partially successful.

That is why the committee welcomes the fact that the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment has written to the European Commission seeking clarification of the issue. It would be good to hear from the minister whether there has been any progress on securing a response, although I think that I know what the answer might be.

The report concludes that the living wage is a potential driver of preventative spending, which is at the heart of the Scottish Government's public service reform. However, the committee accepts that it is not for the Scottish Government to

determine wages in the private and voluntary sectors.

As far as local government is concerned, the committee accepts that local authorities are accountable to their electorates and not to the Parliament or the Scottish Government, and it is therefore for individual councils to decide whether to introduce the living wage.

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):

A number of councils have established arm's-length organisations. Those organisations deliver council services but the staff are not directly employed by the council. Did the committee consider during its inquiry how those staff would be affected?

Joe FitzPatrick: We questioned local authorities that have introduced the living wage, the most notable of which is Glasgow, about that issue. We received confirmation from the arm's-length body that came to speak to us that it is possible for arm's-length bodies to implement the living wage and that some do so.

The committee accepts that councils face different economic circumstances. However, we received evidence from a number of councils that have introduced a living wage as part of an overall package of efficiencies that it has been possible, working with staff and trade unions, to deliver the living wage while making net savings overall.

It is clear that there is a moral case for the implementation of the living wage to give our lowest-paid workers an improved standard of living. As I said, I think that we can deal with the concerns about the loss of benefits. It is becoming increasingly clear that there is also a business case for the living wage and that private companies in London are already seeing the benefits of implementing it.

The majority of Boris Johnson quotes are used for comic effect but on this occasion the mayor of London hit the nail on the head when he said:

"Paying the London Living Wage is not only morally right ... but also it makes good business sense. What may appear to a company to be an unaffordable cost is more appropriately viewed as a sound investment decision reducing staff turnover and producing a more motivated and productive workforce."

What we have seen in London is the public sector leading the private sector, and the committee is hopeful that we will follow suit in Scotland.

I commend the report to the chamber.

15:08

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay): I am pleased to open the debate on behalf of the Government. The bad

news is that I will also close on behalf of the Government.

I am pleased to see that the report of the committee's inquiry into the living wage broadly supports the approach that the Government has been taking to implementation of the living wage in Scotland. Our approach is encapsulated by the Government's purpose: to focus Government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through increasing sustainable economic growth.

We believe that levels of poverty and income inequality in Scotland are unacceptable and that a fairer distribution of wealth is key to tackling poverty and inequality. Addressing low pay and in-work poverty is an important part of the campaign to tackle poverty, but our powers are limited in this area, because the national minimum wage and employment issues are reserved to Westminster.

The problems of in-work poverty have persisted over the past decade and, although work is still the best route out of poverty, we have to endeavour with the powers we have to ensure that work genuinely provides people with a route out of poverty.

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): Has the minister just given a commitment to a living wage for all employees in an independent Scotland?

Derek Mackay: I am sure that that could be part of our considerations for an independent Scotland. Access to this country's full resources would give us many choices about how to invest in it. Our immense natural and other resources mean that, yes, that commitment could be considered by any Parliament in an independent Scotland.

We are striving to ensure that the workforce in Scotland has the abilities and skills to get and retain good-quality, well-paid jobs. We are also doing all that we can with the powers available to us to ensure that Scotland is a place where companies can flourish and are able to choose to pay a living wage to their staff.

It will come as no surprise to anyone in the chamber to hear that I believe that we could better serve the people of Scotland in eradicating poverty and reducing income inequalities if responsibilities in relation to wage rates and the tax and benefit system lay with this Parliament.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): Further to Kezia Dugdale's point, the powers for the national minimum wage may rest with Westminster, but it would be in the gift of the Scottish Government to start a living wage fund similar to its council tax freeze fund for local government. It could actually make this happen, if it genuinely wanted it.

Derek Mackay: Such decision making is a matter for local government discretion. We do not have to create funds to achieve a policy objective, and I announced last week that a majority of Scotland's councils are implementing the living wage. That is about good partnership and discussions, rather than the creation of a ring-fenced fund, in achieving a policy objective. We are moving in the right direction.

There is an argument—based if not on fact, then certainly on perception—that some people who receive a pay rise, including part-time workers, may be adversely affected by the benefits system. We must take that into account in considering the living wage. I am not saying that the living wage should not be paid; I am saying that the benefits system should support people in work, rather than discriminate against them. Such powers should rest with this Parliament. We could have a range of powers and could do so much more if we had absolute control over the economic levers and the benefits system.

We fully support the principle of the living wage, and by implementing it in our own pay policy—by paying our own employees the living wage—we are leading the way and setting an example. We encourage all employers in the public, private and third sectors in Scotland to do likewise, but they must take those decisions.

I welcome the fact that a majority of local authorities are implementing the living wage. I welcome what Joe FitzPatrick has said about Dundee. The administration in Stirling proposed a living wage in its budget, but that budget motion did not succeed.

Councils are autonomous, independent bodies that decide their own terms and conditions of employment and set their own rates of pay. Therefore, the question whether to adopt the living wage is one for them, not the Scottish Government. I have, however, been very proactive on the subject—I accept the view that Parliament and the Government should be proactive on the living wage.

I was pleased that, in its report, the committee recognises the need for individual local authorities to consider their own circumstances when deciding whether to adopt the living wage.

Gavin Brown: The report states that seven local authorities have implemented the living wage. The minister has said that a majority have implemented it, so, for the sake of clarity, will he tell us which ones have done so since 3 February, when the report was published?

Derek Mackay: Six councils have agreed to implement the living wage for the financial year 2012-13: Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Moray, North Lanarkshire, Perth and Kinross, and Renfrewshire.

Two councils have indicated their intention to introduce the living wage: Aberdeen and South Ayrshire. Four councils, in addition to those that I have just mentioned, deliver the living wage, in a de facto sense: East Dunbartonshire, Shetland, Orkney, and the Western Isles. I hope that that satisfies the member.

Those authorities have signed up to the living wage and intend to deliver it. That puts us in a position in which the majority are delivering this policy commitment. To be clear, I want to work to ensure that all 32 councils deliver the living wage.

The Scottish Government will continue to encourage everyone in the public sector, including local authorities, to adopt the living wage. We have led by example.

Procurement is a key issue, which I am sure that members will raise and which is covered in the inquiry report. As part of its inquiry, the committee considered the issues that are associated with making payment of the living wage a criterion in the public procurement process. As was made clear in the evidence to the inquiry, European Union case law suggests that the extent to which public bodies can require contractors to pay their staff the living wage as part of the procurement process is limited. We have made inquiries on the matter to the European Commission, as it was suggested that we do, and we await a response. I can provide no further information on that yet. We require feedback from Europe before we can take the matter forward.

The issue will be considered in relation to the sustainable procurement bill, and it would not be unreasonable for members to continue to pursue the inclusion of the living wage in the bill.

I am conscious of time. I might cover more issues in my closing speech.

It remains the Scottish Government's view that the living wage should be rolled out. We have led by example and will include it in future work, so that we can achieve the aspiration that members have and will continue to express in relation to the living wage.

15:17

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I, too, welcome the debate. I read the committee's report with interest and would like to congratulate the committee, the clerks and all those who gave evidence to it on ensuring that we have a really good report before us that we can pick up and take forward.

These are tough economic times, but that cannot be a justification for people being expected to work for a wage that does not enable them to support their families and has to be subsidised by

the state to ensure that their children are not brought up in poverty. How can tough economic times be an excuse for our failure to act? Politics is about priorities and about doing what is right, and surely this is a proposal whose time has come.

In our manifesto last year, Scottish Labour supported the adoption of a living wage by public sector employers, and I give credit to our then leader, Iain Gray, for taking a lead on the issue and making it a key plank of our manifesto. I also pay tribute to the campaigning work that has been carried out by my colleague John Park, who has consulted on the introduction of a living wage bill. I also congratulate those councils that have already implemented the living wage and those that have given notice that they intend to do so.

I start from the premise that the Scottish Government is crucial in this debate. We believe that the Scottish Government has a crucial role to play in taking the lead, setting an example and making it easy for people to address the issue. In the public sector, there is clearly an appetite and an opportunity for change. A lead from the Scottish Government could make a real difference.

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I remind Ms Boyack that, when the Labour Party was in government in the UK, it had control over the national minimum wage but that, despite the campaign to introduce the living wage that was started in 2001, it never took the opportunity to raise the national minimum wage to a living wage, even though that would have covered every worker in Scotland and the UK.

Sarah Boyack: The Labour Government increased the national minimum wage repeatedly to ensure that it kept up. The fact that we are discussing the living wage now is testament to the campaigning that trade unions have done with us to ensure that the matter is firmly on our agenda. We have a chance to act.

As others have pointed out, the issue affects not only the staff in the public sector, whether they are employed by central Government or local government, but employees of companies that seek to carry out contracts for the public sector. I listened carefully to the minister's comments, and I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government is investigating the issue with the European Commission. However, the Scottish Government must take a lead. In evidence to the committee, the Greater London Authority made clear that, in its view, the EU's procurement legislation was not automatically an obstacle to action. Work must be done across the whole country, and the Scottish Government is best placed to do that.

Action on procurement would also address the concern that some have expressed that it should

not just be public sector staff who benefit from the living wage. I agree, but I believe that the transformative power of the Scottish Government should be brought to bear in that regard. A living wage unit is important. I welcome the minister's comments if he is saying that the living wage should be included in the proposed sustainable procurement bill; it would be good to have that confirmed on the record.

In that context, it is important that we consider the voluntary sector. There is huge pressure on the viability of many voluntary sector organisations, particularly those that are bidding for contracts for local authority work. However, it would not be right for local authorities to raise their own staff out of poverty pay while expecting those who carry out work for them to pay their staff less than the authorities would pay their own. That is particularly important for young women with children, who are often paid much less than the living wage.

The Save the Children briefing highlights the fact that 43 per cent of those earning less than £7 an hour are women in part-time employment, and two thirds of all low-paid workers are women. Where the living wage has been implemented, there has been a huge benefit for women. The Scottish Borders Council is not unusual in that 85 per cent of employees who benefited from the introduction of the living wage were women.

One of the most powerful arguments for the living wage is the need to tackle poverty pay and to lift people out of poverty. Given all the comments that have been made so far about the relationship with benefits, it is worth looking at the work by the living wage campaign and the Save the Children campaign, which shows that people with children are still better off and that we should not get sidetracked by the issue of benefits. We need to pursue it, but it should not stop us campaigning for the living wage.

The benefits that Joe FitzPatrick mentioned are wider than simply tackling poverty. There are benefits for employers in terms of recruitment, retention, absenteeism and staff morale, all of which were mentioned by the GLA. There is an opportunity for smart employers to negotiate with their staff to bring benefits to both sides.

South Lanarkshire Council makes the point that employees who earn at the living wage level spend money locally, which goes back into local businesses. That is surely a win-win situation for everyone. I commend the council not only on addressing the living wage but on boosting the wages of staff on modest salaries of £21,000 by £250. Around 76 per cent of those staff are women, which shows us that there is a real gender issue.

It is not only about the public sector; we should also encourage the private sector to introduce a living wage. There are companies that have taken the lead and benefited from the living wage. We need to ensure that we get a positive response from the Scottish Government today. I would like to hear more clarity on the support that the Government will give to implementing the living wage. We need clear leadership, a dedicated living wage unit in the Scottish Government and action on procurement to ensure that the living wage is rolled out across the labour market.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): You should close now, please.

Sarah Boyack: That is why we would support the implementation of the living wage. I hope that the Scottish Government will listen to us today, as we need that political will, a commitment to lead and a commitment to act. I hope that today's debate will help to secure the determination to ensure that Scottish employees get a living wage.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Margaret Mitchell. You have six minutes.

15:23

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): The committee took evidence from a variety of witnesses, whom I thank for their valuable contribution to the inquiry. I pay tribute to the committee clerks for their work in helping members to produce a balanced report.

The committee agreed that, all things being equal, the living wage is an admirable aspiration that we would all want to achieve. At present, the living wage is paid by the Scottish Government which, in directly attributable costs, spent just over £1.7 million on introducing it. The NHS and—as at the time of the report—seven local authorities in Scotland pay the living wage, and the minister confirmed today that more local authorities have introduced it since then.

