



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 22 September 2011

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Scottish Parliament

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

Common Fisheries Policy

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S4M-00904, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the common fisheries policy. We will be extremely generous with time, and I encourage members to take interventions. Mr Lochhead has a generous 14 minutes.

09:15

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): I thank you for being so generous, Presiding Officer. I do not need much encouragement to take interventions.

We may be a small nation in the north-west corner of Europe, but we are central to European fisheries. Our nation's identity, culture and heritage and, of course, our economy are shaped by the seas that surround us. We are responsible for Europe's sixth largest fishing grounds, which range across some of the European Union's richest waters. The fish in our waters have given many generations sustenance, and they now underpin a modern and innovative industry that is worth hundreds of millions of pounds to Scotland's economy. Our high-quality seafood products are renowned worldwide and are in high demand in shops and restaurants all over the globe.

The men who go to sea put their lives on the line to bring food to our tables, and we all know that many have paid the ultimate sacrifice in doing so. They battle not only the seas, the wind and the cold to bring us that bounty, but a bewildering and often contradictory tangle of European regulation. Despite that challenge, our fishermen land more than 70 per cent of the United Kingdom quota and almost a tenth of the total EU marine fish catch.

Thanks to its resilience, our fishing industry is performing well. In fact, the value of catches landed by Scottish vessels has consistently held up. The second-highest value achieved this decade was achieved last year. Mackerel and langoustine remain our two most valuable species; together, their value approaches £200 million. Newer fisheries are also doing well. We have seen, for instance, an 86 per cent increase in the value of squid landed by Scottish vessels as a result of both greater volumes and higher prices.

Alongside our sea fisheries, Scotland has, of course, a well-deserved reputation for producing healthy and high-quality farmed fish and shellfish. Scottish aquaculture is thriving and it continues to grow. Atlantic salmon production is now worth more than £400 million. We are the largest producer in the EU and the third largest globally, and salmon now accounts for more than a third of Scottish food exports.

It is not just about salmon. The value of farmed blue mussels has gone up by more than 50 per cent, to £6.7 million. That is yet another new growth sector. I am sure that many members who represent fishing communities are aware that our fleet, onshore processors, aquaculture and auxiliary sectors are hugely valuable to Scotland and our communities. That is why we need to safeguard our stocks and our vital fishing industry for future generations.

Ever since the Tories deemed our fishing industry expendable, took us into the common fisheries policy, and gave away our fishing rights into the bargain, Scotland's fishing communities and our fish stocks have paid a heavy price.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member check his history? He will then realise that although we became party to the common fisheries policy under the Thatcher Government in 1983, it was as part of an agreement that was signed in 1978 by the preceding Labour Government.

Richard Lochhead: I know that Alex Johnstone and some of his Conservative colleagues are trying to disassociate themselves from the Conservative Party's history, but every Scot and everyone who lives in a coastal community is well aware that it was the Tory party that sold Scotland out back in the 1970s and 1980s.

We must use the opportunity of the current review to right some of the wrongs. Negotiations on a new fisheries policy will take place across Europe between now and 2013 and the outcome will determine the future viability of our fishing communities.

Today, I hope and expect that we can all agree that the CFP has been an unmitigated disaster. It has been a horror story since the day it was written. Fish stocks have been slashed, vital jobs have vanished and communities have been cut up. The very people who have to cope with its consequences are disenfranchised from the decision-making process. Our fishermen, who struggle day in, day out with the byzantine regulations will certainly agree with that, as do I and the 27 other ministers who have to sit in Brussels into the early hours every December attempting to decide mesh sizes for individual fisheries from the Baltic to the Bay of Biscay.

We all know that the CFP is too centralised and rigid, too focused on enforcing compliance, too slow to react to developing situations—which is extremely bad news for the complex situation of Scotland's mixed fishery—and far too complex for most people to understand, not least those who are expected to implement and abide by it.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I agree with a lot of what the cabinet secretary has said about the deficiencies of the current system, which are recognised across Europe. I am less clear, however, about the situation with regard to support for a more regionalised model. There seems to be a breakdown in the agreement between member states. Could the cabinet secretary update the chamber on the discussions that he has been having, through the UK and bilaterally, about where areas of agreement on a more regionalised model might emerge?

Richard Lochhead: That is an important point, and I will deal with it when I address some of the key issues in the CFP reform debate. I will say, at this point, that we are still waiting to hear some of the proposals from the European Commission, which will give us some indication of what it thinks is legally possible—and, perhaps, legally less possible. We will take a strong view once we have that information.

Crucially, the CFP has failed to protect our stocks. The Commission has identified 75 per cent of European stocks as being overfished. We could not get a better recognition of the failure of the CFP to achieve its core objective. In recent years, and against that challenging background, Scotland has shown leadership and a determination to solve problems as far as we can within the constraints that are set by Brussels. We have brought together everyone who is involved in our fisheries—the Government, scientists, the industry, the non-governmental organisations and the fishing crews—in order to work together for the good of Scotland. We have put stakeholders at the heart of policy making; we have provided incentives for stock conservation measures; and we have challenged conventional thinking with innovation and imagination. Europe can learn from our experience.

It is important that we have introduced measures to tackle the abhorrent practice of fish discards under the policy of catch less, land more. The discarding of high-quality and high-value fish is an absolute disgrace. The way in which the CFP currently operates fish quotas is a recipe for discards. In 2010, perfectly good, high-quality white fish worth more than £30 million to the Scottish fleet were thrown back into the sea, dead. I know that we all agree that that is an appalling waste of a valuable food resource.

Liam McArthur: Will the cabinet secretary take another intervention?

Richard Lochhead: Yes.

Liam McArthur: I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for taking another intervention, in the spirit that the Presiding Officer outlined.

I agree with what the cabinet secretary said about the economic and environmental madness of discards. Does he agree, however, that it would be helpful to make a distinction between the situation that he is talking about and live discards, which happen routinely as part of the inshore shellfish fishery?

Richard Lochhead: Liam McArthur makes a good point and illustrates how we have to be careful as we take this debate forward. Of course, the statistic that I just gave the chamber concerned fish that are thrown back into the sea dead. That distinction, which involves different fisheries in Scotland, has been made.

The fact that the situation that we are discussing is a by-product of a policy that is designed to conserve stocks is perhaps the biggest disgrace of all. There is now international agreement that tackling discards is a priority, and people are talking about imposing a ban on the practice. Of course we will make the case that, if we genuinely want to deal with the issue, we cannot have a ban without having a plan. In Scotland we have worked with the industry and the NGOs to take action. For example, under our innovative real-time closure schemes, areas that have concentrations of cod, for instance, are closed to fishing until the fish have dispersed, which lowers mortality. We have not stopped there. We have developed more selective gear measures in many different fisheries and the catch quota scheme, which focuses on what is caught and not what is landed, is operating. The scheme reduced discards of North Sea cod by 30 per cent in 2009-10.

On the west coast, the science is recommending a 410 per cent increase in quota. I think that all members know that the west coast has had its fair share of pain in recent years, so I hope that the science gives grounds for optimism for the future. It is imperative that the Commission follows the science, because to do otherwise would lead to more massive discarding of viable fish on the west coast of Scotland.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Does the cabinet secretary acknowledge that the Commission is proposing that quotas should automatically be cut by 25 per cent for stock for which no science is available? Given the massive implications for the Scottish industry of that proposal becoming a firm decision, how will he approach the matter?

Richard Lochhead: Tavish Scott makes a point that is important to his constituency, given the high-value stocks that would be caught by the discriminatory rule whereby if the scientific evidence was not regarded as being up to the Commission's standards there would be an automatic 25 per cent cut in the quota. Such an approach is not justified. We have expressed concern about and are resisting the proposal. I assure Tavish Scott that the issue is high on our agenda for the forthcoming negotiations.

Innovation is the hallmark of fisheries management in Scotland, which shows what can be achieved when we can take decisions closer to home. The one-size-fits-all micromanagement by Brussels of every aspect of fisheries needs to stop. For as long as we are part of the common fisheries policy, the CFP's role must be limited to the setting of targets and a framework in which decision making by Brussels is kept to a minimum. Member states must be left to work together, where it makes sense to do so, to manage fisheries in partnership with our fishermen and other stakeholders.

Through our good work in Scotland, I have seen that when everyone who is involved feels that they own the problem they also feel that they own the solution. That unlocks creativity, honesty and fresh thinking about problem solving. The first step to solving the problems of the CFP can be taken only if the Commission trusts member states and returns more power to them to run their fisheries at local and regional level.

The EU's centralising tendency is demonstrated in some of the proposals around aquaculture. The Commission has made clear that aquaculture will be a key pillar of the reformed CFP. Scotland has a diverse and thriving aquaculture industry, which produces some of our most prized products. The industry is doing great things, with support through the European fisheries fund but without overdetailed regulation and micromanagement from Brussels. As part of the debate about the future of the CFP and the fisheries fund, we must ensure that a framework is in place to enable the continued growth of an economically viable, competitive and sustainable Scottish aquaculture industry. What we do not want or need is an extension of the centralised approach that has worked so poorly for the sea fisheries sector during the past few decades.

The Commission's alarming proposal on transferable fishing quotas illustrates many of the existing problems. The Commission has identified as a problem the number of fishing vessels and has proposed a measure to reduce them. Our view is that an approach that allows the people who have the deepest pockets to swallow up the industry is not what Scotland's diverse fishing

communities need. The Commission views transferable fishing quotas as a way of cutting capacity, but in Scotland we have already reduced our fleet and the EU should recognise and reward that. Indeed, thanks to the industry's sacrifices, three quarters of our stocks in our waters are being fished sustainably.

I want to be very clear. The introduction of transferable fishing quotas for Scotland could, in time, spell doom for our fishing communities. This Government will not allow a situation to arise that could mean that future generations will not be able to fish the stocks in their own waters. I note that the proposed regulation allows Governments to recall and redistribute individual transferable quotas after a 15-year notice period. I think that we can all agree that 15 years is a long time. What capacity would be left in Scotland to begin fishing again after the quotas were back in place—if we could find the cash to buy them back from foreign-based multinationals?

The UK Government appears to be sympathetic to quota trading, but Scotland has far more to lose than the rest of the UK, where much of the industry is already foreign owned. That is why Scotland needs a strong voice in the negotiations, so that our case can be heard loud and clear on that and other issues. That means that we must have appropriate representation in Brussels. Even under devolution, Scotland's voice could be louder.

The UK Government keeps telling us that it is relaxed about Scottish ministers speaking at council meetings on the UK's behalf, until we ask to do so—then the UK Government says no. Under this Administration, Scotland has spoken only once for the UK in fisheries negotiations, and even that was only after the First Minister had to ask the Prime Minister to intervene to overturn the initial refusal by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

I assure the Parliament that I intend to ask the UK Government for a greater role in the CFP negotiations, to safeguard our interests. That is not about picking a fight with London; it is about making Scotland's voice heard and focusing on the issues that matter to Scotland's fishing communities and on the industry's future. Scotland is part of the UK—for the time being—so it is obvious that it is important that we work constructively with the UK Government to ensure that it promotes Scotland's interests. We will of course continue to do that.

The UK and the Commission tell us that they want radical change. They must not take the easy route of sticking with the status quo—that happened in the past and must not happen again. We have heard many fine words from them, but now it is time to deliver.

Scotland will remain active in Europe to pursue reform. I have met and discussed the issues with the European commissioner, among others, and I will work with all parties that have an interest in putting the failed CFP behind us—the Commission, the European Parliament, Westminster and other member states included.

If Europe blows the golden opportunity to sail our fishing communities into calmer waters, the consequences will be dire for fisheries conservation, our fishing communities and our industry in Scotland. I know that everyone in the Parliament wants the best outcome from the negotiations for our fishing communities and our marine environment.

Our priorities will be the return of decision making to Scotland to protect our fish stocks, to really tackle discards and to protect our fishing rights for future generations. The Government will strain every sinew and use every means in its power to consign the current CFP to the dustbin of history and replace it with a policy that provides a better future for Scotland's fishermen.

I commend the motion to the Parliament. I move,

That the Parliament supports the Scottish Government in its efforts to achieve the best possible outcome for Scotland during negotiations on the future of the failed Common Fisheries Policy in order to protect Scotland's historic fishing rights, protect fish stocks, tackle discards, support Scotland's aquaculture industry without burdening it with unnecessary regulation, promote Scottish seafood and give greater power to fishing nations to manage their fisheries and protect the marine environment.

The Presiding Officer: I call Elaine Murray, who has a generous 10 minutes.

09:32

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): As the cabinet secretary said, the widespread consensus has been that the common fisheries policy has not worked. It has not produced sustainable fisheries—many are still overfished; it has not worked for the EU market or for fishermen, many of whom cannot make a living; and it has been criticised by fishermen, environmentalists, politicians and now the Commission. The policy has presented particular problems for the Scottish fleet—for example, the maximum sustainable yield for single species has been extremely problematic and unreliable in mixed fisheries, in which many of our fleet operate.

I apologise to Alex Fergusson for my amendment being picked, because I know that he submitted one similar to mine. I hope that he will find it possible to agree to our amendment.

I am slightly surprised that much of the cabinet secretary's speech was about problems with the

current policy and that he spoke a little less about his reaction to the EU's reform proposals, which were much anticipated. In July, Commissioner Damanaki outlined the basic principles, which I will run through, as we have not said much about them. The measures are: bringing all stocks to sustainable levels by 2015, which is a bit of a big ask; taking an ecosystem approach that is based on the best scientific advice; phasing out discarding over three years; introducing individual tradeable catches in member states; providing better information for consumers; using solutions that are tailored to regional and local needs and which involve a stronger role for fishermen's organisations in making economic decisions about the fleet size and market supply; restricting financial support only to initiatives that promote "smart and sustainable growth"; and including aquaculture in the reformed policy, as the cabinet secretary said.

The European Parliament's Fisheries Committee has yet to commence consideration of the proposals. The allocation of reports was delayed at the committee's meeting on 31 July because of an argument that grew up between the groups on that committee about the distribution of reports—who could bid for the reports was apparently discussed. The reports were to be allocated at the further meeting last Monday, but that had—unfortunately—to be cancelled because of a power cut that resulted from a fire in a transformer. I hope that the committee has better luck in beginning to consider the proposals in the future.

As always with the common fisheries policy, the new proposals have not met with universal approval, although there has been a general welcome for the direction of travel. Of course, it is the detail of the proposals that will be important. That is one concern for the Scottish Fishermen's Federation and environmental organisations. The SFF said in an article in its newsletter in the summer:

"how exactly we are to move from hell"—

that is, the current position—

"to heaven while retaining a viable fishing industry ... has yet to be filled in."

The RSPB states:

"A striking key feature of the proposal is its vagueness in many areas repeatedly prompting the question 'who should do what and by when?'"

WWF Scotland states:

"crucial delivery mechanisms, time-frames and responsibilities ... are still lacking".

Scottish Labour welcomes many of the Commission's proposals. We are in favour of an ecosystem approach that delivers a long-term and

sustainable future for the Scottish fleet and enhances the biodiversity of our seas. That is easy to say, but a lot less easy to do. To do it, the EU must invest in the science on which decisions are based, and all stakeholders need to be confident that the science is well founded and correct. We support the regional management of fisheries, through which nations that border a sea work together with their stakeholders to protect biodiversity and promote a sustainable industry with a long-term future. We agree with the Scottish Fishermen's Federation that co-operation with other states will be required to make the most appropriate regulation.

At times, the Scottish Government's approach to the CFP appears to be rather at odds with its policies on an independent Scotland with membership of the EU. For example, the Government's response to the interim green paper on CFP reform in 2009 stated:

"The Scottish Government aims to manage Scottish fisheries outwith the Common Fisheries Policy."

On several occasions, the cabinet secretary has referred to repatriating fishing policy. I might be mistaken, but I do not believe that that is possible while retaining membership of the EU. We know from what the First Minister said in "Your Scotland, Your Voice: A National Conversation" that the Government's intention is that an independent Scotland would be a member of the European Union. The Lisbon treaty states that the European Union

"shall define and implement a common agriculture and fisheries policy",

which will be established by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. So if an independent Scotland joined the EU, it would have to adhere to the common fisheries policy. It could of course negotiate for itself as one of a large number of nations—probably at least 36 by the time that an independent Scotland joined. By that time, another 96 million citizens will quite possibly have joined the 495 million who are already in the EU. I suspect that Scotland's number of members of the European Parliament would remain at about six out of 750.

I and my colleagues in the Labour Party fail to understand how that would better protect the interests of the Scottish fleet or of Scottish aquaculture than being the predominant interest, as those issues should be, for the much larger UK delegation. Surely, the best way in which to protect the Scottish industry is to work to persuade our UK colleagues that the Scottish interest is also the UK interest.

Richard Lochhead: As someone who in recent years has attended more Council of Ministers meetings than I care to remember, I assure the

member that I have witnessed many small nations sitting round the table getting better deals than some of the bigger nations on issues that are key to those small nations' futures. Does that not illustrate why Scotland would get a much better deal with our own seat at the top table in Europe?

Elaine Murray: No, not necessarily. I have only ever been at one Council of Ministers meeting, so I bow to the cabinet secretary's experience on that, but the issue depends on the interest. Our fleet does not have much in common with the artisanal fleets of the Mediterranean. The small countries in the Mediterranean have a common interest that we do not share, but we should have a common interest with our UK colleagues. That is why I believe that we can negotiate better from within the UK.

Two thirds of the volume of fish that is landed in the UK is landed by the Scottish fleet; the most valuable nephrops and mackerel fisheries lie in Scottish waters; and Scotland is the largest producer of farmed salmon in the EU, and currently the second largest in the world because of the problems that Chile is having, so it should not be impossible to persuade the UK that that is the UK's interest. The Scottish aquaculture industry should be a major participant in the creation of the advisory council for aquaculture that is proposed in the reform package. Negotiation as part of the UK member state is the situation in which CFP reform will be considered, as it will be introduced by January 2013. Hence the need, mentioned in our amendment and in the one that Alex Fergusson lodged, to work with the UK Government in Scotland's interests.

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The member referred to aquaculture in relation to the CFP. Does the member believe that it would be in Scotland's interests if that £450-million-a-year industry were inside the restrictive and unhelpful CFP when our major competitors, Norway and Chile, are outside the CFP? Would it not be better that the aquaculture industry remained rather distant from the failed CFP?

Elaine Murray: That depends on the detail of the proposals. As I said, the proposals lack detail at the moment. However, there are opportunities in there because of the strength of the Scottish aquaculture sector. Indeed, bodies such as the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation recognise those possibilities.

I do not care whether it is a UK or a Scottish minister who takes the lead. What I really care about is that whoever does so has a real commitment to the Scottish fishing industry for the long term and to the biodiversity and health of our seas.

I mentioned regionalisation as one of the areas of consensus. I was therefore concerned to hear in evidence to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee last week that the Commission's legal service has since said that any meaningful devolution at all, even to regional management, would be in breach of the treaties. That needs urgent clarification.

There are problems, too, with individual transferable quotas. Although the commissioner believes that the proposals offer safeguards, the committee heard evidence suggesting that articles 31.2 and 32 of the proposed regulation could allow member states to authorise transfer to other member states. There would be inherent dangers for the Scottish industry if trading of quotas is not constrained to within member states and remains voluntary.

The purchase of quotas could lead to the industry becoming concentrated under the control of large operators that may choose not to land catch in smaller fishing ports and instead transport it directly to larger centres of distribution, with the consequent loss of onshore activity and employment in rural areas. My colleague Claudia Beamish will explore that issue.

How much more time do I have, Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer: I am still being generous.

Elaine Murray: Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's "Hugh's Fish Fight" has brought the issue of discarding unlandable fish to public attention across the EU, although it has been an issue of concern for fishermen and politicians for many years. We just do not have the clout of celebrity chefs.

No one likes the idea of catching and killing fish just to throw them back overboard, but the solution is not as simple as it might at first appear. For example the SFF has stated that, although it abhors discarding,

"in the complex mixed fisheries that our fleet operates in it is totally impracticable to ban discards altogether."

Taking the approach of landing everything will not address the issues of sustainable stocks and biodiversity. Discards are not only the

"good quality fish being dumped overboard",

as the cabinet secretary described them in *Scotland on Sunday*. They may also be juvenile fish or species that we should not be landing at all. We must avoid creating a market in those fish; doing so would go against everything that we are trying to do for sustainability. The principle must be to avoid catching them and measures applied by Scottish fishermen, such as real-time fishing

closures, selective fishing gear and the use of closed-circuit television cameras on boats, are essential. We should have proper incentives for our fishermen to avoid discarding altogether.

The common fisheries policy reforms are due to come into force in January 2013. Some of the proposals are to be welcomed; others carry a health warning and need considerable clarification. No doubt there will be much discussion in Europe—when the fisheries council eventually manages to start discussing it—and in the member states over the next year. Our aim in Scotland must be to secure the long-term future of the Scottish fishing industry, the Scottish aquaculture industry and the long-term health of our seas.

The Scottish Government does not even plan to have had its independence referendum by the time the new CFP comes into effect, so it will have to work closely with the UK Government to secure the best possible deal. It would be unforgivable if that was sacrificed in order to score constitutional points or to pick fights with Westminster. I do not like the current Westminster Government any more than the cabinet secretary, but it is necessary for both Governments to work together for the Scottish industry. The industry is too important to be used as a stepping stone to independence. This is not about constitutional reform; it is about an essential and much-respected Scottish industry.

I move amendment S4M-00904.1, to insert at end:

"; however recognises that these discussions will be undertaken by the UK as a member state, and therefore urges the Scottish Government to work closely with the UK Government to ensure that the long-term interests of the Scottish fishing and aquaculture industries and Scotland's marine environment are at the centre of the forthcoming discussions on reform."

The Presiding Officer: I call Alex Fergusson. You will be very pleased to know that I will be equally generous with your six minutes, Mr Fergusson.

09:44

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I am grateful to you, Presiding Officer. I am very well aware of your desire to allow back benchers more time in debates and I will probably allow that to happen, because my comments might be relatively brief.

I thank Elaine Murray for recognising that our proposed amendment stated very much what hers states. I point out only that, in typical economic fashion, our amendment used 19 words to say what Labour's took 56 words to say. However, I find the rejection of our proposed amendment

entirely understandable under the circumstances and that is in no way meant as a criticism.

This is a timely debate, given the importance of the Scottish fishing industry and the massive influence that the common fisheries policy has on it. It is all too easy simply to rail at length against the hated CFP and all who have anything to do with it. Indeed, I was very tempted to begin my speech by doing just that, but I found myself drawn to a comment in the briefing that the SFF helpfully sent to us, which states, perhaps somewhat surprisingly:

“some credence must be given to the fact that since the last reform in 2002: ‘Using the simple indicator of sustainability, the proportion of stocks that are within safe biological limits has increased ... from about 10% to about 40%.’”

So, something must have gone right over the past decade—although presumably and probably not as quickly or efficiently as was originally promised—and it would surely be churlish not to recognise the positive achievement that that statistic represents.

It was in that spirit of magnanimity that I reread Maria Damanaki’s words on the latest proposed reforms. In a press release that has accompanied the announcement of the reforms, she said:

“Action is needed now to get all our fish stocks back into a healthy state to preserve them for present and future generations. Only under this precondition can fishermen continue to fish and earn a decent living out of their activities.

This means that we have to manage each stock wisely, harvesting what we can but keeping the stock healthy and productive for the future. This will bring us higher catches, a sound environment and a secure seafood supply. If we get this reform right, fishermen and coastal communities will be better off in the long run. And all Europeans will have a wider choice of fresh fish, both wild and farm produced.”