In the region that I represent, South Lanarkshire Council spent £3.5 million in 2011-12 on introducing the living wage. From April 2012, a further £2 million was spent on increasing the rate of pay to £7.20. In total, that council will have spent a staggering £5.5 million on introducing the living wage. Ultimately, it is up to each council to decide how to prioritise spending decisions. Some councils have delivered the living wage as part of a broader programme of efficiencies in negotiation with unions, which has resulted in net savings that can then be spent on service provision. That is to be welcomed.

Kezia Dugdale: I was at the committee when the member argued that that money would be better spent on potholes. Does she regret her

comments on the living wage somehow representing gold-plated working conditions for staff?

Margaret Mitchell: I regret anything that takes away from service provision. The *raison d'être* for any local authority is service provision, and that must come first.

The harsh political reality is that, in these challenging economic times, taxpayers' money is being used to pay public sector workers an hourly rate that most small and medium-sized enterprises and third and voluntary sector organisations have no realistic prospect of affording. That results in an even greater pay premium for public sector employees.

An analysis of the evidence that was presented to the committee revealed that nearly 550,000 people in Scotland earn below the living wage. Some witnesses argued that the introduction of the living wage helps local authorities to retain staff by lowering staff turnover rates, that it reduces sickness absence and that it has helped to alleviate poverty. Others disagreed and stated that there was no evidence that staff retention or improvements in sickness absence were directly attributable to the payment of the living wage rather than to, for example, the current economic circumstances. Furthermore, it was argued that, rather than helping to alleviate in-work poverty for the lowest paid, the introduction of the living wage merely replaced benefits that were previously paid by the UK Treasury.

Business representatives expressed concern about the potential consequences of adopting the living wage. The Federation of Small Businesses said in its submission:

"the uplift from minimum to living wage costs, including employer NIC contributions, represents a 20% increase to the cost of paying any minimum wage employee."

Furthermore, it said:

"this increase would hit small businesses harder than larger businesses which would be able to offset increases in the wage bill by cross subsidy or savings elsewhere."

John Mason: Will the member give way?

Margaret Mitchell: I am sorry, but I have only six minutes, and I have a particular view to put over.

It is more worrying that, in its written submission, CBI Scotland stated that the impact of introducing the living wage

"would fall most heavily on young people, with international evidence showing that they face disproportionate exposure to the negative employment effects of a minimum wage."

It concluded:

"it is vital that young people are not priced out of jobs."

With more than 100,000 16 to 24-year-olds currently unemployed in Scotland, that is indeed a worrying consideration.

Concerns were also expressed about the introduction of living wage conditions in public sector procurement contracts. Various questions remain to be answered about the validity of attempting to include such conditions and the consequences of their application, not least within European Union law. Would they apply only to workers who are involved in a particular contract or would they apply to subcontractors as well? Would staff in Scotland alone be affected or would staff UK-wide be affected? We await clarification from the European Commission, which the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment is seeking.

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Margaret Mitchell: I have already explained that I have only six minutes. I am sorry that I cannot take an intervention; normally, I would do so.

In essence, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce said:

"we have no problem with any local authority, public sector organisation, voluntary organisation or business whose policy is to pay its staff the living wage ... However, a scheme or set of regulations that would force businesses to do that would be counterproductive, especially in today's economic circumstances."—[*Official Report, Local Government and Regeneration Committee*, 18 January 2012; c 511.]

On procurement and the third sector's role in providing services, the Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland highlighted the inequality and fundamental unfairness of councils paying the living wage to their workers, but setting an amount of money for external contracted services. That means that third and voluntary sector organisations that provide the service cannot afford to pay the living wage to their staff.

In the current economic climate, priority must be given to maximising employment opportunities. If the introduction of the living wage results in a corresponding reduction in local services and job losses, it could, understandably, lead to resentment that public sector workers' wages are higher than those of many in the private or third sector because taxpayers' money has been used to make that a priority over service delivery. The decision to pay the living wage as a priority is a political decision for which local authorities will be held accountable at the ballot box.

15:30

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I declare an interest. Prior to coming into the

Parliament in May 2007, I was the director of the Scottish Low Pay Unit. I also served on the Trades Union Congress national minimum wage enforcement group and was part of the initial Scottish living wage campaign.

I pay tribute to the East London Communities Organisation, which is now part of London Citizens and which, in 2001, started the campaign for the living wage.

I welcome the debate in the name of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee on the living wage in Scotland. In fact, any debate that highlights low pay and its connection with poverty should be of interest to all members and people beyond the Parliament. The consequences of poverty—especially its complexities—still blight many of our communities.

The committee's report clearly shows the context and scope of the various living wage campaigns, which are somewhat diverse in nature. They have clearly had an impact on the national minimum wage rate, which is set by the Low Pay Commission and is currently £6.08 for workers aged 21 and over. The Scottish living wage is currently calculated at £7.20 per hour.

As I have stated previously in the chamber, 29 organisations in London—including the mayor of London Boris Johnson, the Greater London Assembly and Barclays Bank—have fully embraced the implementation of a living wage. Darren Johnson, a Green Party member in the Greater London Assembly, made a freedom of information request, which was published in March 2009. He found that only four London boroughs out of 32 were incorporating the living wage into their procurement policies. However, with the Olympics approaching, things have moved on and many authorities in London are now adopting the living wage as a formula for calculating contracts.

Although the Scottish Government and other public sector employers, such as many local authorities, have endorsed the living wage, it is not enshrined in statute, unlike the national minimum wage.

The committee spent a considerable period of time in its inquiry on procurement issues. Those are critical to the implementation of the living wage because, if it were to be stipulated in procurement contracts, employers would be contractually obliged to pay their employees at that rate or face action for breach of contract.

That brings us to EU procurement law and, as the committee's report highlights, possible European restrictions on, and challenges to, stipulating that the living wage be incorporated into all public sector contracts. The relevant law—the public sector, or classic, directive 2004/18/EC—was implemented in Scotland by the Public

Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2006. The key principles behind the directive stipulate that EU member states or “contracting authorities” must award contracts on the basis of commercial, non-discriminatory and objective criteria.

I note that the committee’s report refers to the submission by Mr McGuire—a partner in Thompson Solicitors—that payment of the living wage could be included as a contract performance clause. The report further states that the Scottish Government has written to the European Commission on that, and I await with interest the Commission’s response.

The committee recognised that much more needs to be done, although the living wage is to be welcomed as part of a policy mix for tackling in-work poverty that needs to be flexible but not confused.

Promoting a living wage requires better policy co-ordination. That is highlighted in the recommendation that

“the Committee ... calls on the Scottish Government to use its experience, expertise and good relationship with COSLA and with local government generally to seek to encourage the further introduction of the living wage”.

As a society, we have to tackle the problem of poverty—particularly in-work poverty—at source, take every step that is necessary to eradicate that blight on Scotland and urge the UK Government to ameliorate some of its excessive policies when dealing with poverty.

As part of my long-standing contribution to the discussion about having a diverse policy mix, I have stated in the chamber previously that it could be argued that due consideration should be given to the idea of a citizen’s basic income, which would reduce the stigma associated with benefit take-up, for example. Moreover, it could be argued that a living wage may fail to tackle poverty. Under the present system, a living wage and consequent increases in workers’ incomes could lead to a reduction in entitlement to working tax credits, housing benefit and council tax benefit, leaving workers again in a poverty trap.

I welcome today’s debate and its focus on advancing approaches to address poverty, particularly in-work poverty. I look forward not only to a day when all public bodies and authorities adopt the living wage for all employees but to a day when the living wage becomes the standard rate throughout the private sector and when we as a society can eradicate in-work poverty and poverty for all citizens in Scotland. I look forward especially to the debate that will take place in the chamber next Thursday evening on a motion that John Park has lodged, which will allow us to advance further arguments and consider the issues around the private sector’s failure to protect

not only the pay of its workforce but its pensions and other benefits.

15:36

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome the committee report and the general level of debate that we have had so far. I am pleased that, under our new arrangements, we will look at the issue and the report and then give the Government an opportunity to respond. With that in mind, I hope that I can make some constructive suggestions about the practical things that I believe we need to do to try to deliver a living wage across Scotland.

I believe that we face two key issues just now, which previous speakers have highlighted. One is procurement, which I will deal with initially. The second is a negotiation framework for collective bargaining in local government to ensure that local government employees are covered by the living wage.

I met Alex Neil last October and spoke to him about my proposed member’s bill on procurement, in preparing which I have had a great deal of help from the non-Executive bills unit. The bill focuses on how we would change legislation and the law in Scotland to ensure that procurement can be used to deliver the living wage. Following that meeting, Alex Neil wrote to the European Commission, as other speakers have indicated. He told me earlier today in response to a question that I asked that he has not yet had a response from the Commission. I have some doubt over whether the clarity of the response that we will get from the Commission will help to move the argument on.

I strongly believe that the key issue in a matter such as this is, as Sarah Boyack said, political will. There have been issues in the Parliament, such as the smoking ban and, at the moment, minimum unit pricing for alcoholic drinks, on which there have been different legal opinions on both sides of the argument. In such cases, we as politicians need to step up to the plate and make decisions that we know will improve the lives of people in Scotland. That is exactly what the living wage is about and it is exactly what we need to do on procurement. I hope that, after I introduce my member’s bill, it will be supported across the chamber when it is debated. Obviously, a sustainable procurement bill will be coming at some point as well. If my proposed bill has to be part of the discussion on that, I am more than happy for it to go forward in that way.

The second area that I want to speak about is how we ensure that the living wage is paid to those who are directly employed in local government just now. I am pleased to hear that a majority of councils are paying the living wage to

those who are directly employed by them. I was also pleased to hear in a ministerial answer to a question that I asked last week that a number of councils are considering how they would implement the living wage.

My previous experience includes being a union convener in a shipyard in Rosyth—I am not sure whether I have mentioned that in the chamber before—when a particular situation arose about 20 years ago. In 1992, during the previous recession, there was a move by the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions to reduce the working week from 39 hours to 35 hours. That enabled workforces and unions to enter into sensible discussions about efficiencies and how, by reducing sick levels and becoming more efficient in the workplace, we could move from a 39-hour week to a 37-hour week and perhaps to a 35-hour week. If I am right, that framework has been used in Glasgow with the living wage as a practical way of self-financing such decisions.

I hope that, following the debate, the Scottish Government will think about a collective bargaining framework in local government that will enable and encourage discussions on the living wage, in much the same way as negotiations are held on the concordat, the council tax freeze and everything else that the Scottish Government wants local government to deliver on its behalf. I hope that the debate will lead to the Scottish Government committing to doing that.

The one area of the report that I do not agree with, if we are to move things forward, is the part of it that deals with a living wage unit. Perhaps that is not something that we can establish at the moment, but I think that a living wage unit of some description is essential if we are to deliver the living wage not just in local government but across the private sector through procurement. It is necessary to have in place a structure that enables employers, people who are entitled to a living wage and the Scottish Government to understand what is happening in the workplace. I hope that that is something that we will be able to agree on in the future. It is already in my proposed bill. To make a policy commitment happen, it is necessary to have in place the structure, the resources and the people to ensure that it is delivered.

My final point is about in-work poverty, which John Wilson mentioned. “In-work poverty” is the term that politicians use; outside the Parliament, people talk about trying to make ends meet. It is about the reality of people paying their council tax with their credit card—if they have a credit card, that is—and the issues that they face to do with family budgets. It is a massive problem at the moment. We in the Parliament are in the extremely privileged position of being able to do

something about it, and I firmly believe that taking forward the living wage through procurement and directly in local government will make a difference to people's lives. If we make that happen, it will be something that we can all be proud of.

15:42

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):

I welcome the committee's inquiry, its report and today's debate. The tone of the debate thus far has been broadly consensual, with a notable exception. As I listened to Margaret Mitchell's speech, I felt as if we had gone into a time warp and that we were back debating the minimum wage all over again. The impacts that she talked about are the very ones that we were warned would follow the introduction of the minimum wage but, lo and behold, the minimum wage was introduced and the sky did not fall in, the lights did not go out and the position of those at the lower end of the pay scale was advanced.

I remember having a part-time job that involved me spending one and a half hours' worth of pay simply to get the bus to and from my job. Such situations were addressed by the minimum wage, which guaranteed a minimum level of pay for workers. The minimum wage was an idea whose time had come, and that is now the case with the living wage.

I welcome the work that the Scottish Government is doing to show leadership on the issue by implementing a living wage across Scottish Government departments. Obviously, it is not for Government to dictate to local authorities and the private sector how they establish their pay. If we had the ability to set a living wage in the same way that the UK Government has the ability to set a minimum wage, the Parliament could take that approach, but that approach is not open to us at the moment, so we must work with colleagues in the public and private sectors to ensure that a living wage is implemented.

Margaret Mitchell: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark McDonald: Not at the moment.

The inquiry is welcome, because it highlights some of the issues that exist, including the mindset issue and some of the practicalities.

It would be fair to say that a great deal of progress has been made. As the minister highlighted, a majority of councils are actively implementing the living wage or are signed up to delivering it. That includes my council, Aberdeen City Council. As a result of the leadership that was shown by Kevin Stewart, who will sum up in the debate, we moved to a £6.92 wage for the lowest-paid people in the council; the current council

leader, Callum McCaig, has indicated that there will be a move to the living wage of £7.20. That is welcome progress for the low paid.

Margaret Mitchell talked about service delivery—I will happily give way if she wants to intervene on this point—forgetting that the services are delivered by the very people whom the living wage is introduced to assist and protect. It is those front-line workers who will benefit as a result of the living wage. I suspect that Margaret Mitchell has forgotten that one of the key costs of service delivery is the wages of the people in the public sector on whom we rely to deliver front-line services.

John Wilson, who has a long track record of campaigning for the lowest paid in society, spoke with great authority on the subject. He was correct when, during an intervention, he highlighted the failure of successive UK Governments from 2001 to take action to implement a living wage, which could have been enshrined in legislation and could have applied across the board. That is something that the Scottish Government does not have the legislative power to do, although it can implement the living wage in its departments and it can encourage others to implement the living wage. The Government's moves are a clear example of social justice in action, as opposed to inaction on social justice.

Margaret Mitchell: Would the member force businesses to pay the living wage? Does he accept that the knock-on effect of an approach that could lead to a 20 per cent increase in costs for some businesses on the margins could be an increase in unemployment? Does he refute the international evidence that payment of the minimum wage, never mind the living wage, has adversely affected employment opportunities for young people?

Mark McDonald: If the living wage is such a bad thing, why is the Conservative mayor of London such a key advocate of it? I do not agree with Boris Johnson on an awful lot, but he is taking the right approach to the living wage. Margaret Mitchell and her colleagues would do well to heed what he said about the matter, as quoted by Joe FitzPatrick. She talks about reductions and so on, but if we put more money into the economy by increasing people's pay packets, business activity increases, because people are able to afford more goods and services. There is a positive knock-on effect on the economy.

The committee's convener was right to highlight the scaremongering from CBI Scotland, which did not have a shred of evidence to back up its position—it was simply harking back to the scaremongering that took place during debates about the minimum wage. I welcome the Labour Party's apparent ability to see through that

scaremongering. Would that it could see through the CBI's scaremongering on other matters, such as the constitution—but we are getting there, and perhaps the Labour Party will join us and complete its journey.

On procurement, I support efforts to address the issue and the work that the minister talked about. At question time, the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment said—if I picked him up correctly—that in discussions with the European Union the UK Government has not been minded to take on board the Scottish Government's arguments for a living wage and community benefit clauses. That is regrettable and I hope that the UK Government will reflect on the wider benefits of the living wage, not just for local economies but for the national economy.

I welcome the report and look forward to further progress on the living wage.

15:48

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Every day we come across examples of the hardship that these exceptionally difficult times are causing in the budgets of households, and in the public and private sectors. Testament to the strain is the pay freeze that the Scottish Government had to impose on staff salaries above £21,000, which was a tough decision, but one that was necessary in order to avoid job losses. It is perhaps not a universally-held view, but it is a widely-held view, that having a job and a pay freeze is much better than having no job at all.

However, that decision and the straitened times in which we live should not prevent continuing efforts to move towards the adoption of a fair living wage throughout Scotland. Indeed, the current situation makes the policy more essential. Since the start of the downturn, inflation has run well above the Bank of England's target rate, so households' purchasing power must be spread even more thinly. It is an inevitable fact—as others have said—that those who are on the lowest wages are most vulnerable to the increased day-to-day costs that inflation brings. With inflation eroding the real value of household incomes, a living wage is the only sensible way of fighting in-work poverty for the lowest-paid people in Scotland. The Scottish Government has been at the forefront of efforts to introduce a living wage, with the policy having been adopted by the Scottish Government and all its agencies as well as the national health service.

The Government cannot realistically dictate the pay policy of local government, although I was surprised to hear Gavin Brown suggest to the minister that he might do that.

Gavin Brown: Will the member give way?

Maureen Watt: Wait. That is one of Mr Brown's arguments; the next day it will be that national Government is interfering too much in local government. He cannot have it both ways. It is up to individual councils to follow the example that is being shown and to adopt the policy for themselves.

Neil Findlay: Why is it that the Scottish Government can dictate to local authorities on the council tax, but not on the living wage?

Maureen Watt: The Government is not dictating on the council tax. As Neil Findlay well knows, that is a voluntary agreement.

It is heartening that 17 of Scotland's 32 local authorities expect to have a living wage in place by April this year. My colleague Mark McDonald mentioned that Aberdeen City Council is one of those authorities, following its recent decision to allocate the necessary funding during the budget process. That is particularly welcome and will benefit a significant number of my constituents. Mark McDonald mentioned Kevin Stewart and Councillor McCaig, but that move is testament to the hard work of all my SNP council colleagues in Aberdeen City Council in the past five years. They inherited a council that was nearly bankrupt, but it is now receiving many plaudits for its significant performance in all areas of local government. If Aberdeen City Council can do it, I am sure that the other councils that still need to come on board can do so.

Although the progress that has been made is welcome, there is still some way to go in the efforts to make the living wage the standard in Scottish society. I am sure that most members who are present sincerely hope, as I do, that the rest of Scotland's local authorities will follow the example that has been set by the councils that have said that they will adopt the living wage in the near future.

Of course, the real challenge is not just for the living wage to be implemented in the public sector: it is important that the living wage be adopted throughout the economy, including in the private sector. That challenge is even more pronounced in the current job market, as so many people compete for every job. The only way to ensure the roll-out of the living wage across Scotland's private sector would be through raising the minimum wage. However, as other members have said, the power to do that is reserved to Westminster. Unfortunately, it seems less than likely that the UK Government will take any steps in that direction, particularly when it currently proposes attacks on employment law that would make the situation even worse than it is at present. Interestingly, Germany has the most stringent employment laws

and the most negotiation with wage councils, but it still seems to be one of the most prosperous countries in Europe. This is another issue on which, if the Scottish Parliament had the powers to act, we could make Scotland a better place to live.

The proposal to use public sector procurement contracts to specify that companies that provide goods and services to the public sector should operate a living wage policy has the potential to result in progress in the private sector. Other members have asked whether such a move would be compatible with EU law; I look forward to hearing the results from the EU. I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government is working with the European Commission to resolve the uncertainty and I hope that we will get a viable option in the future.

The importance of a living wage policy is growing, as times get tougher for households that are on low incomes. So far, central Government has shown an excellent example in adopting the measure. We should all welcome the fact that many local authorities are following suit. The challenge that we now face is to build on that progress and to give more and more people in Scotland access to a fair living wage.

15:55

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I begin by declaring an interest as an elected member of Glasgow City Council.

Since joining the Local Government and Regeneration Committee at the beginning of this year, I have had the opportunity to take part in the final stages of the committee's report on the living wage in Scotland, and I owe recognition to my colleagues, Mark Griffin and Kezia Dugdale, for their efforts and the work that they did in shaping the report in the committee.

As a member of the first local authority that introduced a living wage in Scotland, I am glad to see a committee report and this subsequent parliamentary debate on the issue. As a long-term supporter of the living wage campaign, I am happy with many of the report's conclusions and the committee's broad support for the living wage. I hope that the report and today's debate will further strengthen the Scottish Government's support for the move towards greater implementation of the pay rate.

The campaigners for the living wage campaign have long championed the benefits for employees in the private and public sectors as well as the potential boost for the economy and combating poverty. In Glasgow, the local authority now has more than 160 recognised living-wage employers from the public and private sectors. By committing to the living wage, each of those employers has

their details included on the dedicated website, www.glasgowlivingwage.co.uk. Those companies have a combined workforce of more than 50,000 people and, from 1 April this year, those people should earn a minimum of £7.20 per hour.

Some might argue that encouraging the public sector to increase wages, even for the lowest-paid people, is not wise in the current climate, but as the committee report recognises, strong preventative spend benefits are associated with implementation of the living wage. That should be noted, particularly when preventative spending is being encouraged. There are knock-on effects for issues such as fuel poverty. I often hear about the need for greater support for low earners who are suffering from fuel poverty; the living wage can help to tackle that problem.

The link between gender and low pay can also be targeted through the living wage, which in turn can help to tackle child poverty. Figures from the Poverty Alliance Scotland suggest that two thirds of all low-paid workers are women, which increases the number of children who are living in poverty. The living wage has had support from Save the Children as being one tool that can lift families and children out of poverty.

As I said earlier, more than 160 public and private employers in Glasgow are now committed to the living wage for their employees, but none of those employers is in the hospitality industry. The Commonwealth games is coming to the city in 2014 which, it is hoped, will mean a boost for the hospitality economy in the city. We need therefore to ensure that that potential boost is reinvested in the people of Glasgow, especially those who are on low incomes. Also on the hospitality trade, during the games, we must make sure that sessional workers who are employed to accommodate an increase in demand are fairly rewarded. A living wage for what are likely to be young people, for the most part, is essential so that they can build up finances to support themselves when the work is removed.

It is fair to say that, if low-paid workers are paid a bit more, local economies will benefit from the increase in people's incomes. Spending more in their local communities, and supporting jobs and growth, will clearly bring great benefits and the living wage can help to achieve that.

Although there are success stories across the country for the living wage, there are difficulties with rolling it out further, particularly through procurement processes. In Glasgow, the council asks bidders whether they pay their staff the living wage, but that cannot be a weighted factor at the moment.

Although local authorities such as Glasgow City Council have worked well and hard to increase the

number of businesses in their areas that take seriously the responsibility to pay their employees at the living-wage rate, we need more support for greater implementation from the Government. The public sector, along with the trade unions and anti-poverty groups, has been at the forefront of the campaign for a living wage, and the Scottish Government must also become an advocate for changes to legislation, to support the growth of implementation. As the committee report notes, the experience of the London living wage has been that major international companies have signed up, and that needs to happen here, too.

I hope that any future procurement legislation proposals that are brought to the chamber will take note of those issues. It would be the perfect chance to put the living wage at the heart of employment in Scotland. I look forward to the day when everyone in Scotland can engage with a living wage.

16:00

Bill Walker (Dunfermline) (SNP): As a member of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee, I was pleased to take part in the inquiry into the living wage in December and January. I wholly support the committee report, and I would like to address both the wider economics and the morality of the living-wage argument.

In my youth—which was not yesterday—I flirted with the politics of the command economy. “Wouldn’t it be nice,” I reckoned, “if we could all agree on a system of fair prices for everything, and on equitable distribution of property based on need.” Bigger brains than mine have tried to make such idealism work, and have failed; in my opinion, because practical implementation does not take into account human nature—good and bad. At first hand, I experienced the awfulness of Czechoslovakia after the Dubček spring of 1968, and the former Soviet Union and East Berlin of the 1970s. The command economy just did not work.

Someone once said that democracy is a lousy system but it is the best invented yet, and the same sort of argument has been used in economics:

“A market economy can be pretty bad but it’s better than anything else so far.”

Supply and demand can drive progress, but there needs to be a manageable system—I emphasise “manageable”—of rules and regulations based on human values. We are not animals in the jungle, driven only by our needs for immediate family survival—for which there is an economic theory—but rather we are, I hope, a civilised society seeking a better world.

Only last week, a previous speaker in the debate, John Wilson, hosted a reception here in the building for the Church of Scotland, and the Right Rev David Arnott, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, presented the draft report of its special commission on the purposes of economic activity. It was an enlightening evening for me, the highlight of which was the words from the report that were repeated by Mr Arnott in his press release:

"Economics is not, and can never be, a morally neutral or ethics free zone. Humanity does not exist for the market but the market for humanity. Any morally legitimate vision of economics and economic activity, whether domestic or international, must be a vision of social economics, embedded in a vision of society which respects and values the needs and contributions of all its members".

Those are wise words, and we should use that kind of thinking when we are considering setting and operating a living wage.