Like everyone else, I am sure, I cannot disagree with one single word of that statement, and yet for some reason my heart sinks when I realise that the vehicle for the delivery of that unarguably magnificent aspiration is the common fisheries policy itself. History tells us—both previous speakers underlined this—that the best interests of Scotland’s fishermen and, therefore, its fishing industry, rarely if ever coincide with the general principles and thrust of the CFP.

We have to look at the main proposals of the reforms very carefully. In the time that is available to me—however generous it might be—I will take a brief look at just three of the proposals in the reforms: on discards, transferable fishing concessions and aquaculture. I make no apology for the degree of repetition that I am sure there will be throughout this debate.

I share completely in everyone else’s widespread revulsion at the dreadful waste and

wilful disregard for our marine environment that discards personify and I welcome whole-heartedly the determination to do something about them. However, I add a word of caution about the dangers of a possible knee-jerk reaction to a very public and high-profile campaign by a celebrity TV chef, which has rocketed this issue up the agenda, even though that chef—this is a rather Stewart Stevenson-like statement, for which I apologise—was my first cousin once removed’s best man. I am influenced in my observations on that not just by the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation, which points out that the proposals for a ban on discards do not necessarily present a solution to the problem, but by the cautionary note that is sounded in the briefing papers provided by the RSPB, which argues that

“the Commission’s current proposals focus overwhelmingly on the issue of landing all catches, rather than on ways to avoid the capture of potentially discardable fish in the first place.”

That view is echoed to an extent by WWF Scotland, which states:

“we believe the proposed discard ban is not the right solution to a highly complex problem. We need to catch less, and make better use of what is caught.”

Those are powerful arguments and I am certainly not persuaded that a simple land-all-catch policy is in any way the right answer. I therefore must urge caution in that area of reform. I was warned by Elaine Murray’s powerful arguments in that regard.

I urge similar caution on the subject of TFCs. Some, like the SFF, argue that the proposal poses little threat. Others, like Ian Hudghton and Struan Stevenson, two MEPs who appeared in front of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee by videolink just last week, argue that the proposal holds a very real threat to the basic principle of relative stability that currently underpins fisheries policy. Like Elaine Murray, I suspect that if TFCs are kept within the member states, the SFF’s position will be justified, but that if TFCs become tradeable between member states, the fears of our MEPs will be more than fully realised. Caution has to be the watchword on this matter if our Scottish industry is to be properly protected.

Finally, I turn to aquaculture. I find myself instinctively nervous at the prospect of the EU spreading its bureaucratic tentacles over the aquaculture sector to an even greater extent than it does already, and I am relieved that that nervousness is shared by the UK and Scottish Governments. The Commission’s proposals include the suggestion that an aquaculture advisory group be established. Although that is not our preferred outcome of the reform process, if it is the outcome, I believe that Scotland must have a

lead role to play in that advisory group, given the pre-eminence of our aquaculture industry.

Even with the Presiding Officer's kind offer to extend the time that is available to us, time does not permit me to look at the reform proposals in any greater detail, although I know that others will do so. I cannot overestimate the importance of getting the reform of the CFP right for Scotland. Of course we support the Scottish Government in its efforts to do just that, and I welcome the cabinet secretary's commitment to working as closely as possible with the UK Government as it does so. For our part, Conservative members will do everything that we can to encourage the UK Government to work as closely as possible with the Scottish Government to achieve that outcome.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I ask for speeches of six minutes, but if members take interventions, we will be generous.

09:52

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome this timely debate on the reform of the common fisheries policy as the EU discussions get under way in Brussels. I also welcome the cabinet secretary's outlining of the Scottish Government's priorities for protecting Scotland's crucial fishing industry and communities.

On 13 July, the European Commission published its proposals for a major reform of the CFP. Those proposals will impact on one of Scotland's most important economic sectors, determine the future of our fishing industry and the livelihoods of our fishermen, and impact on entire towns and communities around Scotland's shores.

Despite the fact that the proposals will impact principally on Scotland's shores, given that over 70 per cent of all the fish that are caught in UK waters are landed in Scotland, Scotland's cabinet secretary must rely on an invitation by the UK Government to participate fully in key fisheries council meetings so that he can be part of the crucial EU decision-making process. Ministers from the landlocked Czech Republic, Slovakia and Luxembourg have the right to attend those meetings, in which they have no national interest, whereas Scotland, a country with an absolutely vital national interest in the future of the CFP, is excluded from them, unless the UK Government permits our minister to attend. That is not only unacceptable; it is an insult to the individuals and communities whose livelihoods will be determined by the decisions that are made in Brussels.

In a debate in the chamber two weeks ago, Opposition members urged the Scottish Government to bring forward reasons why it wanted the Scotland Bill to be amended to give Scottish ministers the right to attend meetings of

the EU council when a devolved matter is being debated. I can think of no better illustration of the Scottish Government's case than the crucial discussions to reform the CFP, at which Scotland's vital national interests are at stake.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Aileen McLeod: I would like to make progress.

I simply do not accept the proposition that the UK Government has a sufficiently detailed knowledge and understanding of the Scottish fishing industry, of the Scottish Government's policies towards the industry or, indeed, of the significance of fishing to our communities, to properly represent Scotland's interests in the area. In support of my argument, I offer the fact that, prior to devolution, I understand that it was customary for a minister from the Scottish Office to participate in the UK delegation to the fisheries council precisely for that reason. I hope that those who question the Scottish Government's motivation in proposing the amendment to the Scotland Bill will reflect on the fact that there are extremely valid reasons for it.

However, we can also reflect on much wider evidence that reforming the CFP must involve those who understand the industry and represent the communities that are involved in it. Few members will be surprised when I say that the CFP has been bad for Scotland, the industry and fish stocks. There is now general acceptance that the CFP is a failed policy. Even the European Commission accepted that in its April 2009 green paper, but instead of acknowledging that the cause of the failure is the policies that it has foisted on the industry, the Commission now offers as the way forward yet another round of centrally planned and implemented reforms under its control. That is hardly the radical reform for which many of us had hoped.

The Commission has seemed incapable of accepting that the way forward is to give the powers that it has misused to Europe's fishing nations to manage better their fisheries and protect the marine environment. The SNP Government's record on that is exemplary, with the establishment in 2008 of its ground-breaking conservation credits scheme. That scheme is now widely adopted throughout the EU and remains a central plank in the partnership that has been forged between the Scottish Government and Scotland's fishermen to manage fish stocks and ensure that the industry has a viable future.

The Commission's CFP reform proposals begin to recognise that responsibility for the future sustainability of our fishing industry must be returned to the countries and communities that are involved in it. Although I welcome that recognition,

albeit that it is belated, the Commission's proposals for regionalisation are much too modest in scope and do not go far enough. The real management decisions should be left to our fishing nations, which must work regionally, with the EU setting only broad principles.

The Commission's proposals for an EU-wide mandatory discards ban and mandatory tradeable fishing concessions scheme are of deep concern, as other members have mentioned. We must guard against any potential threat to the relative stability principle and ensure that Scotland retains its historical fishing rights.

Therefore, it is vital that Scotland's interests be represented in the negotiations. Part of the responsibility for that falls to our MEPs, with whom we must work closely. However—I make no apology for returning to this theme—Scotland has no direct representation on the arguably more important Council of Ministers. I genuinely hope that, as this important debate proceeds, colleagues from other parties will reflect on the Scottish Government's proposal that we be represented on the relevant UK delegations to ensure that the interests not of the SNP but of Scotland's fishing industry and communities be represented in Brussels and that Scotland's voice be as strong as possible.

Scotland's interest in the CFP debate will, as with all other EU policy areas, be properly represented only when Scotland becomes a full member state with its own commissioner, its own representative and many more MEPs.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member give way?

Aileen McLeod: I am just about to finish.

In the meantime, matters will be improved only if the Parliament endorses the Scottish Government's proposed amendment to the Scotland Bill and it is included in any subsequent Westminster Scotland act.

09:58

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I thank Aileen McLeod for her speech, but I am still confused—as, I think, my colleagues on the Labour benches are—about the SNP's position on the issue. It is my understanding that an independent Scotland—if it were to come about, which I am doubtful it will—would be part of a common fisheries policy if it was a member state of the EU. I invite the cabinet secretary to clarify the position on that in his closing speech.

I welcome many of the European Commission's proposals for reform of the common fisheries policy. As we are all aware, the CFP has been subject to intense criticism as one of Europe's biggest policy failures. With around 80 per cent of

European stocks being overfished and fish consistently being caught before they reach maturity, there has been justified concern among scientific bodies and policy makers for the sustainability of the fishing industry that is crucial to many of Scotland's coastal villages and towns, especially in the region that I represent.

I particularly welcome the European Commission's commitment to an ecological approach to fisheries, as demonstrated by its commitment to bringing stocks to maximum sustainable yield by 2015; the establishment of long-term multi-annual plans for all fisheries, based on sound scientific advice; and, perhaps most important, a commitment to phasing out the practice of discarding by 2016.

Liam McArthur: Will the member take an intervention?

Jenny Marra: No, thank you.

Only by tackling the root causes and effects of the CFP's failure can we bring stocks back to healthy levels and make fishing an ecologically sustainable endeavour once more.

As well as those clear and bold objectives, the Commission has committed to decentralising control of policy making to better embody the principle of subsidiarity, or bottom-up decision making. That marks a distinct opportunity for member states and those within them who are closest to the fishing industry to take more control of the policy-making process. In light of that opportunity, the Scottish Government must work harder than ever with the industry, scientists, the UK Government and NGOs so that it can make a successful contribution to the achievement of the Commission's targets.

There are still significant gaps in the Commission's proposals that leave opportunity, if not responsibility, for the Scottish Government to act. For example, the delivery of long-term management plans through clear and specific targets for individual fisheries must be put in place, and the Scottish Government must work with stakeholders to achieve that.

Similarly, the Scottish Government must commit fully to multi-annual plans, in terms of resources and its efforts to engage. Our scientists must have the necessary resources to contribute fully to a more regionalised CFP, where good governance ought to be synonymous with good science. Too often we have seen quotas prescribed not on the advice of scientific bodies, but on the basis of political considerations. The Government must work hard to promote the role of science in the consideration of fishing rights allocation, because only then can we begin to meaningfully restore our fishing stocks. Scientists have made it clear that significant steps still need to be taken to monitor

the state of our fisheries, and without the means to do so we risk losing the opportunity to focus our efforts efficiently on ecological sustainability and thus a healthy fishing industry.

In that process, the Scottish Government must listen to the concerns of fishermen, industry experts and NGOs in order to tackle fundamental problems such as overcapacity and discards. They all have a valuable contribution to make on the best way to tackle those issues. For example, like many stakeholders, I am concerned that the practice of commercialising would-be discards will bring unique challenges to Scottish fisheries. The Government must continue with the work of the Scottish conservation credits scheme to focus on avoiding the capture of unwanted fish in the first place rather than on creating a market for them. Mechanisms such as real-time closures, the use of CCTV, and gear specifications have been widely recognised as successful in combating discards, and I urge the Scottish Government to continue working with stakeholders to develop similar mechanisms that will help to eliminate discards by 2016.

The Commission has been bold in its proposals to reform the CFP in a way that makes it more sustainable. However, it has also placed the ball in our court and put significant onus on member states and related stakeholders to achieve that goal. I urge the Scottish Government to play its part in shaping the future of the CFP by working with the UK Government and listening to NGOs, scientific advice and the industry to create a responsible, sustainable common fisheries policy that will benefit Scottish coastal towns and villages for years to come.

10:03

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): As a recently elected member, I admit that I can still occasionally be genuinely taken aback by things that I come across as an MSP. With the passage of time, I suspect that I will become more hardened to such things, but I hope that I never reach the point at which I am so immune that events of the type that have put the reform of the CFP on ice for the past two and a half months do not provoke a sense of dismay and disappointment.

As Scotland's fishermen face with concern the formulation of a new CFP, they deserve better than to have progress towards that delayed by the petty party-politicking in Europe on which Elaine Murray touched.

The six separate reports that the European Commission published on 13 July should have been allocated to the various political groups before the summer, but a dispute over who got

what created an impasse. It will be next Monday at the earliest before the matter is resolved.