We have a market economy operating within a representative democracy. A decent living wage should be an integral part of the regulated limit at the low end of the income scale, below which no one should fall. This is a matter of human compassion, although we also heard arguments in committee for how it can make good sense economically, especially when it comes to employment stability. That great Fifer—I emphasise "Fifer"—and father of modern economic thinking, Adam Smith, regularly drew attention in his theories to the need to treat people properly.

Our committee was united on the idea that a living wage is a good thing. The question was how to get there affordably, especially for some suppliers to local government, such as smaller businesses and the voluntary sector.

I am in some awe of the researchers at Loughborough University. I will repeat what our convener said—they came up with the level of £7.20 per hour, which is described in one briefing document as

"an estimate of the minimum income that households need in order to afford a minimum acceptable standard of living, as defined by members of the public."

That must have been some research project.

I certainly do not think that the figure is high, given the levels of income that obtain elsewhere in society, especially in the upper decile of high earners. In a society in which the income gap between the rich and the poor is increasing, I am tempted to say that a very modest amount of income redistribution would easily solve the residual problems in implementing a living wage, but that question is for another day.

I maintain that the living wage is a moral issue, in addition to its being an economic one. I urge Parliament to accept our committee's report.

16:06

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): When we speak near the end of a debate, we become very aware that most of what we wanted to say has been said. However, hearing comments again in a debate such as this is important.

If we are serious about tackling poverty, we should be equally committed to the living wage, for it is designed and calculated to take people out of poverty. I congratulate all those who have been instrumental in bringing the campaign to the current stage, including the Poverty Alliance Scotland, the Scottish Trades Union Congress, the trade unions and the councils—notably Glasgow City Council. I am pleased that North Lanarkshire Council has now endorsed payment of the living wage to its employees. In the spirit of consensus, I am pleased that even David Cameron has recognised that it is

"an idea whose time has come".

The living wage is not a new idea. As many members know, we can claim that a Scot had a hand in its evolution more than 200 years ago, when Adam Smith wrote in "The Wealth of Nations" that workers

"should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as to be themselves tolerably well fed, clothed, and lodged."

Those words are quite close to the modern concept.

For families whose wage earners are paid less than the living wage, it is difficult—if not impossible—to provide basic essentials without working excessively long hours or taking on unsustainable debt. Of course, the justification for the living wage goes beyond basic needs. For example, as Save the Children has pointed out, in-work poverty and low pay, particularly among women, contribute to the high level of child poverty in Scotland.

Those who fear that bringing in the living wage would create unemployment should remember that that argument was also used against the minimum wage, but the relationship between wage levels and income is not so simple. At the bottom end of the wage scale, raising income has many impacts—through factors such as greater work satisfaction, improved quality and productivity, less absenteeism and increased local spending—that can offset the higher wage costs and boost employment.

The old adage that the poor work harder if they are paid less and the rich work harder if they are paid more is clearly a myth that rich people have propagated. We should remember that the warnings of dire consequences and lengthening dole queues proved to be unfounded when the minimum wage was brought in. The opposite was true—employment continued to grow. Many people who understood why that would happen with a minimum wage that was set at the right level were of the opinion that the minimum wage had been set cautiously. If anything, it was set below the level that would give the economy the optimal benefits.

To those who argue that the living wage distorts the labour market, I say that we need the living wage to protect people from the ravages of a labour market that uses high unemployment to drive wages down to poverty levels.

I hope that, after all the failures of unrestrained markets, we have learned that free markets are not the solution to every problem. The quality of people's lives should not be at the whim of market forces. Our society recognises that, and the state steps in to support those whom the labour market squeezes and spits out. Is it not better to protect people's ability to keep themselves out of poverty than to adopt a laissez-faire attitude and have to deal with the consequences? We must take a broader view and consider the wider benefits to the economy and people's lives. Let's face it—putting a few extra quid in the pockets of the poorest members of our society is likely to do more for the local economy than boosting the bonuses and offshore bank accounts of the better off.

It is estimated that local businesses will get an extra £1.63 for every £1 that is paid to provide a living wage. Reductions in poverty and inequality also have many longer-term benefits, from better physical and mental health to lower rates of crime and antisocial behaviour.

The living wage is proposed for the public sector, but I hope that it will be taken up more widely. It is indeed an idea whose time has come, as witnessed by cities and countries all over the world that have adopted the idea. It is not the whole answer, however, and the degree of its success will depend on action to address poverty traps in the tax and benefits system.

Like other objectives, such as increased numbers of apprenticeships and the promotion of measures to tackle climate change, payment of the living wage could be incorporated into procurement procedures. As John Park does, I hope that the new Minister for Local Government and Planning and the Scottish Government will support the creation of a Scottish living wage unit, as called for by the Scottish Council for Voluntary

Organisations and trade unions, to increase the impetus for wider introduction of the living wage.

Finally, just to make the score one each, I put it on the record that North Lanarkshire Council's employees would not be receiving the living wage if the SNP's alternative budget had been successful.

16:12

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): It was when I was working in London that I first became aware of the campaign for the living wage. A number of members have mentioned the campaigns in London. At that time, the campaigners were looking for £7.45 as their local living wage, and I believe that they are now aiming for £8.30. They started with the public sector and got both the major mayoral candidates to commit to the living wage. They moved on to put pressure on private companies, which were named and shamed, and I believe that there were demonstrations outside their offices. As has been mentioned, some of those companies were embarrassed because they had portrayed themselves as having corporate social responsibility while their cleaners were not getting a living wage.

We have had some good briefings for today's debate, particularly from Save the Children, which makes the point that women and children particularly benefit from the living wage. It states:

"As an example, research by the Scottish Government has shown that implementing the living wage would increase the net income for a single parent with one child by 5 per cent, while a married couple with one child would see their income increase by 11 per cent."

John Wilson: Before he was elected to the Scottish Parliament, Mr Mason was a member of Glasgow City Council. In his experience, what would have been the impact if Glasgow City Council and other local authorities had introduced equal pay in 1999? What would that have done for the wages of those low-paid women who were denied equal pay? I note that, in some local authorities, such as North Lanarkshire Council, such women are still being denied equal pay.

John Mason: The issue of equal pay was avoided by most local authorities for quite a number of years when it should have been addressed. That stored up a huge number of the problems that Glasgow City Council and other local authorities have had. If we had seriously believed in equal pay, it should have been addressed sooner, so it is disappointing that it took legal action to get it sorted out. I will come back to another point on that in a minute.

Save the Children's briefing for the debate continues:

"Moreover, the financial benefits of wage increases will tend to be greater under universal credit because this will withdraw benefits at a flatter and usually slower rate. This should have positive implications for child poverty."

That gives added impetus, despite all the problems with the Welfare Reform Bill.

On local government, I believe strongly in the concordat, which has been a huge advantage for local government and gives local authorities the freedom to make their own decisions. Previously, we had a centralist, top-down approach that was resented by councillors of all political parties. The reality is that councils can and should make their own decisions. I welcome the minister's commitment to work with local authorities, but I strongly defend local authorities' rights as well.

Going back to John Wilson's point, a problem in Glasgow was the arm's-length external organisations. As a councillor at the time, I strongly opposed that. I and members of other parties opposed those organisations because of the fear that terms and conditions would be undermined and that women in one arm's-length organisation would be more poorly paid than people doing an equivalent job in another organisation. Although there are good things happening in Glasgow, I remain to be reassured that that has not been a problem.

The statutory minimum wage has been mentioned several times. The problem with the living wage is that it would still be only for the public sector and, potentially, for those with contracts surrounding the public sector. That would leave the private sector to continue largely unaffected.

Sarah Boyack: Surely, one of the lessons from London is that when the living wage is implemented, it begins to influence the labour market and to drive up opportunities for staff in other companies. Private companies must be competitive, so it would have a ripple effect. The key thing is to get the critical mass that we are all campaigning for.

John Mason: The living wage could have a ripple effect, but there are still examples of areas in London where that is not happening and it is a long way away from happening. I welcome the fact that the Labour Party introduced a statutory minimum wage. That was not happening, so it needed statute; I argue that we need statute for the living wage.

Labour has asked whether we would have a higher minimum wage in Scotland if we were independent. That question applies to all the parties—all the parties must say what their policy on a statutory minimum wage would be if Scotland were independent. I assume that, occasionally, the Labour Party might get elected after independence

and that, therefore, its view on a minimum wage would be important.

I am running out of time, but I will touch on the nonsense that Margaret Mitchell talked. Her argument that we should push wages down until we have all the people working—filling potholes—that we possibly can is basically an argument for slavery. By that argument, employers should pay only enough food for their workers to live on and no wage whatever. She also used the word "subsidy", which is ridiculous. One of the arguments for the living wage is that, currently, we are having to subsidise private companies with tax credits. I welcome tax credits—which were also introduced by the Labour Party—but tax credits for a profitable company are a subsidy and that should not be acceptable.

16:18

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I welcome the debate and the committee's inquiry into the living wage. Arguments for a living wage have been well expressed by many colleagues, and I agree with almost every colleague who has spoken. I was pleased to hear John Wilson raise the issue of the citizen's income and Sarah Boyack's comments on the benefits of the living wage for local areas. I congratulate all those who have campaigned for the living wage and the councils who have implemented it.

In the climate justice debate this morning, we talked about gender inequality; in this debate, the issue is still key. As the inquiry heard, 76 per cent of the employees who were affected by the introduction of the living wage in East Renfrewshire were women. In the Scottish Government and its agencies, women represented 71 per cent of the people whose wages were improved.

A vital group to consider in this debate is children. UNICEF's "Report Card 7" found that the United Kingdom was at the bottom of the league table for child wellbeing, beneath 20 other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries—including some that are substantially poorer than the UK. UNICEF identified two key things that are important to a child's wellbeing: quality time and relationships with family and friends, and a range of engaging activities. However, UNICEF's central and priority 1 recommendation to improve the quality time that parents are able to give to their children was the living wage. The living wage is that important. UNICEF recommended that Governments work with organisations such as the CBI to encourage them to adopt the living wage. Like others, I was disappointed that CBI Scotland did not attend the inquiry's oral evidence sessions to speak to its written submission.

We have debated the need to tackle in-work poverty, which is a massively important task. However, we must also aim to combat inequality and to acknowledge how wage differentials between the lowest paid and the highest paid in society matter too. In the previous session of Parliament, my colleague Patrick Harvie brought to the chamber a debate on the living wage. I will quote a point that he made, because it is clear and it remains relevant:

"We must not be distracted from dealing with the underlying structural causes of poverty in the way that we run our economy. We must go beyond that and recognise not only that poverty matters but that inequality matters. It is about not only the level of wealth that people have, but their relative wealth. It is about how well we share wealth in society, not just how much economic growth we achieve as a whole."—[*Official Report*, 29 April 2010; c 25815.]

It is as unjust to pay somebody a pittance for valuable work as it is to pay millions to a company chief executive officer. Reams of reports track poverty in Scotland and abroad, but we spend far less effort reporting on the rich and the super-rich. A maximum wage, or a limit on differentials within an organisation, may seem like a sledgehammer solution, but there are ways in which to celebrate good practice. The London Green Party is currently running a campaign for a fair pay kitemark for companies that pay the London living wage and have no employees earning more than 10 times that rate.

In many councils, work continues. Unison figures show that 1,800 council workers are paid less than £7.20 an hour, here in Edinburgh. However, as Sarah Boyack said, councils that implement the living wage will see benefits, because people on low incomes spend most of what they earn in the local economy, supporting local businesses and services. I agree with the Scottish living wage campaign that a clause should be included in public sector contracts to ensure that the benefits of the living wage are extended to voluntary sector and private sector workers who deliver services that are paid for from the public purse. I welcome the minister's assurance that his Government will continue to pursue that issue.

We must not forget the people who work in the retail and hospitality sectors, which traditionally are in the private sector. Embedding a living wage across the public sector shows that Government, at national and local level, regards the issue as a priority.

The debate has been fairly consensual so far, but I may be about to break that consensus a little. The minister suggested that councils are autonomous, independent bodies, which are responsible for their own decisions. However, as Neil Findlay suggested, they are less autonomous than they used to be when it comes to setting the

council tax. Local authorities have been hamstrung by a council tax freeze. I look forward to discussing the issue when we get into the debate for the independence referendum. I would like us to consider greater devolution—

Colin Keir (Edinburgh Western) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Alison Johnstone: Absolutely.