The next phase in the process is—or was—due to get under way on 10 October and to conclude by December. Resolution might have been reached at Monday's planned meeting of the Committee on Fisheries in Brussels, but that meeting was scrapped after the European Parliament building was struck by a power cut—as the saying goes, you could not make it up. However, there is little humour to be found in this farce, because a two-and-a-half-month logjam, especially at this initial stage, raises the possibility that aspects of the new-look CFP that may be hugely important to Scotland will not be as well scrutinised as they might have been.

I am sure that this debate will cover in detail every angle of the CFP and what it might mean to our fishermen. I will focus on just two aspects: decentralisation and the threat of the Commission imposing mandatory transferable fishing concessions on member states. Greater decentralisation and regionalisation is long overdue. Centralised micromanagement from Brussels has dogged the CFP for years. For a while, it seemed to be accepted that what is actually needed is a menu of management options from which member states can select what is best suited to their needs. However, no sooner had fisheries commissioner Maria Damanaki spoken about ending micromanagement from Brussels than a problem emerged over a claim that it might be illegal to do so.

Commissioner Damanaki told us that the EU should be

"the lighthouse ... showing the way. Member states, the regions and industry have to steer the ship—and avoid the rocks."

Almost immediately, doubts were raised about the legality of such a move. It was claimed that transferring significant powers from Brussels back to member states would be a treaty breach. Now, interestingly, Ms Damanaki is on the retreat and qualifying everything that she says on regionalisation with the rider that it is as far as the treaties allow for.

There is, of course, a degree of contradiction from the Commission, which talks about devolving power to member states while at the same time proposing an EU-wide programme of tradeable fishing concessions. Scotland should be extremely wary of the establishment of transferable quotas as proposed. We are told that the quotas will be tradeable only within member states and not between member states and that safeguards will be put in place. However, as Elaine Murray touched on, that is not what is proposed in articles 32.2 and 31.2. The fears that are raised by those proposals are supposed to be calmed by claims

that the wording in the proposals, which present a back-door threat to the principle of relative stability, should have been clearer and that they refer only to temporary leasing or the transfer of unused concessions. However, as Alex Fergusson said, when Scots MEPs Struan Stevenson and Ian Hudghton, who are both members of the Committee on Fisheries, gave evidence to the Parliament's Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, they left no one in doubt about the seriousness of the issue.

One of the aims of establishing tradeable fishing concessions is to reduce further the capacity of the EU fleet by 20 per cent without compensating fishermen for decommissioning. It is accepted that there are too many boats chasing too few fish and it is generally accepted that, despite the conservation efforts of recent years, up to 75 per cent of EU stocks are still overfished. However, there remains considerable doubt over the science surrounding the issue.

Liam McArthur: Will the member take an intervention?

Graeme Dey: No. I want to finish, if I may.

Just as we accept the need to tackle the issue of discards, so no one disputes that overfishing is a problem. Commissioner Damanaki can argue that the EU fleet remains "obese", but the problem for Scotland is that the Commission is effectively admitting defeat in trying to force the likes of Spain to take its share of cuts and settling instead for fleet reduction wherever and whenever. It wants market forces to do the job, but that takes no account of the fact that in Scotland since 1998, through a mix of consolidations, decommissioning and retirement, 48 per cent of our pelagic fleet and 41 per cent of the demersal fleet has gone.

According to Struan Stevenson and Ian Hudghton, one of the major dangers of such a scheme is that if the rights were bought off Scots fishermen by large mainland-Europe fishing operations, the catches would be landed there, which would sound the death knell for Scottish ports such as Peterhead and Fraserburgh. Both MEPS pointed to Iceland as a prime example of how things can go wrong. The Icelanders introduced a system that was designed to ensure that quotas were held only by fishermen in their smaller village fishing communities, but those quotas were subsequently bought up by big Reykjavik companies and eventually fell into the hands of a financial conglomerate in the USA. That New York-based conglomerate then went bust, leaving the Icelandic Government with a shambles on its hands. There is a warning there for us, and we should heed it.

Last week, Struan Stevenson gave the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment

Committee an undertaking that Scotland's MEPs would set aside party differences and work together in the interests of our fishing communities. I hope that the Parliament, too, will come together and speak with one voice in support of Scotland's fishermen to secure CFP reform that protects Scotland's fishing interests in future.

The Labour amendment calls on the Scottish Government to work closely with London. I am sure that the cabinet secretary will fight Scotland's corner by any and all means necessary, including working closely with the UK Government, but there are two very good reasons why Richard Lochhead needs to be given a leading role in securing a CFP that protects our fishermen's interests. First, as he pointed out, Scottish vessels land 70 per cent of the UK catch and almost 10 per cent of the EU. Secondly—and more telling—such is the London Tory and Lib Dem coalition's interest in fishing that it has not included a single reference to it in its 409-point coalition agreement.

I urge members to support the Scottish Government motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

It is of course entirely up to members whether they want to take interventions. However, if they wish to do so, I can be generous in giving that time back to them.

10:11

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The cabinet secretary has ably articulated the fishing industry's importance to Scotland and the serious implications for its future if the CFP review body ignores regional differences and needs. In the region that I represent, the Highlands and Islands, all kinds of fishing combine to make it our largest industry; indeed, it is as important as oil to the Scottish economy and not only generates work for fishermen but sustains land-based employment at harbours and ports and in the transport, processing, trade and retail sectors. It is ironic that the CFP, which I am sure was initially designed as an expression of common cause by European states, should threaten all of that.

In the 1970s, the UK Government banned herring fishing, which led to boats being tied up in the Highlands and Islands, particularly along the west coast. Markets were then found in north Africa, Russia and Japan for mackerel, which had hitherto not been fished. It resulted in an extraordinary Klondike. Boats from every part of the UK came to share the bonanza. They had to steam only very short distances to fill their holds with fish; indeed, many did so twice a day. That Klondike continued for just over a decade and, by

the late 1980s, it was all over. It was simply unsustainable. Such practices would be unthinkable today.

That bit of history is relevant in illustrating why the belief exists in the need for a serious approach to conserving fish stocks and better management of the catch and the industry. Given this common cause, it would not have been unreasonable to have had a considerable and responsible common fisheries policy that was agreed by European partners. If the policies are to be right for our industry, it is essential that their terms and conditions are practical and understood, and political representation and negotiation in Europe must be undertaken by those who understand the industry.

As others have mentioned, certain conditions in the CFP review that have been flagged up by our MEPs would be wholly detrimental to the industry in Scotland. The subject of discards is interesting. To many, the case will appear black and white: fishermen should just land everything. However, the situation is complex and we must listen to and understand practitioners and their agencies on this matter. The industry—which is, I would say, not whiter than white—has recognised and is acting on conservation and discards issues in order to maintain sustainability.

However, Europe's proposed changes will negate all that work. Too often, European legislation is simply unfit for purpose; meanwhile, other countries that claim that parts of the legislation do not suit their situation or culture are granted derogations. That is why we need to establish a united front and lobby the UK Government, demanding that Scotland sends her own representative to argue our case.

Scotland's fishermen have seen dramatic changes in the industry since the 1970s. They have led on conservation, have worked to reduce discards and want to ensure that the industry is heritable, but the threat of ill-informed legislation from Europe, the dramatically increased quotas for Iceland and the Faroes that have already been mentioned and climate change, which is affecting sea temperature and species, are of enormous concern and represent a disincentive to young people who might be attracted into the industry.

On derogation, I can cite as an example the ferries review that happened when Scotland was badly represented by, as I remember, a land-bound MP with no experience of ferries. That cost Scotland dear in comparison with other countries. For example, Greece—another nation of islands—sought and was granted a derogation. It was able to continue to run and subsidise a ferry service fit for purpose for the country, whereas we did not seek derogation, ignoring the numerous ferries that we have in Scotland, and paid the price by

having to undertake a costly exercise in putting our ferry services out to tender.

Liam McArthur: I find the area that Jean Urquhart has roamed into slightly strange. In Scotland, we have a landlocked transport minister who is playing havoc with the ferry services to the Northern Isles. As I am sure that she realises, as a Highlands and Islands MSP, that may come back through her mailbag to haunt her.

Jean Urquhart: That is simply not true. I do not want to enter into a debate about ferries; I simply used the example to show that derogation is possible in any European policy that is put forward. The other argument is for another day, and I will happily take it on at that time.

I believe that, if we get fisheries policy right, we can see the industry stabilise, develop and continue for future generations. Fish is part of a healthy diet, 30 per cent of our exports, part of our culture and part of our economic future, and part of our work in this place is to secure and sustain the industry. That is less than likely if we cannot directly negotiate the terms of the CFP. I plead to the other parties in the Parliament that we unite in asking that we have Scottish representation, in stating that our cabinet secretary is the best person to make the case, and in supporting the case.

10:17

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I broadly agreed with the minister's introduction this morning. I strongly agree with many of the points that he made about the industry.

Mr Lochhead mentioned in his opening remarks the changes to the fleet that have happened under successive Governments. Since 2007, we have seen the number of white-fish trawlers greater than 10m—in other words, the majority of the fleet—fall by 17 per cent. As I am sure the minister was reflecting in his remarks, the changes have happened under successive Governments, and it is important to remember that in the context of our debate.

For me, and particularly for the islands that I represent in Parliament, the main requirement of the minister is that, in considering common fisheries policy reform, he ensures that the financial viability of our fleet is paramount. For men and women, families and communities in places such as Whalsay and Burra, and right across Shetland, what happens with the policy and how the minister negotiates on behalf of this Parliament and his Government are fundamental. Their livelihoods depend on it. In his own way, the minister reflected that argument in his opening remarks, with which I agree, but I hope that, in everything that he does on the issue, he

concentrates absolutely on the financial viability of the boats.

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I agree that the cabinet secretary must do all that he can to negotiate the best deal for Scotland's fishermen, but does the member not agree that his hand would be greatly strengthened if he was leading the UK delegation or, better still, leading an independent Scottish delegation?

Tavish Scott: As Mr Lochhead made clear in his opening remarks, as a party arguing the UK case he should be comfortable arguing the whole of the UK case. If he was confident in his facts and figures—which I am sure Mr Lochhead is—he would have no problem dealing with the Wash, the Irish Sea or other areas. Mr Thompson should have a little more confidence in his minister instead of running him down so much.

I want to make three points in what is an important debate for us all: on regionalisation, aquaculture, and discards, which have had a good airing already.

On regionalisation, Graeme Dey got it right and made a very reasoned argument. As far as I can tell, the Commission envisages a system in which decisions on objectives, targets, minimum standards and timescales continue to be taken at European Commission level. It sees a greater management role for producer organisations—a point on which I would like the minister to reflect, as there can be some advantages in that. However, I recall Richard Lochhead, in an earlier life, describing the regional advisory councils as “toothless talking shops”. Whatever comes out of this particular proposal, if those advisory councils—I believe that they will no longer be called regional—continue to be of that ilk rather than proper bodies with management structures that can work with the industry and Government to achieve the reform that we need, I suspect that what Richard Lochhead said may continue to be the case. There must be a strong drive to achieve more in that area.

On aquaculture, I agree strongly with my good friend Alex Fergusson, who was in dangerous territory in linking himself to a celebrity chef, although he added the caveat about him being the best man of some relation of his. The point that he, Elaine Murray and one or two other members have made this morning is fundamentally correct. Celebrity chefs have a lot more power than we do—certainly individually, but probably collectively as well—but there is no need for them to go on television and present classically simplistic solutions as being the ultimate idea in constructing the future of a policy that is, by definition, complex and difficult. I strongly support the members who made that argument this morning. I hope that Mr

Lochhead, who will be much more able than the rest of us to do so, will hold discussions with that one celebrity chef in particular and will take him to a Peterhead trawler to point out the reality of his suggested policy, so that it can be seen for what it is, even if it makes for good television.

Mr Fergusson made another point about aquaculture. He will recall, from the visit that we paid to Norway back in 2002, when he was the convener of the Rural Affairs Committee, that Norway is very good at pushing its trade interests at the European Union level. Not that long ago, we had a major trade dispute with Norway over salmon farming and the EU absolutely caved in. That was not in the Scottish interest at all. No matter what the Scottish or UK Government did on that issue, it was the Commission that caved in. Therefore, I would be reluctant to see the European Commission take a big role in aquaculture. Frankly, the industry is getting on fine without the involvement of the European Union.

Many members have made strong arguments on the proposed discards ban; however, what is proposed is akin to banning the symptoms of an illness rather than treating the illness and addressing its causes. That is the challenge for the minister and the people who work under him, and I ask him to clarify the position on the science behind the proposal. I asked him about the science earlier and I welcomed his response. Although page 157 of the budget document shows that the level of funding for Marine Scotland is falling—inevitably, given the position that we are in—the narrative beneath the figures states that the Government plans to continue to strengthen funding in the area of sea-fish research. Given the threat to our fish stocks of an automatic 25 per cent cut in quotas, it would be helpful to those of us who are concerned about how science funding will be allocated in future and, more to the point, to the industry if the minister could clarify—not today, but in the coming weeks—what his department plans to do to ensure that our science is as good as it can be to help our industry to confront what, in my view, is a serious threat to the economic viability of the fleet, as I mentioned at the start of my speech.

In conclusion, I ask the minister to ensure that, in his negotiations on the common fisheries policy, the Shetland box—which is important to my constituency as well as to the industry—is protected. It is not mentioned in the reform proposal. I would be grateful if he could establish what the position is and ensure that the protection of that designation is maintained.

10:24

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): This motion, which deals with our

historic fishing rights, promoting Scottish seafood and giving greater power to fishing nations to manage their fisheries and protect the marine environment, has a major bearing on how the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee will deal with its business in this regard. The annual debate about fishing allows us to review how Scotland is faring but, with a new form proposed for the common fisheries policy, it is also essential to recognise the part that we can play in showing that Scotland is in the lead and in underpinning the argument for Scotland needing a seat at the top table in making these decisions.

Sustainable management is at the root of what we are talking about. That is why I am glad to see that stocks of west coast haddock are on the rise and can make a fishery for the future.

Pioneering work on fish conservation, not only offshore but also inshore, shows that we are making progress. A number of examples have been given of how the Marine Stewardship Council's sustainability status can improve a fishery. This example is not a positive story but a salutary lesson. Scotland's Loch Torridon langoustine, or nephrops, fishery was withdrawn from the scheme in July. The suspension came after fishing pressure in the area increased due to additional creel fishing boats being attracted to the fishery. The Torridon group was unable—by itself or with the relevant management bodies—to establish management control over the fishery. An argument between creelers and trawlers ensued, following the announcement, so we must ensure that Marine Scotland management areas and inshore fishery groups work together to ensure that a combined fishery is sustainable. The standard of Loch Torridon langoustines is excellent and provides a benchmark for the fishery, which is one over which we have complete control. There are areas in which we can take forward Scotland's pioneering fish conservation ourselves.

In the context of the common fisheries policy, we must look at ways of ensuring that fishery-dependent areas, which Jenny Marra mentioned, get some special treatment. In my constituency, the ports of Lochinver, Kinlochbervie and Scrabster are major participants in the fishery. From Lochinver, the participants are foreign boats, from Kinlochbervie there are one or two local boats—much reduced from the past—and in Scrabster there are boats with links to the Faroe Islands and other places. The latter has been having a relatively good time. The point is that they have been adding value in Scrabster and doing what the Government asked. They made sure that they are providing a service of which the fishing industry can be proud.

On looking after our better fisheries, we should look no further than Aberdeen University's study of the use of CCTV on our fishing boats. The comparison of observation by students and CCTV shows that the approach is one that we can propose to the rest of the EU. At present, only Denmark and Scotland are adopting this approach, but if it is not a factor in discussions on the CFP, we will be missing a trick.

Much mention of Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall suggests that we should use his ability to get publicity—it was on BBC 1 after all and one must be entertaining on that. We should bring him into discussions here. That would allow us to take forward the issues around a mixed fishery, and he could articulate them. I do not see why we should not trumpet our ability to differentiate in considering how this should work and get some celebrity chefs on our side. The arguments about scandalous waste go on and there must be solutions, which we want to lead.

Relative stability in catches is at the heart of much of the historic rights argument for Scottish fisheries. Comparisons with how the Norwegians manage their fisheries, with different types of fishing boats, are interesting. Norway is, of course, outside the EU, but it is one of the countries with which we have to negotiate every year. We could learn from its ability to manage its fisheries and emulate its approach in Scotland, given our large proportion of the EU fish catch. If it is not possible for the EU to set up a clear form of decentralisation, which members have been debating, it is no wonder that the common fisheries policy is described, as it is in the motion, as being a “failed” policy. Scotland does not deserve to be party to a failed policy when we have such a large part of the EU catch.

The motion is correct. It is a great time for negotiation, but there is an opportunity in the Parliament's Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee to view some of the issues and to add to the body of knowledge—and, indeed, to the body of argument—through the allies that we can make. There are allies not just in celebrity chefs, but in other countries in Europe that want to help.

10:31

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):

Like Lewis Carroll's Alice, I try to believe six impossible things before breakfast. Two such things that I considered this morning were that the EU would accept that the CFP is redundant and that a UK Government minister would arrive at EU negotiations with Scotland's best interests at heart. I think that we must accept that both scenarios are highly unlikely.

I want to address the point that the Labour Party appears to be making about Scotland being better represented in the EU as part of the UK, and the notion of the Scottish role in the common fisheries policy. If we could play a full part in EU negotiations on reform of the CFP or otherwise, we might end up with a policy that would suit Scotland and its fishing interests. Currently, we have no role in that, and we are not able to head the UK delegation to ensure that our voice is heard. As a result, the Scottish Parliament loses out. When EU legislation affects devolved matters such as fisheries, the Scottish Parliament loses legislative power and accountability. If the minister does not lead on behalf of the Scottish fishing industry, the Parliament has an issue in how we hold the minister to account for decisions that affect the Scottish fishing fleet but are made in the European Union. An accountability gap is created.

I entirely understand the point that is made that, if we were to become an independent nation, we would effectively be a small fish in a big pond, but at the moment we are essentially a small fish inside the stomach of a large fish. We can talk and shout as much as we want to, but at the end of the day, nobody hears us, and it is not our voice that speaks when negotiations are undertaken.

Elaine Murray: Does the member accept that, as a common fisheries policy will be implemented in January 2013 and the SNP will not even have had its referendum by then, the UK as the national state will have to negotiate and therefore the most important thing that we can do is to convince the UK that the Scottish interest is its interest? That is the purpose of our amendment.

Mark McDonald: Therefore, the most important thing is that the lead minister in the negotiations is the Scottish minister. I welcome Elaine Murray's acknowledgment that, as long as the UK is negotiating on Scotland's behalf for such a vital Scottish interest, it must be the Scottish minister who is at the top table.

As long as we are party to the CFP, we must ensure that it is designed in a way that works best—or in the least worst way—for our fishermen and fishing communities. I think that there is cross-party consensus that the common fisheries policy is not good for Scotland and its fishermen. That is why in some respects I struggle to reconcile Elaine Murray's contention that we must trust the UK Government to have our nation's interests at heart with her concerns—which I share—that tradeable fishing quotas could have a potentially devastating impact on the Scottish industry. Given that, according to the cabinet secretary, the UK Government seems to be persuaded or, indeed, seduced by that approach, it strikes me that a potential logical non sequitur is at play. Even allowing for Alex Fergusson's understandable

caveat on how tradeable quotas could potentially be implemented, we can probably rely on history to instruct us that, when it comes to the EU and the UK operating on behalf of Scotland—or supposedly on its behalf—the wrong choice is usually made. We should therefore probably be very cautious about tradeable quotas.

The cabinet secretary referred to the infamous Tory memorandum that said of Scotland's fishing fleet that

"in the wider UK context, they must be regarded as expendable".

Interestingly, Murdo Fraser seems to have reached the same conclusion about the Scottish Conservatives. Alex Johnstone said that the Labour Party is implicated in this situation as well. I accept that Labour does not have a glowing record when it comes to standing up for the Scottish fishing fleet.

The figures show that 70 per cent of the UK catch is landed in Scotland and that, in 2009, 38.4 per cent was landed in ports in the north-east. Between 1997 and 2009, there was a nearly 90 per cent decline in landings at Aberdeen and an 8.5 per cent decline in Fraserburgh. That was linked entirely to demersals and the impact that total allowable catches and quotas had on those stocks. There was a modest increase of 2.7 per cent in the landings at Peterhead, which I suspect we can link to the pelagic sector, which has undergone a phenomenal increase. Nevertheless, overall, there was a 16.3 per cent decline in the number of fish landed at north-east ports. Obviously, that has had a devastating impact on fishing communities across the north-east, as any member who represents that area or has visited those communities will know. That is why tradeable quotas represent a threat to our smaller ports. If the worst-case scenario is borne out, large amounts of quota will be purchased from Scottish fishermen—who will take the opportunity to make money by selling their quota, as they would be perfectly entitled to do—without there being any guarantee that that quota of fish will be landed in Scottish ports, which would mean that the ports would suffer. If there is a decline in the number of ports due to closure, the industry is unlikely to be viable. If quotas are sold, the ports might decline to such a state that they are incapable of coping with landings in the future. That is a vicious circle that could lead to significant problems for the industry.

There can be no doubt that the UK Government's record on negotiating for Scotland and Scotland's fishing fleet is lamentable, if not disgraceful. That is why it is vital that we go further than simply ensuring that the Scottish Government works with the UK Government. I fully accept that the cabinet secretary will do all that he can to

persuade UK ministers to take Scotland's interests to heart, but the sad fact is that, once the UK minister sits down at the table, all the persuading that the cabinet secretary will have done will matter nothing while that minister trades away Scotland's rights and fishing fleet. We absolutely must have a situation in which the cabinet secretary is the man at the table who is negotiating on behalf of Scotland's fishing industry, whether that be as the head of the UK delegation or—my preference—of an independent Scottish delegation.

10:38

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to have the chance to speak in this debate, to listen to other members and to try to find a way forward, and to support Elaine Murray's amendment. I am reassured by the cabinet secretary's words on the amendment—perhaps I am being too optimistic, but that remains to be seen.

As has already been acknowledged, this is a complex issue and, frankly, quite challenging for a new member who is not on the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee. However, I want to highlight principles and issues in relation to sustainability, and to speak up for my region, South Scotland.

Fishing communities in South Scotland, in which more than 700 people are employed in vessels, can often be overlooked. Much of the employment is in small-scale fishing. In Eyemouth district, 148 regular workers and 45 part-time workers are employed on vessels. In 2010, the district saw total landings of more than 2,000 tonnes, with a value of £5.5 million. In smaller ports, there is a real opportunity to develop local traceability further, such as we have seen in meat production. I certainly enjoyed the best fish supper ever in Eyemouth last week, looking out over the sea after a walk around the harbour. Consumers want to know where their food comes from, and net-to-plate identification has a strong resonance.

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation indicated that it supports the idea in the CFP green paper of small-scale fishing matters being dealt with by member states rather than through EU legislation. However, although the importance of small-scale fleets is acknowledged in the CFP proposals, the SFF is concerned that great care should be taken to ensure that nothing that is prejudicial to small-scale fleets appears in the subsequent legislation. The SFF stressed that the issue is not just regulation but ensuring that the proposals that are expected in November on financial support for the new CFP take account of small-scale fleets. Will the cabinet secretary reassure members that he

will carefully consider how best to protect fishing communities that are away from the main ports?

The cabinet secretary stressed regionalisation, and the concerns that Graeme Dey expressed about legality are worrying. Greater regional control of fisheries is important. The SFF welcomes such a move and wants the measures to be

"robust and provide the opportunity for meaningful management on a local scale."