Colin Keir: You have just mentioned Edinburgh, and somebody said earlier that local authorities differed in their abilities to get to where we want to be with a living wage. You have criticised City of Edinburgh Council—and I should mention that we are both members of the council. The Green group in the council did not present a budget, so perhaps the member could explain to the people who are in the chamber now how the Green group in Edinburgh would propose to pay for the living wage, given the difficulties that Edinburgh faces.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): I remind members that they must speak through the chair when they make interventions.

Colin Keir: I beg your pardon.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Johnstone, you have 30 seconds left.

Alison Johnstone: The Green group does not take part in the council's budget-setting process, because—as we have documented many times—it is a complete and utter waste of time. If every party in here set a budget, most of the work would go nowhere.

I look forward to discussing the need for meaningful tax-raising powers—at both local authority and local community level—when we get into the independence debate.

16:24

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): Since its introduction in 2011-12, the living wage has assisted about 6,000 staff. Moreover, people who earn less than £21,000 have received an annual minimum increase of £250, which benefits 76,000 public sector workers. Those are all positive steps, but low pay remains an issue and I agree that this SNP Government is doing what it can, within its powers, to address it.

The issue is made more prominent by the fact that we are approaching the end of Unison week. Unison Scotland has long campaigned for a living wage that will provide a level of pay that allows workers to provide adequately for themselves and their families.

I am still a North Lanarkshire councillor—perhaps Gavin Brown will have another pop at me for that later—and in my experience most local

authority workers remain poorly paid. I agree with Unison that local authorities, when placing their contracts, should encourage contractors to pay a living wage.

I do not agree with Margaret Mitchell's earlier comments—I am glad that she has returned to the chamber—about council workers. They are of great benefit to councils, and I would like them to be paid a decent wage.

The UK living wage outside London for 2011 should be £7.20 an hour.

Neil Findlay: I am glad that the member thinks that North Lanarkshire Council employees make a great contribution. Will he, therefore, criticise his colleague Alex Neil, who slated North Lanarkshire Council workers only a few weeks ago?

Richard Lyle: Alex Neil did not slate any worker from North Lanarkshire Council. He slated officials and councillors. If I have time later, I will address comments that were made by my colleague John Pentland.

I refer Margaret Mitchell to a report by the Association for Public Service Excellence—I might send her a copy later—which has proved that, for every pound spent by a council, £1.60 is generated into the local economy.

The national minimum wage is set by the UK Government, which is Tory at present, and it stands at £6.08 an hour for a person over the age of 21. That is £1.12 below the given living wage. For those aged 18 to 20, the national minimum wage stands at £4.98 an hour. Competition to get into universities has increased and many people who can go into work after leaving school want to become independent from their parents, but they are not able to do so. Moreover, £6.08 an hour for a person over the age of 21 is not sufficient for those who want to start a life with a family.

The majority of councils are now paying their staff the living wage. Six further councils have confirmed that they will pay it from April, and another two have said that they intend to introduce it.

The Government supports the principle of the living wage and the public sector pay policy for staff for 2012-13 requires employers covered by it to pay their employees a Scottish living wage of £7.20 an hour. The public sector pay policy covers employees from central Government, Government agencies and the national health service, but not the wider public sector. Although many local authorities are implementing the living wage, others are not, which means that local authority workers are not safeguarded by that incentive. I believe that they should be.

The SNP is dedicated to the welfare and wellbeing of its citizens and is working with the

European Commission on the issue, because it is estimated that about 550,000 employees on adult rates in Scotland are paid below the living wage.

In the private sector, pay is a matter for individual companies, and including conditions for procurement processes could amount to a restriction of the freedom to provide services that is guaranteed by article 56 of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union. The Commission is currently reviewing the issue so that it can examine procurement rules.

The Scottish Government recognises that local authorities are not safeguarded by a living wage and the public sector pay policy, but it encourages all employers to implement it so that we can help to ensure that everyone can afford to meet their basic needs. We should recognise the need to safeguard those who are employed by contractors and those who are not directly employed, so that they too can receive a living wage. We are striving to resolve a large poverty gap, so the living wage should be implemented where possible to secure good living standards for the Scottish population.

UK regulations on minimum wages leave people with not enough money to support a family. That is closely related to poverty, which in turn is a social problem, disadvantaging those who cannot afford to improve their circumstances. That still occurs, even though the Scottish Government has produced data that allow us to see that the minimum wage, as it stands, simply does not provide a basic living for a worker and their family.

Over the years, Mr Pentland and I have continually battled over budgets in North Lanarkshire Council. In the seconds that I have left, I remind him that his party's budget last year made more than 600 workers redundant, while our budget made only six workers redundant.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches. I remind members who have participated in the debate that they should be in the chamber for the closing speeches.

16:31

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): The report that the committee produced was excellent, and this has been a good debate. I echo the comments of Joe FitzPatrick, the convener of the committee, and of John Park that it is good that the debate is taking place within weeks of the publication of the report, instead of after there has been a full response, which would cause a delay.

The report, fairly and rightly, acknowledges the work that has been done by the Scottish Government, along with campaign groups and others, to advance the living wage in Scotland. However, I part company with the Government

and some SNP members who have suggested today that the Scottish Government's powers are so limited that it can do no more than it is currently doing. In the private sector, that is absolutely correct. The national minimum wage is set by the UK Government, and there is little that the Scottish Government can do in that regard. However, in the public sector that simply is not correct. To clear up what Maureen Watt was saying, I was not advocating that the Government should do that—that is certainly not Conservative Party policy—but I was making the point that it could, if there was the political will to do so.

John Wilson: Is Mr Brown arguing that the Scottish Government should take the powers to force the living wage on local authorities, which would leave it open to criticism from the private sector—particularly CBI Scotland—that public sector wages are way above those in the private sector? Is he seriously arguing for that? If he is, I welcome it.

Gavin Brown: About 10 seconds before John Wilson intervened, I said fairly clearly that I am not arguing that the Government should do that. I am arguing that, if the political will was there—if the Scottish Government had the passion of John Wilson on this issue—perhaps it could do that.

Derek Mackay: Will the member give way?

Gavin Brown: In a moment.

The point that I alluded to, and which Neil Findlay made, is that the Government has a ring-fenced fund for those councils that decide to have a council tax freeze, from which it gives those councils additional funds. If the Government wanted to—if the issue was the political priority that it says it is—it could create a similar fund and therefore subsidise the councils to pay a living wage.

Joe FitzPatrick: Will the member give way?

Gavin Brown: I said that I would give way to the minister.

Derek Mackay: Does the member accept that with regard to that which is in our control in terms of our legal competence, our finance and the areas about which there is clarity, we have acted to deliver a pay policy that, in a de facto sense, delivers the living wage?

Gavin Brown: In terms of pure legalities, yes. I think that I acknowledged that at the start of my speech. However, in terms of political abilities, the Government cannot force councils to accept a council tax freeze but, politically, it has managed to do so, and it has not taken the same approach in relation to the living wage, in terms of funding. As I said, I am not arguing that the Scottish Government should do that; I am arguing that it could.

Joe FitzPatrick: Mr Brown spoke about the need for funding. If he reads the committee's report, he will see that a number of councils have introduced a living wage as part of a package, negotiated with trade unions and staff, that has delivered a saving.

Gavin Brown: In some cases that is true—I know from reading the report that Scottish Borders Council made that point. However, it has certainly not been true for every organisation.

The debate has been framed in terms of absolutes. Some members have argued that there are no flaws at all in the policy—indeed, John Wilson stated that it would eradicate poverty. They say that anyone who raises any concern or caution about the policy is somehow arguing for slavery—John Mason curiously made that argument regarding Margaret Mitchell—and that CBI Scotland believes that the sky would fall in if the living wage was introduced.

To be clear, there are positives to the policy. I do not doubt that there are some economic benefits if the money is spent locally, or that it would have an impact on morale. However, by the same token, if a council spent £3.5 million not on the living wage but on, for example, employing more teachers, there would be an economic benefit from that, and that money could also be spent locally.

Mark McDonald: Will the member take an intervention?

Gavin Brown: I will not take any more interventions. I have taken four in six minutes, which is fairly generous—there is only a minute to go.

There would be an economic benefit from using that money to employ more teachers: it would create jobs and improve front-line services. There would be positives from putting the policy in place, but there are also opportunity costs in putting the money in one direction as opposed to another. That is the point that Margaret Mitchell was making, and which the CBI has argued: in effect, by putting money into the living wage, employers are not putting money into other jobs.

That was accepted by Maureen Watt in relation to a pay freeze. A pay freeze is critical to protect jobs, but when it comes to the living wage, protecting jobs or creating more jobs seems a lot less critical to the Government. That is the argument that we advanced this afternoon, and I am happy to close there.

16:36

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): I am pleased to participate in today's debate. As Joe FitzPatrick mentioned, I was a member of the committee for

all but one of the evidence sessions, when I moved on to pastures new. In some ways, participating in today's debate brings a degree of closure. As a long-standing supporter of and activist for the living wage, it is a very welcome—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Dugdale, could you move your microphone round slightly? Thank you.

Kezia Dugdale: Sorry, Presiding Officer.

I commend the work of the convener and his assiduous deputy, all members of the committee, the clerks and those who gave evidence in producing what I believe is a good report that states broad support for the living wage.

I will talk about three Ps: poverty pay, procurement and political will. I will say a little bit about each in turn but, before I do so, I will make some remarks about Margaret Mitchell. I disagree with a number of elements in her speech on ideological grounds. I do not have the time to go into those, but I also disagree with her on an element of fact.

Margaret Mitchell quoted CBI Scotland's written evidence to the committee that the impact of the living wage

"would fall most heavily on young people, with international evidence showing that they face disproportionate exposure to the negative employment effects of a minimum wage."

That evidence was supplemented by footnote 2, which referenced a Low Pay Commission report that says something completely different. That report says:

"The evidence suggested that minimum wages were more likely to have a negative effect on the youth labour market where there were no separate rates for younger workers."

Ms Mitchell and others will realise that there are differential rates for the national minimum wage in our country, so the point does not apply. That is a fact. The Low Pay Commission goes on to state:

"Further, the impact could be positive if youth rates were set at an appropriate level, and any adverse effect could disappear or become less negative if there were strong labour market interventions by governments to support"

young people into work.

I am afraid that I find CBI Scotland's written evidence disingenuous. I appreciate that some members of the committee raised that point at an earlier stage, so I am a little sorry to see CBI Scotland's evidence referenced at paragraph 131 of the committee report, because it is, to a degree, misleading.

Gavin Brown: By the same token, at page 4 of the committee report, the Low Pay Commission report from 2011 is quoted as stating that

"it did find some evidence to suggest that young people may have been adversely affected by the minimum wage, especially in a recession".

That is directly from the committee report.

Kezia Dugdale: The member's Government is having a far greater impact than that on the incomes of young people at the moment.

I return to the three Ps. In her speech, my colleague Sarah Boyack talked about poverty pay, the experience of people in these tough economic times, the squeeze on family budgets, the pressures of rising costs, and the increasing number of people who are finding themselves living in poverty, despite the fact that they work. For someone who believes that work is the best way out of poverty, that is extremely worrying. John Pentland made those points best in a particularly powerful speech.

In his speech, the minister talked about the fact that half of the 32 local authorities in Scotland now pay the living wage. I am sorry to disappoint him, but, sadly, the Scottish National Party-led council in Edinburgh is not one of those local authorities, so it was a little bit cheeky of Colin Keir to have a go at Alison Johnstone in that regard. I assure members that, when Edinburgh Labour wins in May, the position will be rectified, as we have a clear commitment to the living wage in our manifesto.

My colleague John Park spoke at length about procurement. I know that he is well-versed in that issue and that he will talk about it more in the chamber in the future. I recently visited the Commonwealth games organisation in Glasgow to see how it was getting along with creating jobs for young people through procurement processes. It is worth remembering that the Commonwealth games are a living wage games. I think that that will address many of the issues around hospitality, which my colleague Anne McTaggart dealt with. I also welcome John Wilson's remarks in that regard.

I will speak briefly about political will and the living wage unit, which the committee report addresses in great detail. When he gave evidence to the committee, John Swinney talked about the number of Government departments that consider pay issues. He talked about procurement, the employability directorate, the pay policy directorate, the finance directorate and all the people in the Government who deal with the third sector and pay issues on a day-to-day basis. He thought that, because so many parts of the Government were involved, it would be bad to compartmentalise the solution in one Government department. I am afraid that that completely misses the point. That is exactly why we need a living wage unit. So many different parts of the Government are talking about the living wage

without there being the necessary co-ordination to go forward with it.

Bill Walker: Will the member give way?

Kezia Dugdale: I am sorry, but I am in my final minute.

We would like to see more political will from the SNP. We agree with the rhetoric: there is more to be done.

My final plea to the minister is to recognise that his work will not be done even when 32 of the 32 local authorities deliver the living wage, because this is also about uprating and a year-on-year commitment to ensure that the value of the living wage is always with us. I hope that he will comment on that in his closing speech.

16:42

Derek Mackay: I will begin with the final point that was made, on trying to get 32 of the 32 local authorities to deliver the living wage. I make no apology for trying to get 100 per cent compliance with the policy, and I will certainly continue to do that, although I will try to deliver it in a partnership process, of course. John Pentland is quite right to recognise that his administration back at the ranch is moving towards the living wage. I know that that was a matter of negotiation with the local trade unions. It would have been wrong of the Government to step in and ride a coach and horses right through negotiations with a local authority. That is why a nationally imposed approach is not relevant to the living wage. A partnership approach in which local democracy is recognised is far more important.

I want to be generous. North Lanarkshire Council agreed to introduce the living wage only after my ministerial visit, of course, but who is more responsible for that agreement—Jim McCabe or me? In fairness, the answer is Jim McCabe, as the leader of the council, although perhaps not all SNP members appreciate that. That agreement was, of course, set against the backdrop of a very good financial deal for local government, which made the policy possible in North Lanarkshire and in many other parts of Scotland. I am happy that, as a parting gift, Renfrewshire Council, which I was a member of, has also implemented the living wage.

I do not think that party politics is the reason why some parties are choosing to implement the living wage and others are not, as some people have suggested. Even the Conservatives in South Ayrshire are implementing it. That just goes to show that, although the forces of conservatism are alive in the chamber, there are more moderate forces out there on the ground.

The debate has been constructive and helpful. I agree with Gavin Brown that this new process or journey is particularly welcome, because it allows the Government the time and the opportunity to reflect on what is said and to take the issue forward in future debates, such as the one that we will have next week.

There is a clear relationship between the living wage and the minimum wage. More people in the private sector will benefit from the living wage through procurement than would benefit if it were simply implemented in the public sector, even where that is the aspiration.

Many members contributed positively to the debate. I thank Bill Walker for the philosophical journey that we enjoyed; John Park for his consistency and challenging approach; Kezia Dugdale and Sarah Boyack for their suggestions—I am not sure that Kezia Dugdale's approach to the debate brings closure to the subject, as I suspect that we have only just begun—and John Wilson for his work on low pay.

I also thank Mark McDonald, Maureen Watt and John Mason for their valid and pertinent points on the need to recognise local democracy. That point is frequently made to me by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in discussions on achieving partnership principles.

I welcome Margaret Mitchell's speech. It reflects the forces of conservatism, but it is important that that voice is heard so that, having debated it, we can at least pretend that those views do not exist.

However, I must say that we got a wee bit lost on some of the benefits of the living wage and increasing pay. Let us reflect on some of them again.

Some of the evidence that we have discovered demonstrates that higher wages increase productivity because an increase in the cost of losing the job creates an incentive to work harder, and positive psychological benefits may arise if a greater proportion of an individual's income is earned rather than coming from benefits. The evidence also indicates that the living wage helps to reduce staff turnover and increases incentives for firms to train low-paid workers. If the living wage lifts people out of poverty, there are also health benefits. That is surely good for the private sector as well as for the individuals themselves.

I disagree with some of what Sarah Boyack said. She challenged us to lead by example. I say to her that the SNP Government has led by example in its public pay policy. I ask her to reflect on the fact that the Government has frozen ministerial pay and that, although there is a pay freeze to protect employment numbers, it has ensured that those who earn less than £21,000 received an annual minimum increase of £250.

Sarah Boyack: Will the minister clarify whether the companies that work for the Scottish Executive—for example, the cleaning contractors—provide a living wage for their staff?

Derek Mackay: I understand that there are some outstanding categories in which there are still legal issues to be resolved, but the Government's clear pay policy is that its staff will achieve the living wage.

The living wage under an SNP Government is £7.20 but the minimum wage under the Labour Party was £5.63. That shows that we have progressed the issue.

John Park: Will the minister give way?

Derek Mackay: No, I need to make more progress to cover some of the questions that were raised about the proposed sustainable procurement bill.

There will be an opportunity to consider social benefit clauses and the living wage in that bill. We cannot prejudge it, because there must be a consultation, but there is a clear aspiration pretty much across the parties to consider the living wage in the bill. That opportunity must be set within the context of having the legal comfort of clarity on EU procurement laws and directives. We cannot take the immense risk to us and all other parts of the public sector of legal challenge if we do not get the bill right.

Gavin Brown: I accept that Alex Neil is awaiting a response from the EU, but has the Scottish Government taken legal advice on the issue?

Derek Mackay: The legal advice includes the position that, unless we have clarity about what Europe is saying—including the court ruling that was mentioned in the report—we cannot progress the policy properly because there will be a risk of legal challenge. We must have the position clarified before we progress the policy. We will have time to consider that through the bill process.

John Wilson: Will the minister give an assurance that he will look at the 2006 procurement regulations to see whether the Scottish Government can amend them to ensure that procurement policies are in line with the promotion of the living wage?

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

Derek Mackay: I am conscious that I am past my time, Presiding Officer.

I am happy to raise John Wilson's point with the cabinet secretary, who will lead on the sustainable procurement bill.

The final point that I want to make is that the bill will influence the £9 billion-worth of public sector spend in Scotland. Surely we can use the bill to ensure that we maximise our contribution to the environment, with sustainable economic development, socially responsible policies, ethical policies and further innovation to meet many of the aspirations that have been expressed in today's debate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Kevin Stewart to wind up the debate on behalf of the committee. Mr Stewart, you have until five o'clock.

16:50

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): First, I thank the committee clerks, those who gave evidence to the committee and the committee members, including the convener and former members Kezia Dugdale and Mark Griffin, whom I know gave a lot to the inquiry. I am glad that most of today's debate has been consensual.

Something that has not been talked about at all today is evidence that the committee took at the beginning of the inquiry that blew away the myth that implementing the living wage would have a detrimental effect on equal pay and single status. The blowing away of that myth and the fact that people were talking about the living wage led to a situation in which more councils felt confident about implementing the living wage. I think that that is why we have seen other councils around the country moving forward on the living wage, and I hope that more will follow.

I will not touch on many of the issues that the convener addressed in his speech, but I will follow up on some issues around procurement. The convener said, as have many others, that the cabinet secretary, Alex Neil, has written to the European Commission on procurement. I will not bore members by going into any depth on the ongoing case of *Rüffert v Niedersachsen*. I think that it may be a while before we get a reply from the European Commission on procurement. However, it would be wise to wait for that reply; I am sure that no member would want to breach European law.

Sarah Boyack said in her speech that there should be a living wage unit in the Government. I refer members to paragraph 135 of the report, which states:

"The Committee notes the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth's view that there is no need for the establishment of a living wage unit within the Scottish Government. The Committee took the view that the co-ordination and mainstreaming of work on the living wage across different strands of government was more important than there being a dedicated unit."

I do not want to get my colleagues John Pentland and Anne McTaggart into trouble, but that view was agreed unanimously by the committee on the basis of the evidence that we heard. I was interested to note that John Pentland seems to have changed his mind today about that.

Margaret Mitchell was part of the unanimous agreement to the report, but she, too, seems to have changed tack today. I will not consider in any depth the comments that she made, but I disagreed with a lot of what she said.

Kezia Dugdale rightly pointed out the issue around CBI Scotland's written evidence, which in one instance quoted only half the evidence to which it referred. In addition, the committee was most disappointed to hear the suggestion that CBI Scotland's written evidence to the inquiry was drafted in London, and it was equally disappointed that CBI Scotland said that nobody was available to come to give oral evidence. That tells me that the folk from CBI Scotland were not going to be able to defend the written evidence that was submitted on their behalf. It is really disappointing when an organisation submits written evidence but is—I think—afraid to come to the committee to defend it. I hope that that does not happen again.

I pay tribute to John Wilson, who, over the years, has made a big contribution to the debate, as director of the Scottish Low Pay Unit and in various other capacities. He rightly pointed out that major companies in London back the living wage, including Barclays Bank. Let us be honest—in some regards, banks do not have a good record of late but, in this case, they have a very good record. That shows that there is in London a coalition of views that to pay the living wage is a good thing.

We know that John Park, too, has a very good record in the matter. I hope that we will be able to move forward on procurement, but we need some positive words from the EU. I would suggest that Mr Park read the case of Rüffert v Niedersachsen, but I am sure that he has better things to do with his time.

John Park: I might read it if I am struggling to sleep tonight.

There are things that previous Governments have done, including the smoking ban, on which there have been differing legal opinions. The same is true of the present Government's desire to bring in minimum unit pricing. Does the member agree that on such matters, it is a question of political will, and that action on the living wage as regards procurement is a matter of political will?

Kevin Stewart: I agree that, in some regards, it is easy to do things if the political will exists, but in this case the evidence that the committee got was so complex that we would be wise to wait and see

what the European Commission says in its response to Alex Neil.

Maureen Watt talked about the purchasing power of households being spread more thinly. That is a good reason why the living wage should be implemented, where possible. She also gave the example of Germany and its wage councils; I think that we could learn a number of lessons from other places.

Anne McTaggart mentioned the hospitality industry. I hope that people in that industry were listening to her speech.

I have to say to Bill Wilson that I dinna remember Dubček in 1968, because that was the year in which I was born. Mr Wilson contributed greatly to the debate.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Walker!

Kevin Stewart: I beg your pardon—I meant Mr Walker. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask members to calm down, please.

Kevin Stewart: John Pentland is right that fairer wages can lead to better physical and mental health—there is evidence on that—but I again point out that his position on a living wage unit represents a change of heart, as it is different from the position that he agreed to sign up to as a member of the committee.

John Mason mentioned his time in London—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask members to be quiet as they enter the chamber.

Kevin Stewart: I am amazed that people in London are trying to raise the living wage to £8.30. I also agree with Mr Mason that tax credits are sometimes a subsidy for private companies that could afford to pay their staff more.

I have missed out a number of members, and I apologise for doing so. All the speeches have been quite positive, apart from the Tory ones—but there is no surprise there. Gavin Brown talked about wasted money, on which he refused to take an intervention from my colleague Mark McDonald. Does Gavin Brown believe that the money that was spent on implementing equal pay and modernisation was wasted money? If he does, then I do not know—the Tories here get more right wing by the day.

Comment has been made on evidence to the committee that, when the living wage has been implemented, there has been greater productivity, less absenteeism and lower staff turnover. Those are three very good reasons why we should do everything possible to implement the living wage. I

hope that more local authorities will take that on board and that we will make progress on procurement.

It is not often that I agree with Boris Johnson, but he is right—the living wage is morally right. It is just a pity that some of his colleagues in this place do not think the same way.

Decision Time

17:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-02156.1, in the name of Claudia Beamish, which seeks to amend motion S4M-02156, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, on climate justice, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S4M-02156.2, in the name of Patrick Harvie, which seeks to amend motion S4M-02156, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, as amended, on climate justice, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The third question is, that motion S4M-02156, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, as amended, on climate justice, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament understands that it is poor and vulnerable people in developing countries who are most affected by climate change and are least equipped to respond to it; supports Scotland acting as an international model of best practice on climate change and promoting the moral, environmental and economic reasons for action by other countries; strongly endorses the opportunity for Scotland to champion climate justice, which places human rights at the heart of global development, ensuring a fair distribution of responsibilities, and welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to ensuring respect for human rights and action to eradicate poverty and inequality, which are at the heart of Scotland's action to combat climate change both at home and internationally and strengthening Scotland's support for developing countries on climate change as part of Scotland's international profile; calls on the Scottish Government to redouble its efforts to reduce emissions and target climate change in Scotland by working with local authorities, public services, business and individual communities to ensure that all are equipped to respond to this growing threat in a manner that puts environmental justice and equality at its heart, developing new and transferable skills and encouraging the sharing of knowledge internationally to benefit the world, and further calls on the Scottish Government to announce a timescale for the creation of a Scotland-wide climate adaptation fund as outlined in the SNP manifesto and for the development of a system of consumption-based reporting targets as specified in section 37 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

BBC Scotland (Job Cuts)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-01745, in the name of Sandra White, on BBC Scotland job cuts. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament expresses concern at the proposed cuts at BBC Scotland's Glasgow headquarters and Edinburgh offices, which will result in one third of BBC Radio Scotland's production staff losing their jobs and the axing of *Scotland at Ten* and *Newsweek*; believes that, at this time of historic political debate on the future of Scotland, these cuts are counterproductive to the aims of a thorough and informed debate; acknowledges calls for these proposals to be explored in more detail with an aim to producing alternative future models for broadcasting in Scotland, and hopes that any final decision will address these concerns.