The environmental NGOs also support decentralisation. WWF talked of the need to

"harness the expertise of local stakeholders who are best placed to draw up and implement plans for their fisheries to deliver high-level EU objectives."

From my limited experience, having been involved in discussions some years ago about a Solway marine park, I have learned that the coming together of different interests and perspectives in coastal communities is essential if we are to find a sustainable way forward—that applies in the context of coastal farming, renewable marine energy, tourism and much more.

Investment is a necessity. RSPB said that there is a need for

"investment in fisheries and marine science, and in fit-for-purpose data collection, monitoring and compliance".

The Scottish Fishermen's Trust recently funded a remote electronic monitoring research project at the University of Aberdeen—Rob Gibson mentioned the research at Aberdeen. The findings of the evaluating observer effects in discard sampling project will contribute to the way forward on discard reduction.

The issue is complex, as all members have said. Without the science, and without recognition from the EU that issues must be resolved in a sustainable way that does the least hurt to our fishing industry, we are on a hiding to nothing. EU financial support for the industry is imperative if we are to find a sustainable way forward. Will the minister reassure us that he is fighting for such support?

The RSBP—sorry, RSPB; I am dyslexic—said:

"investment will result in a financially viable, successful industry, free from discards, and ensure that fleet capacity is balanced with available resources."

As the CFP is shaped we must work together at all levels in the context of an ecosystems approach that—among other things—rewards people who fish in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner and minimises hardship for the people in the industry who are negatively affected. I make a big plea to the cabinet secretary to show support in the forthcoming negotiations for

the resilience of smaller fishing communities in South Scotland and throughout Scotland.

10:43

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):

During the recess, I had the opportunity to visit the Scottish fisheries museum in my constituency. I was struck not only by the enormous size of the museum but by the sense of an industry that has had to adapt again and again to survive. Fisheries were not and are not an industry for the faint-hearted, especially given that the common fisheries policy has failed Scotland's fisheries and the marine habitats that provide fishing opportunities.

Scotland's marine fisheries are an important resource. As we know, about £430 million-worth of fish was landed in Scotland last year and the Scottish fleet employs more than 5,200 fishermen. Direct employment in catching, aquaculture and processing amounts to 19,800, which is just shy of 1 per cent of all Scottish employment. If one considers indirect economic activity, the total number of jobs that depend on those sectors rises to 48,000, which is equivalent to about 50 per cent of the direct and indirect employment that depended on North Sea oil at its peak, so the industry is big and important for Scotland and is a key provider of goods and employment.

We have a reputation for high-quality seafood that is increasing Scottish fish sales abroad. Our seas present us with a multitude of valuable opportunities. I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to keep up efforts to secure Marine Stewardship Council sustainability status for more Scottish stocks.

Fishing is important to Scotland but, as the cabinet secretary said, we as a country have no separate voice at the negotiating table in Brussels and no automatic or statutory right to be part of the UK delegation that attends relevant European Union meetings. This summer, in papers that proposed amendments to the Scotland Bill, the Scottish Government said that it wanted that position to be changed. The Parliament should support that proposal. The Opposition parties want us

"to work closely with the UK Government",

but working closely depends on mutual respect, which would be enhanced if those parties accepted the automatic right to be part of the delegation.

Unfortunately, Scotland's fishing stocks are a sorely mismanaged resource. Since 1964, North Sea cod stocks have reduced by 59 per cent and haddock numbers have fallen by 57 per cent. A greater abundance of fish makes fishing effort

easier. Good conservation is good for our fishermen.

The management framework that the common fisheries policy provides has failed. Our fish stocks and the economic opportunities that they provide are under threat. The collapse of fish stocks would represent an unacceptable loss of opportunity for our nation's future generations. The common fisheries policy has failed because it is removed from the communities on which it impinges. The absurdity of fish discards that are equivalent to 25 to 33 per cent of fish that are landed has stripped away all the CFP's credibility as a means to conserve our marine stocks.

The fundamental fact is that fishing communities need to be given more responsibility for their local resources. Despite any proposed safeguards, selling transferable fishing quotas on an international market might only make bad management worse. In extreme situations, Scottish fishermen might sell their quotas because of poverty, which could lead to a decline in already hard-pressed fishing ports.

Our fishermen will respond most quickly to a conservation mechanism that involves them and motivates them to adhere to and support the policy. The policy's obvious objectives are to ensure that there are healthy fish stocks that provide fishermen with a secure occupation and—more than that—that there is an abundance of fish, which will ensure that fishing effort is better rewarded than it is for pursuing the skeletal remains of the shoals that once swam in the North Sea.

It is obvious that the fishing industry desires stocks that are healthy enough to provide a reliable catch in the future. Fisheries science has been discredited by association with the quota system. Throwing good-quality fish overboard does nothing to preserve stocks but might be the practical result of decisions by policy makers that ignore the best scientific evidence. The scientists who provide us with the ability to comprehend what goes on under the waves must be listened to. The infamous Grand Banks saga in Newfoundland provides a clear enough example of what can go wrong when science is ignored.

However, it is not only scientists who can deliver useful evidence that can help to conserve fish stocks. Scottish initiatives such as real-time closures represent positive steps forward. Passing to fishermen responsibility for avoiding spawning cod, for example, makes the industry responsible for its future. Taking spawning fish out of the water reduces population recruitment.

Instead of focusing, as previous conservation measures have, on net size, which may not be reducing mortality in the smaller fish that should

pass through nets unharmed, and instead of focusing on species quotas, we should focus on preserving breeding fish. Fishermen need to be involved in the conservation process. Putting power in the hands of those who need it—those who rely on fish stocks—is a form of subsidiarity that will achieve results.

Regionalism is a good concept, but the EU should set broad principles and leave the management decisions to the fishing nations. Fishing policy should not be about quantifying natural resources into time quotas, standardised nets and graphs that look good in a Brussels office. Cod are not standardised lengths. We need to allow cod the space to live and fishermen the time to make a living. However disagreeable we think discards might be, we should avoid the conclusion that a blanket ban is the answer. We need to heed the RSPB's prevention-rather-than-cure advice, particularly in a mixed fishing environment, and we must engage with the industry on the issue. We need to encourage initiatives such as the conservation credit scheme and the catch quota scheme. We need a policy that is fit for the 21st century and the Scottish Government should be encouraged to develop that. The motion should be supported.

10:50

Paul Wheelhouse (South Scotland) (SNP): It will not surprise members that, with a name like mine—Wheelhouse—the fishing industry is not one that I forget in a hurry. Alex Johnstone talked about the transition between Labour and Conservative Governments in the 1970s. The reference to the fishing sector being expendable relates to Ted Heath's Administration when it was negotiating entry to the European Community, as it was then. In those negotiations, the Government of the time declared that the industry was expendable.

Alex Johnstone: As Paul Wheelhouse is a new member of the Parliament, I am sure that he is not aware that I have never defended anything that that Prime Minister ever did.

Paul Wheelhouse: On that, we have common cause.

In a similar vein to Claudia Beamish, I will unashamedly refer to my constituents in South Scotland and in particular to the community along the Berwickshire coast around Eyemouth. As members might be aware, on 14 October 1881, there was a great fishing disaster off the east coast of Scotland. The day is known locally as black Friday, because 189 fishermen lost their lives off the coast of Berwickshire and East Lothian. From Eyemouth alone, 129 fishermen died, leaving 92 widows and 263 fatherless

children. The men sailed that day despite dire warnings from the fisher king, Willie Spears, who was a famous man from Eyemouth, and utter disaster followed with a perfect storm engulfing them. It took more than 100 years for the population of Eyemouth to recover, but it was still an important fishing port in the 1970s and 1980s.

The significance of the fishing industry to the region and to Eyemouth is reflected in the annual herring queen festival in the town. Tragically, though, as I will discuss further later, no herring at all are landed in Eyemouth today. Graeme Dey referred to the substantial decline since 1998 in the pelagic and demersal fleets. I will focus on Eyemouth to give members a sense of how serious the decline in fishing has been at local level. In 2010, there were just 105 vessels in Eyemouth and district, which is down from 133 in 1990 and 164 in 1980. As recently as 1990, there were estimated to be 75 to 80 vessels using Eyemouth. At a recent meeting with representatives of the fishing sector in Eyemouth before the election, at which Richard Lochhead was present, we were told that an estimated 20 to 24 vessels now use Eyemouth. That puts in perspective the sheer collapse in the number of vessels using what was, and still is locally, an important resource.

By 2010, just 193 fishermen were left in the whole of Eyemouth and district, which extends well beyond Berwickshire and goes up into the Lothians, including North Berwick, Dunbar and other ports. As Claudia Beamish said, only 148 of those fishermen are full time. That is a decline from 1980, when there were 591 fishermen in the area. That puts in perspective the sheer collapse in the scale of the local industry, which has profound impacts not only on the community of Eyemouth, but on the local fish processing sector, which is entirely dependent on fish being landed in the harbour or being brought to the harbour by road to sustain its activities.

By 2010, a £5.5 million catch was landed in Eyemouth and district, of which £5.4 million was in shellfish. Of that, £1.4 million was lobsters, and £3.2 million was nephrops—mainly Norwegian langoustine, which are principally sold to Europe. Although it is a lucrative market that is a dramatic change from past days.

No herring are landed in Eyemouth now. In fact, on the pelagic side, a total of 25 tonnes of mackerel were landed in 2010. There is virtually no pelagic catch. Haddock and demersal catch was down from 1,123 tonnes at the beginning of the decade to just 103 tonnes by 2010. To highlight the impact of the CFP, I note that 5,952 tonnes of demersal fish were landed in Eyemouth and district in 1980. The pelagic catch was only 2 tonnes in that year because, as other members

have said, the herring catch was stopped in the 1970s. Shellfish catch has increased slightly from 1,512 tonnes to 1,902.

In the 1970s, there was the following description of Eyemouth:

"By this time, there were relatively few large markets concentrated in the major fishing harbours ... Eyemouth is the most important fishing centre in the southeast of Scotland."

By the 1980s, that had been downgraded to:

"Eyemouth is the largest base for the South East of Scotland fleet."

By the 1990s, Eyemouth is described as

"the largest fishing port, in terms of catch volume and value, along the Scottish east coast south of Aberdeen."

Anyone looking at Eyemouth today would struggle to define the town in those terms. In the past year, we have lost four boats, and we are down to about 20 boats. The decline continues apace.

Like Claudia Beamish, I very much welcome the recognition by WWF Scotland, RSPB Scotland and other environmental bodies of not only the conservation dimension to the debate but the economic value of the sector. Indeed, WWF stresses that it needs

"to ensure that the reform improves the health of Scottish seas and the long-term profitability of the fishing industry".

It is often portrayed as being a black-and-white debate, with conservationists versus fishermen, but the conservation bodies recognise that it is no longer that simple and that there is mutual interest in preserving fishing stocks and, as Rod Campbell indicated, ensuring that there is a viable fleet for the future.

I hope that members recognise the profound scale of impact of the CFP. It has been worse for the area of Eyemouth than the perfect storm of 1881.

10:57

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): I am sure that members will agree that my constituency, Motherwell and Wishaw, is not commonly associated with the fishing industry. However, there are connections beyond the consumption of kippers for breakfast and haddock suppers.

Historically, Ravenscraig was the heart of the Scottish steel industry, supplying the raw materials for shipbuilding. We know what it is like to live in a community that is built around a particular commodity, facing an uncertain and unpromising future, so I have a lot of sympathy for our fishing communities. I recognise the importance of creating and safeguarding a viable, community-

focused fishing industry. That needs to be at the heart of the common fisheries policy.

The long-term needs of communities that rely on fishing can be met only by establishing and developing policies and practices that protect and promote sustainable fishing. If we cannot protect fish stocks and allow overfished species to recover, our fishing communities will continue to struggle.