17:02

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):

I acknowledge the dedication and commitment of BBC staff across the country to delivering high-quality journalism. From television to radio broadcasting, they do a great job with what we have come to learn is very little. I make special mention of the poor souls at "Democracy Live", who have the unenviable task of sitting through and sifting through every meeting of the Parliament and its committees. Our thoughts are with them.

I cannot say it too clearly: the work that BBC staff do is terrific. That is why the proposals, how staff are being treated and what they are being asked to do are a huge kick in the teeth. The delivering quality first project—that is true Birtspeak—aims to cut £1.9 million, or 16 per cent, from BBC Scotland's news and current affairs budget over five years. In the first tranche of the cuts, a third of BBC Radio Scotland production staff will lose their jobs, which is staggering.

On top of that, programmes such as "Scotland at Ten" and "Newsweek Scotland" will be axed, which will lead to a reduction in overall quality, if not in the amount of politics coverage on Radio Scotland. The proposed cuts look bad enough, but the public are not being given all the facts. Four editorial posts have already been lost, which has led to a situation in which the programmes that we are told will replace "Scotland at Ten" and "Newsweek" are already seriously understaffed.

We are told that the rationale behind the cuts is the licence-fee freeze that the Westminster Government imposed, and that Scotland is just shouldering its share of the overall cuts. That is simply not true; Scotland is being singled out for

deeper and faster cuts than will be made anywhere else in the UK, which is worrying. BBC Radio Scotland's budget is due to be cut by 6.6 per cent and the budget for the Gaelic radio service is due to be cut by 6.7 per cent.

However, BBC Radio 4's budget will not be cut, but will remain at £99.5 million. The budget for BBC Radio Wales will be cut by 3.2 per cent and for BBC Radio Ulster it will be cut by 1.6 per cent. BBC local radio in England will have a 4.2 per cent cut. I simply cannot understand why BBC Radio Scotland should receive larger cuts than BBC radio in any other part of the United Kingdom, especially at this time of unprecedented political debate on the future of our country. Although the political parties are unable to agree on which way to vote in the 2014 independence referendum, they all agree on the need for a full and frank debate on what independence will mean for the people of Scotland. The cuts will simply not help that.

The way in which the BBC is carrying out the cuts is equally troubling. It has announced changes, but it has not said what the changes will look like, and has given no details on the new two-hour Saturday "Good Morning Scotland". There are fears that other programmes will be scrapped or downgraded because of the reduction in resources. There is also concern over the fact that the cuts are being rushed through on day 1 of what is a five-year strategy that is inappropriately called delivering quality first. It is no secret that the National Union of Journalists believes that the cuts to BBC Scotland's radio news are fundamentally at odds with the BBC Scotland management's stated aims to

"protect and enhance the quality of our core News and Current Affairs output across all platforms"

during what we could call the "delivering quality second" process.

I have received many letters from constituents asking the Scottish Government to make representations regarding the proposals and to ask the BBC to reconsider its current approach and proposals. For example, many people have questioned how axing a one-hour weekly show such as "Newsweek Scotland" could save much money when the proposal is to replace it with a two-hour "GMS". Those questions are from listeners—the consumers—who are the very people that the BBC should listen to and serve.

As John Boothman, the head of news and current affairs for BBC Scotland, proudly pointed out when he gave evidence to the Education and Culture Committee in January, the corporation's radio news coverage has an audience of 450,000 listeners, which is up 30,000 over five years. "Scotland at Ten" is listened to by 100,000 people

each week, but what thought has been given to the provision of public broadcasting for that large amount of listeners? The BBC has a duty to provide for those 100,000 listeners. By removing the programme, it is failing in that duty.

To avoid further challenges, the BBC needs to issue clear evidence, at the earliest possible opportunity, of how the change does not contravene the guidance. At that meeting, Mr Boothman went on to laud the fact that BBC Radio Scotland broadcasts 63 hours of news and current affairs a week, which is well above the quota that is set by the BBC trust of 43 hours a week. For the life of me, I cannot see where those 63 hours come from, as that is a staggering nine hours a day. If Mr Boothman is tuning in or watching today, I would be grateful if he could let me and others know about that.

My colleague Joan McAlpine, who will speak later in the debate and who is a member of the Education and Culture Committee, had some pertinent points for the head of news and current affairs. She asked him whether he had made any representations to the BBC nationally regarding the scale of the proposed cuts in Scotland, given the importance of the 2014 Scottish referendum on independence.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Sandra White: I am sorry, Christine, but I do not have time.

In reply, a rather reluctant and unusually coy Mr Boothman eventually suggested that Ms McAlpine would be better off speaking to his boss, Ken MacQuarrie, implying that the issue was above his pay grade—which, incidentally is £200,000 a year.

At the same meeting, Iain Macwhirter—I do not know whether he will like this, but I will say it—that sage and well-respected commentator, made the point that, when he raised the issue of the historical underfunding of broadcasting in Scotland, he was told that because Scotland has only a tenth of the population of the United Kingdom, programmes are made at a tenth of the cost. I was absolutely dumbfounded to hear that. It speaks volumes about how broadcasting in Scotland is viewed by senior executives in the BBC. To put it in context, what is being said is that, as Scotland has only a tenth of the population, programmes can be roughly a tenth of the quality. If I were to go to hospital or to access social services or any other public service, I would want the same service, no matter how much of the population there is in Scotland.

Staff are concerned about their future, because cuts have been announced but they do not know who the cuts will fall on. As far as I am aware, the

staff have been instructed to attend boards in Glasgow next month, but they do not know what those boards will do or what they will consist of. People do not know whether they will be pitted against one another, asked to explain why they would be better for the job than a colleague or simply told that they had better consider voluntary redundancy or possibly face a worse fate. They do not know. Unsurprisingly, that is having a huge impact on morale in the organisation. It is no way to treat the dedicated workers who have, time and again, shown their value and commitment to the BBC and to one another.

The delivering quality first strategy is seriously flawed and we, in this Parliament, need to look seriously at what is happening in the BBC. If the higher-up staff at BBC Scotland fail to listen to our views, we will need to look seriously at the role of the BBC in Scotland.

17:10

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I will speak quite quickly because there is a lot to say and very little time to say it in.

I congratulate my colleague Sandra White on securing tonight's members' business debate. I share the concerns of many members that these wholly unnecessary cuts will have a negative impact on the news and current affairs outputs in Scotland. I was frankly amazed to learn that the proposed cuts are larger than any cuts that have been proposed for the rest of the United Kingdom, which is simply unacceptable. We need to know why Scotland is being singled out in such a manner. It will mean a loss of the quality jobs that are being done expertly, and a loss of quality programming for the population of this country.

Since its foundation on 18 October 1922, the BBC has, overall, done a great job in the past century, which has seen huge political, cultural and technological change. If the BBC could handle those changes, why is it that, in the 21st century, it is said to be unable to respond to the changes in the political make-up of the UK? The advent of devolution in Scotland and Wales has undoubtedly thrown up challenges for the BBC in the way that it reports news and current affairs from Scotland and from outwith Scotland but, again and again, it has shown itself to be unable to respond, to evolve and, ultimately, to represent effectively those who pay the widely reported licence fee. That is not the fault of the people who work at the BBC, but the fault of the board.

As Aesop said, it is better to bend than to break. I agree with that wise man. The BBC board should bend to the will of the Scottish people before the BBC's commitment to the service that it provides to the people is broken.

Perhaps a halfway house could have been found. The Calman commission, the mother of the Scotland Bill that is currently snaking its way through the Westminster Parliament, proposed just that in recommendation 5.4:

"The responsibility for the appointment of the Scottish member of the BBC Trust should be exercised by Scottish Ministers, subject to the normal public appointments process."

Let us remind ourselves that the commission was, in the words of its founders, set up to find a way to make devolution work better for the people of Scotland. The Scottish Parliament's Scotland Bill Committee recommended that powers that are broadly in line with those suggested by the Calman commission should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament to regulate public service broadcasting aims. Has Westminster taken up those recommendations? The simple answer is no. What does that leave us with? A public service broadcaster that is not responsible to the people to whom it broadcasts and is totally out of touch with what is required in modern-day Scotland.

Ms White picked up on evidence that was given to the Scottish Parliament's Education and Culture Committee. In the same meeting, Iain Macwhirter went on to say that the set-up is no longer acceptable. He said:

"We will have a referendum. We will have either independence or a move further towards a federal arrangement. Either way, we will have a different political and constitutional environment. I see no evidence that the BBC in the UK is even beginning to recognise that."—*[Official Report, Education and Culture Committee, 24 January 2012; c 654.]*

Even the former BBC chief, Jeremy Peat, has added his backing to the calls for Scotland to have more broadcasting powers. He said that the

"case for more and more production out of London remains and the pressure for increased devolution of programming must continue".

Everyone seems to get the message and most of us seem to agree that the BBC needs to adapt to the changing political climate at this juncture in Scotland's history and, even more than that, it needs to serve its listeners and viewers in Scotland.

Lord Reith, the first director general of the BBC, was born and raised in my constituency of Glasgow Anniesland. To paraphrase him, if nation shall speak unto nation, they should first and foremost have a functioning broadcasting service. It is time for the BBC in Scotland to get with the programme.

17:15

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): Like Bill Kidd, I congratulate

Sandra White on securing this debate, and I join her in her praise of the production staff at the BBC.

Ms White is right to point out the value that we should all give to informed, independent broadcasting, particularly at a time when the future of our country is being discussed, sometimes quite hotly. We know that more people than ever rely on the broadcast media for news and current affairs, so it is important that the service they get from our biggest broadcaster is as comprehensive as possible.

I lodged an amendment to Sandra White's motion because it did not emphasise enough the concerns about job losses and their possible effect on both the quality of the BBC's output generally and on individual programmes, and I still believe that to be the case. I am sure that colleagues will have received the briefing from the BBC, which relates directly to the motion before us and seeks to correct certain inaccuracies in it. We are told that a third of BBC Radio Scotland production staff will not lose their jobs, but that that figure relates only to radio production staff employed wholly within the news and current affairs operation, and that the total number will be about 11 over some five years, although that is still a matter for discussion. We are also told that about 30 posts in total will be lost over the next five years out of a workforce of some 240, based in nine centres throughout Scotland.

The situation of "Newsweek Scotland" and "Scotland at Ten" has also been explained, and it would appear that although "Newsweek Scotland" will no longer be broadcast, "Good Morning Scotland" will extend its reach into Saturdays, increasing from one to three hours the amount of news and current affairs on that day of the week. "Scotland at Ten" will end completely, but apparently there will be additional daytime coverage.

Although it might be possible to give some explanation for the changes to programming, it appears that staff members who are fortunate enough—I use "fortunate" advisedly—to retain a job, will be required to do more with less. Furthermore, although the explanation might be absolutely correct, I, like Ms White, do not see how the changes that the BBC says will happen will produce the kind of savings that BBC Scotland is being asked to make. Of course, the changes and cuts are necessary entirely because the licence fee has been frozen, and I am genuinely interested to hear from the cabinet secretary what the Scottish Government's view is of that freeze.

The BBC needs to engage more with its staff and the trade unions, to minimise job losses and protect the conditions under which staff work. If the services of some members of staff are

dispensed with, there will inevitably be more pressure on those who remain. The BBC has a duty of care to its employees, both to those it currently has and to the reduced number it expects to have in a few years' time.

The BBC must also explain the measures to this Parliament and the viewing public, and reassure us that the quality for which the BBC is renowned will be maintained in Scotland. We should expect nothing less of the BBC; it is a public service broadcaster, and one that is renowned throughout the world. At a time when our future is under such discussion and our debates and our world of politics are under such scrutiny, we need a comprehensive and independent broadcaster that can explain to the people of Scotland exactly what the issues are and bring to them a point of view that everyone recognises as independent.

17:19

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank Sandra White for bringing this debate to the chamber, but I have to say that my briefing differs a little from hers. I express my admiration for the tremendous work of the BBC, which, because of its high standards and emphasis on impartiality, has become not only a great national asset but an important British cultural export. With that in mind, it is right to support the BBC's great work and to strive to ensure that its international standing and reputation are maintained.

That said, it is also imperative to balance support for public broadcasting against the need to ensure that the BBC is run efficiently and with value for the licence-fee payer in mind. We are undoubtedly living in tough economic times. As a result, funds are being squeezed across a range of services and broadcasting is no exception.

The UK Government's decision to freeze the cost of the licence fee until 2016 has meant that the BBC has been forced to suffer cuts in its budget. I am not against the decision to freeze the licence fee. It is right for the Government to recognise that all budgets, including household budgets, are being stretched like never before.

Sandra White: Will the member give way?

Nanette Milne: I am sorry—I do not have time to take interventions.

A sad consequence of the budget cuts is that jobs will be lost, although I believe that the numbers will not be those that Sandra White states in her motion. Job losses are not unique to the BBC, and they are certainly not solely confined to the BBC in Scotland. When businesses across the country are laying off staff, it would be unrealistic to expect broadcasting to be immune from that.

The situation is undoubtedly unfortunate for the individuals in question. It also puts extra pressure on the BBC as an organisation to strive to ensure that the quality and professionalism of its output do not diminish as a result. I am certain that the BBC will be able to meet the high standards that it sets for itself. The chairman of the BBC trust, Lord Patten, has made clear his belief that it is

"perfectly possible to run a great public ... broadcaster"

even in the face of budget cuts. I was heartened that BBC Scotland's head of news and current affairs, John Boothman, maintained to the Education and Culture Committee that job losses and budget cuts would not negatively impact on quality or result in a decrease in broadcast hours. That commitment is welcome.

Moreover, given that the BBC and the media as a whole are increasingly moving to the online sphere, that will inevitably have an impact on production staff levels.

It is encouraging that, despite cuts to budgets across all the UK's regions, funding for television broadcasting in Scotland has risen in recent years and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Under the network supply review, spending on network television production in Scotland has doubled since 2007 and will continue to rise, even when budgets in London and other parts of England are being reduced. The BBC has undertaken to grow network TV production in Scotland to 6.1 per cent of eligible spend this year and to 8.6 per cent by 2016. Such an increase should be applauded.

As for BBC Radio Scotland, it is unfortunate that "Newsweek Scotland", of which I am a great fan, and "Scotland at Ten" face the axe. However, it is reassuring that those cuts will be more than offset by a new two-hour slot on Saturday mornings for "Good Morning Scotland" and an increase in the station's daily political output. That will go some way toward guaranteeing that Radio Scotland maintains a consistent and high level of public broadcasting.

I fully agree with Sandra White that this is a historic time in Scotland's political history. As a referendum on our nation's future will take place in the next few years, it is essential to have a public broadcaster that ensures that all sides of the argument are heard and that the debate is reported and presented impartially and fairly. I have no doubt that, even in the wake of budget and staff cuts, the BBC will rise to those challenges, especially given the standard of its political journalism.

17:23

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Sandra White on securing the debate. I support her comments about and praise for the work of BBC staff in Scotland.

I will look at the subject in a wider historical context. Sandra White comprehensively outlined the effect on staff and the percentage cuts that are affecting us now. If Scotland had been generously treated when it came to slicing up the broadcasting cake, there might be a justification for prudent housekeeping now, but the opposite is the case. Scotland generates 8.8 per cent of BBC income in licence fees but receives only 5.7 per cent of the revenues that are raised.

The BBC's Scotland-only budget is £102 million per annum, and it will be reduced to £86 million per annum by 2017. That is part of a worrying historical trend that is damaging to our national life, democratic participation and cultural development. The BBC's Audience Council Scotland reported last year that the BBC should show more, not less, Scottish news and offer deeper analysis in its coverage. The Audience Council Scotland report said that there was a continued bias towards news stories on the network that affect only England. That is striking even to those from outside Scotland. It was put rather well by the respected "Channel Four News" journalist Krishnan Guru-Murthy in his blog last year. He wrote:

"I'd forgotten how English the British media is. The inevitable concentration in TV news programmes is on English concerns, English politics, English culture. Having spent just a couple of weeks north of the border it seems blindingly obvious that the status quo doesn't make sense anymore."

Far from cutting posts in news and current affairs in Scotland, the BBC should be expanding them. As others from across the political parties have said, just as our nation enters a period of intense debate about its future, the media spaces in which we can conduct that debate are shrinking. Why is BBC Radio Scotland's most analytical and intelligent current affairs show, "Newsweek Scotland", facing the axe? Why is the only Scottish opt-out on Radio 1, "Introducing in Scotland", which showcases unsigned bands, being pulled and re-presented as a UK-wide programme from London? Why are programmes that have become part of the aural fabric of Scotland, such as the Janice Forsyth show, being unceremoniously dumped despite audience protests?

Janice Forsyth has been described as a national treasure. Can we imagine Radio 4 dumping what it considers to be national treasures, such as "Just a Minute" or "The Archers"? On the same tack, can we imagine it dumping "From Our Own Correspondent", which could be compared to

"Newsweek Scotland"? Of course, Radio 4's budget is not being cut, because Mark Thompson has described it as the jewel in the crown of the BBC. Its budget of about £100 million a year is being protected. To put that in context, it is more than the whole of BBC Scotland's broadcasting budget for our country after the cuts.

Sandra White referred to Iain Macwhirter comments at the Education and Culture Committee. I was chatting to a journalist who also has experience of working for the BBC in both Scotland and London, on "Good Morning Scotland" and "Today". He mentioned that more money is spent on flowers for the "Today" green room than the entire GMS budget. I have no means of knowing whether that story is apocryphal or accurate, but I do know that the BBC has never made available figures that would allow us to compare those and similar programmes. Such an exercise is called benchmarking, and if it was conducted in a transparent way, it would be clear just how unbalanced is the BBC commitment to delivering quality.

I thank Sandra White for her remarks on my cross-examination of Mr Boothman at the Education and Culture Committee. I should add that I put the same question to Mr Boothman's boss, Mr MacQuarrie, when he was before the Scotland Bill Committee. I asked him whether he had argued against the cuts because Scotland was a special case, and he was unable to answer, too. I reflect on the title "Delivering Quality First". It is clear that Scotland is not first in line when it comes to quality treatment.

17:28

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I, too, congratulate Sandra White on securing this evening's debate. I know that the future of BBC services in Scotland greatly concerns her as she has raised it at First Minister's question time, and indeed she raised it this afternoon. I am glad that we have now been able to discuss the matter at more length. I was pleased to hear a degree of cross-party support for the maintenance and enhancement of BBC services in Scotland, and also the recognition from members throughout the chamber of the quality of the staff. I share that sentiment.

I turn to a point that Bill Kidd raised. When the Prime Minister came to Scotland recently, he was kind enough to remind us that Reith of the BBC—Lord Reith of Stonehaven—was a Scot. The Scottish Government was already mindful of that fact, and mindful not just of his origins but of his vision of public service broadcasting.

In a particularly good speech, Patricia Ferguson raised the issue of the licence fee and the source of the problem. Had the coalition Government been more mindful of that vision when it imposed the current licence-fee settlement, which was negotiated secretly over 48 hours, we might not be having this debate. I have made that point repeatedly in the Parliament and directly to ministers, both in person and in writing. That is one of the reasons why, in the current Scotland Bill discussions, we proposed to include in the bill a power of consultation on the licence fee.

We come here not to criticise the BBC—although some members have done so—but to protect it. We recognise that the BBC has been placed in a difficult position by the cuts that have been made by the UK Government. Indeed, even as the Scottish Government absorbs the effects of cuts to its funding, we understand that that is also the case for the BBC. Just as the challenge for us is to respond to our financial situation in a way that maximises public benefit, preserves front-line services and protects priorities, so the BBC faces a similar challenge. Just as the Scottish Government expects the Parliament to recognise that the overall position under current constitutional arrangements is forced upon us and to hold us vigorously to account on how we work within those constraints, so it is entirely right to challenge the BBC on how it works within its financial constraints. Joan McAlpine's point about the BBC not touching Radio 4 because it is the jewel in the crown gets to the nub of the issues that were raised by several members, including Bill Kidd and Sandra White, regarding the way in which radio, particularly, is being treated in Scotland compared with how it is being treated in England.

The BBC has approached its response to the cuts in a systematic fashion through its "Delivering Quality First" consultation, to which the Scottish Government has sent a response. Patricia Ferguson talked about the importance of the quality of output, and that was very much at the heart of what we put in our submission. We were grateful to Lord Patten, the chairman of the BBC trust, for the opportunity to discuss that when he met me and the First Minister last month. We look forward to seeing the BBC trust's response to the consultation in due course.

It is concerning, therefore, that the BBC both in Scotland and more generally is making decisions in advance of the BBC trust reaching a formal position in the light of the responses to its consultation. It is also concerning that, when such decisions are made, they do not always match the rhetoric of "Delivering Quality First".

In the final paragraphs of the introduction to the Scottish Government's response to that paper, we say:

"Turning to how the BBC will operate within these constraints, few—if any, and certainly not the Scottish Government—would argue with the broad ambition that is contained within the five pillars of proposed editorial strategy identified by the Director General: seeking the best journalism in the world; ambitious original drama and comedy; inspiration and commitment in the fields of knowledge, music and culture; outstanding services for children; and events that bring people together."

Those are all laudable aims. However, it is vital that the detail of the BBC's proposals matches those ideals and that they are met specifically for Scotland as for the broader network—a point that was made by a number of members.

Patricia Ferguson: Those aims and the items outlined in the pillars by the cabinet secretary are laudable, and I am sure that we could all sign up to them. However, all those things cost money. Does the cabinet secretary support the freeze in the licence fee? At the end of the day, we will either have an increase in the licence fee or face the consequences.

Fiona Hyslop: That ship has sailed—unfortunately, within 48 hours—and the renegotiation will not take place until 2015-16. Either we will have the full powers of independence to allow us to make decisions about broadcasting or, at the very least, we will need to have a consultation on the negotiation as it proceeds. Patricia Ferguson is absolutely right about the price of the cut and the freeze, and we should have been part of those discussions. I agree with her that there could have been other solutions, and the effects of the freeze should have been addressed.

The Scottish Government's response continues:

"The emphasis on delivery in the title 'Delivering Quality First' is, like the Director General's five pillars, wholly laudable. The concern is the lack of detail to demonstrate that the BBC's proposals will, indeed, deliver those pillars to the standard of quality to be expected."

As more detail emerges, that concern has grown rather than diminished. We debated "Introducing in Scotland" in January. However, the issue is not about a specific programme, excellent though it is, but about preserving the opportunities that it offers to our gifted young people and the "inspiration and commitment" to music and culture that it shows—to use the words from one of the director general's five pillars.

The challenge is similar in relation to programmes such as the Janice Forsyth show, which I think is the best show on the radio, and "Mary Ann Kennedy's Global Gathering", which is described on the BBC's website as

"a world music show with a uniquely Scottish perspective".

The challenge for the BBC is to demonstrate how that kind of unique Scottish perspective in music and culture can be maintained. I was encouraged to see that BBC Scotland's brief for the debate mentioned a continuing role for those presenters. I hope that more detail will follow soon.

I might be thought to have a vested interest in encouraging the BBC to pay particular attention to Scottish news and current affairs, but no more so than any member of this Parliament or, indeed, any citizen of this country. The First Minister and I had a very positive meeting with Lord Patten. We all agreed that the BBC must be properly equipped and staffed to cover Scottish news and current affairs fully at this vital point in Scotland's history. I think that every one of us in the chamber can agree that that is imperative.

That applies both to factual reporting and to providing the opportunities for wider reflection and debate that a programme such as "Newsweek Scotland" currently delivers. A point that was well made by Bill Kidd is that the need for information on and analysis of Scotland's constitutional debate applies not only to citizens of this country but to citizens of the world. Scotland is now subject to international attention as never before. That is a challenge, but it is also an opportunity that the BBC and other public service broadcasters need to live up to.

Let the word go out from the chamber that Scotland and the world look to our public service broadcasters to match the needs of this historic moment.

I will send a copy of the *Official Report* of the debate to Mark Thompson and to Ken MacQuarrie to reiterate our concern about the BBC's proposals.

Meeting closed at 17:36.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice to SPICe.

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