Climate change presents major challenges to marine ecosystems, and we must be wary of the combined impact of overfishing, climate change and the use of destructive and damaging fishing practices, particularly in breeding and nursery areas. The CFP has not been adequate to that task. It has allowed poor management of stocks and short-term fixes that create long-term problems of overcapacity fleets, overfished waters, rules that are disregarded and fish that are discarded. The new proposals are a step in the right direction, in that they put conservation and long-term management of species at maximum sustainable yields at the heart of the policy, but they are not yet sufficiently robust to ensure that those objectives are met.

We still need to put some flesh on the bones of the new CFP. We need workable mechanisms, definitive timescales and allocated responsibilities to turn a laudable wish into a practical reality. An essential element is the creation of clear mechanisms for regional fisheries management to support the fishing industry and communities while protecting the long-term ecological viability of fish stocks.

As for discards, commercialisation is clearly a second best to not catching the unwanted fish. Changes in fishing gear can be augmented by increasingly sophisticated technology to ensure better-targeted catches and to avoid the bycatch of non-target species.

It is essential that the EU fishing quotas are based on scientific advice, but the application of the quotas should take account of social and environmental impacts and include measures to address the hardship that can be caused.

The adoption of more sustainable fishing practices should be supported not only through help and advice to the fleet but through fishing rights. Trading rights should not be regarded simply as a market-driven means to promote more efficient operations but ought to be controlled to encourage those who operate in the most sustainable manner.

The marine environment is very important to Scotland. Two thirds of UK fish are landed here and we have done much to protect our marine environment through Scottish legislation, but there is only so much that can be done at this level. We

need coherent, focused and workable agreements at European and global level.

My participation in the debate has been without any expert knowledge of fishing communities or the CFP, but I know about the consequences when a community loses a particular commodity on which it is so dependent. Let us get this right. I just wish that we could put aside the political carping. I hope that the common fisheries policy can become part of the solution, rather than part of the problem.

11:02

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Very often, our common fisheries policy debates are dominated by doom and gloom, and we have heard some of that today, but I have some good news to tell the chamber—after I add just a little bit to the doom and gloom.

Fishermen in my constituency, in Avoch and in Mallaig and the west coast, are still struggling very badly. They have been hit hard by high and increasing fuel costs in particular—some of the larger vessels in the fleet are having to find as much as £100,000 extra a year just for fuel. I know that the cabinet secretary understands that and I wonder whether he would support an increase in the de minimis aid limit to alleviate those very high fuel costs—that is something worth thinking about.

Another area where we can make progress, as the cabinet secretary has already acknowledged, is the haddock quota, or the current lack of it, on the west coast. Even the scientists now agree that there are plenty of haddock. I look forward to a realistic haddock quota on the west coast for next year.

As I said, I also have some good news. A little over a year ago, I was very grateful when Richard Lochhead, our cabinet secretary for fisheries and so on, agreed to accompany me to Mallaig, where I had arranged a meeting with the Mallaig and North West Fishermen's Association. We met a group of fishermen who were worried about what the future held for their industry and whether they would be able to pass on their way of life to their children as their fathers had passed it on to them. As a Lossie loon, fae a fishin toun, ah kent jist far they wir comin fae.

John Hermse, the secretary of the association, and his fellow members took the opportunity to make clear to the cabinet secretary their concerns for the future and their frustration that their quotas were being cut year on year, threatening the continued existence of many boats and the future of fishing on the west coast. One of the key issues that members of the group raised was their desire to promote their catch to UK consumers because,

habitually—certainly in recent years—most of their landings have been bought by buyers from southern Europe, where the high quality of such Scottish produce is recognised and prized. To his credit, the cabinet secretary agreed to do what he could to help to market their wonderful fresh prawns and langoustines to the UK market.

A few weeks ago, I was delighted to hear that that additional help was paying off and that talks were far advanced with two major UK supermarket chains about supplying high-quality fresh prawns from the west coast to hundreds of supermarkets all over the UK. Earlier this week, news of the deal with Sainsbury's leaked out and we now know that consumers at 500 of Sainsbury's 800 UK stores will soon see a new premium product on the fish counter, which will be sold as fresh Scottish west coast langoustines.

The impact of that deal goes much further than merely providing a new customer for our west coast fishermen. It will highlight the fact that the products in question are not French or Mediterranean delicacies but ones that originate here and which are part of Scotland's fantastic larder. I am sure that there are many people in Scotland who think that it is possible to get langoustines only when they are on holiday abroad.

I am sure that, through their advertising, Sainsbury's and others will seek to emphasise the quality of their new products, which can only enhance the reputation of our seafood and lead to more business and better prices for our fishermen. If, in turn, that leads more people to seek out the very best produce from our seas and farms, that can only be good news for our food producers, which will give them the confidence to expand and develop their businesses. Such endorsement of a traditional and sustainable source of employment for fragile communities will, I hope, encourage others in similar traditional professions to seek wider recognition and reward for their endeavours.

The west coast community has always had an entrepreneurial edge, and the confidence and financial security that such a major supermarket order brings will, I am sure, encourage greater investment in the onshore infrastructure that is needed to service a greater demand for its landings.

To add to the good news for the fishing communities of the north-west, I am delighted to have been told of plans for a pilot programme to introduce courses leading to a Scottish Qualifications Authority qualification in maritime skills for fifth and sixth-year pupils at six secondary schools in the north-west Highlands. The new courses will be introduced in partnership with Highland Council's skills for work programme and have been made possible through financial

support from the Highlands and Islands Fish Industry Training Association. Given that funds are being provided to help to train future generations of fishermen and women, I hope that we are beginning to see evidence of more confidence in the future of this important industry than has been witnessed in the north of Scotland for many years.

I thank the cabinet secretary and his officials for taking the time to join me in Mallaig to meet the fishermen a year ago and for assisting the fishing community in moving the matter forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): We move to closing speeches. We have quite a bit of time in hand, so Alex Johnstone has a very generous six minutes.

11:08

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. It is always nice to have a bit of extra time; I hope that I have something constructive to say during it.

The minister began by talking about the importance of the fishing industry and the courage of the men who are involved in it. I would always pay tribute to that and to the courage of the wives and families who are left at home when boats are at sea in extremely difficult conditions.

We all know that the economic importance of the fishing industry for Scotland is several orders of magnitude greater than its economic importance for the rest of the UK. If we look at the issue in greater detail, we see that it is the tendency for the industry to be concentrated in towns in relatively rural or distant areas that lie at the end of long supply lines that explains why it is so crucial in some key areas. That applies not only to the fishing industry but to the aquaculture industry, which has become of much greater importance than has been the case in the past. One of my concerns relates to the proposals to include aquaculture in the CFP, to which I hope to return.

To see the importance of fishing, we need only look as far as the changes in my party's structure that Murdo Fraser has suggested, which one or two speakers, including the minister, mentioned. I raise that because, at his campaign launch, Murdo Fraser singled out the fishing industry as a key example of an issue on which Scottish needs differ from those of the rest of the UK and on which the Conservative Party in future may need to have a more flexible and workable position to do what is best for Scotland. That demonstrates the importance of finding cross-party agreement on what is important for Scotland.

Elaine Murray: I am slightly confused by Alex Johnstone's reference to Murdo Fraser, because I

thought that Murdo Fraser's new party would advocate withdrawal from the CFP.

Alex Johnstone: That is not what we are discussing. I raised the subject merely because the minister raised it.

The Conservative Party is aware of the need for cross-party working on the CFP, which is why we will vote for the Government's motion whether or not it is amended. However, we will also support the Labour Party amendment. As we pointed out, that amendment is virtually identical to the one that was proposed by my colleague Alex Fergusson, which was not selected for debate—understandably so, in the circumstances.

The reason why we will vote for the motion and amendment is that we have grave concerns about the future of the industry. If we look at the relationship between the scientific evidence and the decisions that politicians make, we see that scientists and politicians, with the best interests at heart, far too often find themselves in diverging positions. The science can often be used to prove more than one thing and, when the politicians have become involved over the years, the micromanagement of the science and of the industry has resulted in many decisions being made for the best possible reasons but without delivering the results that the Scottish industry requires.

The proposal to move towards a system of maximum sustainable yields has its attractions but, as we know, the problem with the science in the past has been a failure to apply general principles in a way that produces significant improvements for the industry. For instance, the failure to understand the cannibalistic habits of the white-fish population in its immature phase meant that the failure to get the 1999 year class of haddock out of the sea more quickly than we did was a contributing factor to the population diminishing again over time.

We need to take a more holistic approach and treat the science with respect, but decisions need to be taken for the good of the industry by politicians who understand it. That is why the proposal to move towards regionalisation—devolution of decision making—within the common fisheries policy is important. Even if we accept the principle of common access to a common resource, there are people within the EU whose interests are not those of the fishermen in the marginal areas on the periphery of north-west Europe. That describes many people who rely on our fishery for their incomes. We must have the authority to do what is right for them, and it breaks my heart that the European green paper that was published more than 10 years ago and originally proposed a move to a regional management structure was so watered down by the time that it

was enacted that all we got was regional management committees. We need to go back to that green paper and try to achieve the objective that it set out.

One key area of discussion in the debate has been discards. We all understand the Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall approach, which is that there should be no discards. Maria Damanaki appears to have taken up that approach with a vengeance, but the many members present who understand the industry know that it is not universally achievable.

I suppose that it would be possible to ban discards entirely if we regulated, but the problem is that we could create a market in the fish that were previously discarded and we do not want that to happen. The last thing that we want is for the industry to become based on its waste. We want higher-value catches to be sold at high values. Although we must do everything we can to reduce discards, the idea that they can be prevented entirely is not a good thing for the industry.

We have to think about how the proposals on the transfer of fishing concessions will impact on our industry. Members will be aware that I defend free trade whenever I can, and I will continue to do so, but the idea that fishing concessions might be traded internationally on a one-to-one basis or between member states is undesirable for an industry in Scotland that must not be allowed to sink below critical mass. As we have heard from other speakers, our fishing industry has been successfully managed down in size, and its catching potential has been reduced and largely matched to the availability of fish. If we now enter into an EU-wide arrangement that continues to exert downward pressure on our industry, we will be in danger of losing it. We cannot afford to take that step, so there must be protection to ensure that the fishing quota that is in Scotland today stays in Scotland wherever possible.

There are several reasons why it might be beneficial for aquaculture to be brought under the umbrella of the CFP. I do not intend to go through those ideas, because I intend to introduce as much of an air of caution as I can. Scotland is one of the few European nations that engage in the salmon industry specifically. There are other types of aquaculture in other parts of Europe, and the idea that they can all be drawn together and regulated singly under one umbrella organisation is dangerous. I suggest that the evidence is in what has happened with the CFP.

Stewart Stevenson: Over the summer, I had the opportunity to meet the ministers from Chile and Norway who are responsible for their aquaculture industry. It was clear that there was a strong, shared sense of purpose about the value of that industry and its future potential. Does the

member believe, as I do, that the most satisfactory way of addressing the interests of all three countries is through collaboration at ministerial and industry level rather than having another regime superimposed on the ability to deliver for our industry and the economy in Scotland?

Alex Johnstone: I am strongly attracted to that approach. The final issue that I want to talk about falls slightly outwith the discussion that we have been having, but it has been raised a couple of times: the effect of the unilateral decision by Iceland and the Faroe Islands to raise their allowable catch in the pelagic fishery in the north Atlantic.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close now.

Alex Johnstone: We need to ensure that that is dealt with.

11:18

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I welcome this timely debate. There are huge pressures on our fishing stocks. The EU Commissioner for the Environment recently produced a paper describing that pressure, with the world's population quadrupling during the past century, output growing by 40 times and fish catches increasing by more than 35 times. There is massive pressure on our stocks and huge competition, so we need fair management.

Everyone agrees that the common fisheries policy is not fit for purpose, but what will replace it? As Elaine Murray pointed out, it is difficult to disagree with the principles that Commissioner Damanaki set out in July; the questions will all be about the design of the new system. The consensus in Scotland—which has been reflected in today's debate—is that fishing interests, environment NGOs and fishing communities all want to see the detail.

From the Scottish perspective, everyone has stressed the importance of our fishing industry to our national economy and to the communities that are dependent on fishing, whether they be coastal communities that land fish or those that contain the companies that process our seafood and turn it into high-quality products. That is why we think that our fishing communities need to be at the heart of the debate, and that we must develop sustainable fishing industries for the future. We therefore support the move to regional fisheries management to support those communities and to ensure the long-term ecological viability of our fish stocks. Accountability and transparency are critical for the management of the stocks, and the CFP simply does not have those.

I was interested in members saying that they are nervous about aquaculture being part of the process. It is interesting to contrast those comments with the SSPO's comment that it welcomes aquaculture being given a more prominent role in CFP reforms. It might be that it welcomes the importance of aquaculture being recognised rather than the detail, but that perhaps needs to be teased out. The SSPO's view is that if global aquaculture production had not increased strongly since the early 1990s, there would be massive fish shortages across the world. Aquaculture is important both for Scotland and for the world's need for fish.

Members across the chamber have acknowledged the major efforts that our fishing communities are making to ensure the sustainability of our fishing stocks and banning of wasteful discards. Again, everybody has stressed that the detail is crucial, particularly in a mixed fishery. That is why research on discards and the CCTV pilots are vital in providing evidence for making suggestions to the EU about what the framework might be. Jenny Marra was right to stress the importance of the science, which must be credible and correctly interpreted so that it stands up to scrutiny when it is presented to the EU.

We have condemned the practice of discarding for several years now, and there is massive public opposition to it. As the cabinet secretary said, the question is how we catch less but land more. He was, in that regard, right to look to the conservation measures that our fishing industry has implemented and to the dialogue between our environment NGOs and our fishing industry.

However, what happens next is the key issue. As we know, Commissioner Damanaki has flagged up that she wants to get rid of discarding. Claudia Beamish was right to speak up for consumers in that regard, who are demanding better information. However, we must work out the detail. Our fishing fleets have been working on increasing conservation management, but what happens next?

Rob Gibson was right to say that we need to find common cause with others on the issue rather than just discuss it here. I hope that the cabinet secretary will talk in his closing remarks about what is being done at European level to build support for getting the right policy on discards. There is an issue about persuading the EU. If we can mobilise huge numbers of consumers in the UK on the issue, cannot that be done in other European countries? There must be a way to ensure that the political pressure on us is translated into political action when the EU produces the new proposals. What is key is

mobilisation of people's concerns so that we get the right decisions.

The challenge for the Scottish Government is to work with the UK Government in order to ensure that we influence the development of the new fisheries management rules. Our amendment is not just about stating the facts but about building support across the chamber so that we influence the UK minister. The Labour Party is the Opposition not only here but at UK level. When I look across the chamber, I see not just the Scottish National Party Government but the coalition parties of the UK Government. Whether or not we like each other politically, we have a responsibility to lobby together for the best interests of Scotland, which involves everyone in the chamber using whatever political influence they have, whether that is us talking to our MEPs who are supportive, or other parties in the chamber talking to their UK ministers, and the cabinet secretary ensuring that he translates that support into action down south.

It is not just about the UK Government—important as it is, as a key block of the EU—but about what the other European states think. I have represented the UK in EU discussions, so I know that it is possible for us to have something deleted or vetoed if the EU feels that that will keep us quiet and let it concentrate on the big picture. However, the challenge is not just to veto a small point here or there but to influence the whole architecture of the next CFP. That must be our ambition. It is not about just deleting a line in the policy; it is about ensuring that the whole policy is infinitely better than what people must live with at the moment. That political challenge faces everyone and the burden rests particularly on the cabinet secretary's shoulders as the person who is involved in the process. Given that, I would be grateful if he could tell us a bit more about his strategy for delivering on our collective ambitions.

Elaine Murray and Graeme Dey were right to highlight the Commission's legal advice and to question whether we will get any meaningful devolution at all or whether the prize of regional fisheries management will be taken from us at the last moment, as the CFP is reformed. Surely that would go against the principles that we have all been arguing for, so I hope that the cabinet secretary will be able to clarify the processes and timescale with regard to that position. We need to think about how, collectively, we can put pressure on the EU.

As for trading quotas, which have been raised by members across the chamber, I must say that getting Alex Johnstone to sign up to something that the rest of us agree on is a major achievement. I do not want to stray any further into the Tory party's discussions about where it wants

to position itself, but if we can achieve that kind of political consensus on the view that the quotas will be a nightmare for our fishing communities, we need to use it properly. Such a move will lead to our companies being bought up and quotas being traded away. It will mean that the fish that are currently landed in Scotland will be landed somewhere else and it might result in the disappearance of our fish processing industry. The stakes are very high and we do not have much time before the rules come into force. As a result, we need the best possible representation. Indeed, our amendment is about ensuring that we all work together.

Of course, the challenge does not face the UK alone. I would be interested to hear about the cabinet secretary's discussions with other European interests because it is crucial that we build common cause not just within the UK but across the EU. Different countries have different interests. If we can get the fishing communities in Cornwall and, indeed, in the rest of England on our side, I am sure that we can do the same thing in the rest of Europe. The challenge, though, is massive.

In his opening remarks, the cabinet secretary correctly analysed the CFP's failings; however, the question is what the new CFP is going to look like, so I would like him, in his closing speech, to tell us more about what he is doing—and intends to do—to deliver on the proposals that we think are important. I suggest, for example, that he invite the European commissioner and the UK fisheries minister to come up and talk to us, the industry and the NGOs. Such an approach has been hugely influential with previous fishing ministers. When Jonathan Shaw and Huw Irranca-Davies came up, they totally understood the challenge that was facing them and the importance of the negotiations in which they were involved. We need to do the same again and get ministers up here to talk to us and the cabinet secretary in order to demonstrate that this is not a minority interest but something that interests the whole Scottish Parliament.

Furthermore, the cabinet secretary should consider how we can maximise influence and support, because this is all about translating our aspirations into the CFP's new principles. In the past, the cabinet secretary has been quite coy about his strategy, but I do not think that such an approach is appropriate now. We have to go out and build support for certain principles. After all, we do not want to tweak one or two bits of the system; instead, our challenge—and our aspiration—must be to influence the whole policy. We want devolution of decision making, an end to tradeable quotas and a solution to discards that we can all live with.

Graeme Dey was right about the reduction in the Scottish fleet. We had decommissioning in the early years of this Parliament; our fishing communities have already made those sacrifices. What will be our bargaining chip when the next round of CFP is being developed?

We only have 18 months and there will be no independence referendum in that time. We all have to work together in our country's interest and I hope that members will support our amendment, which is a collective call for common purpose not just within Scotland or the UK but across Europe.

11:29

Richard Lochhead: I will do my best to address some of the points that have been made very eloquently by many members of all parties in the chamber. I agree with Sarah Boyack and Alex Johnstone that we have had a very good debate with good speeches.

At the outset, I should say that as well as being Scottish Government minister for fisheries, I represent—as do many members in the chamber—a constituency in which many of the communities are defined by their fishing heritage. Today, the level of fishing activity is much less than it was in many previous decades, and fewer livelihoods are dependent on fisheries compared with past years. That is perhaps the real cost to us all of the common fisheries policy.

Many members spoke about the importance of our fishing industry to defining not just our communities but Scotland as a nation. Many also made the point that the future of our fishing communities is a national priority. It is not just an issue for members who represent fishing communities, which is why I was delighted that John Pentland, our representative from Motherwell and Wishaw, spoke in the debate and used the opportunity to remind us of that point.

We are also speaking about food. Dave Thompson raised the fact that we are talking about a top-quality food product, which, as Jean Urquhart said, is also a healthy product. We are therefore talking about a good healthy food, to which many communities add value to the benefit of both our coastal economies and Scotland as a nation.

I welcome the news, which Dave Thompson referred to, that the west coast of Scotland, which has not had its problems to seek in the fishing industry in recent years, has an added-value project that means that consumers the length and breadth of these islands will be able to buy top-quality langoustines from the pristine waters of the west coast. That is good news for the local industry.

Fishing has changed over the decades, and there are several factors behind that. First, the biological and ecological conditions in our seas have changed. That has had an influence on the size and location of our stocks, and we should not lose sight of that. We have also seen technological creep. Our vessels have become bigger and more efficient and can catch fish a lot more quickly and easily than in previous decades. That influences the number of vessels that we can have and the impact that they have on our fragile fish stocks.

Those are important factors, but I think that we can all agree today that the biggest factor that has influenced the fortunes of Scotland's fishing communities down the years has been the disastrous European common fisheries policy, which is what today's debate is really about.

I want to address a number of issues that were raised by members. I will start by ensuring that the arguments that we put forward for the future of our fishing communities and fish stocks are based on science. It is important that we present the evidence that makes Scotland's case. Tavish Scott asked about the science budgets; I can assure him that as part of yesterday's announcement we have protected the fish science budgets in my portfolio. We recognise the importance of the science in negotiations, not just this year but in subsequent years, including in relation to some of the stocks in Tavish Scott's constituency. We need more science. We tend to be one of the few member states to have an interest in the stocks, so we have to ensure that we fund the science because no one else will do it. It has been challenging, but we have protected the budgets.

My officials have helpfully passed me a note to remind me that I am appearing before the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee to discuss our budget in a couple of weeks. I am looking forward to that.

Many members raised the issue of international tradeable quotas and the prospect that we could have a regime imposed on us that would mean that our current generation of fishing businesses could sell their quotas to foreign-based companies, thereby denying future generations of Scots in fishing communities their birthright and, as Sarah Boyack said, inflicting huge economic damage on our onshore sectors, as well the fleet. We all want to avoid that. We have asked for clarification from the Commission on the legalities of what it proposes and the safeguards it is offering. Clearly, we live in a single market, so if a Scots fisherman can sell to another Scots fishermen, how can he be prevented from selling to Dutch or Spanish fishermen? As I said in my opening remarks, unless we have absolute

guarantees, the proposal will spell doom for many of Scotland's fishing communities.

Discards are a huge public issue. I can exclusively reveal to the chamber that I have had two lengthy conversations with Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall in recent months. He did not give me any tips for the kitchen, but we did discuss the importance of discards and ensuring that we take the right approach. I used the opportunity to make it clear that we need not only a ban on discards at some point in the future but a plan to get there in the first place. The situation is not quite as simple as some people are making out, particularly in the case of Scotland's mixed fishery, where the net goes over the side of the boat and various species are caught at the one time. It is not the same in the clean fisheries in the Mediterranean and elsewhere in European waters. We must be very careful, but we all agree that we have to make discards history as soon as possible.

Another proposal from the European Commission is that we ensure that our stocks achieve maximum sustainable yield by 2015. We can all agree with that principle, but we have concerns about how we will get there. As I said before, the biological and ecological conditions in our seas can influence the location and size of stocks; therefore, it is not the way forward to set a crude target for 2015 and, if we do not make progress quickly enough in the eyes of the European Commission, to be suddenly denied fishing opportunities for our fleet. We will keep a close watching brief on that.

Many members raised the issue of aquaculture and the need to ensure that the mistakes that we have made over sea fisheries are not made in relation to Scotland's important aquaculture sector.

Some good things are being proposed by the Commission. For instance, the movement toward long-term multi-annual plans for our fish stocks is a good idea that we all support. We must move away from the constant crisis management that our fishing industry has had to put up with year in, year out. Those plans would be a way of doing that and would give the industry stability to plan its business into the future. The retention of relative stability is also welcomed by us all, because it protects Scotland's historical fishing rights. The protection of the Hague preferences, which is a mechanism that ensures that fisheries-dependent communities get a minimum threshold of fish stocks and quotas, is also very important for Scotland and Ireland. In addition, the retention of the 6 and 12-mile limits has been confirmed, which we all welcome.

Tavish Scott raised the issue of the Shetland box. We have noticed that it is absent from the European Commission's proposals and we are

discussing with fishing representatives in Shetland and nationally how we can take the debate forward on the future of the Shetland box. I assure Tavish Scott that the matter is on our radar screen.

Sarah Boyack suggested that we must maximise our influence in the negotiations. I agree that we must make every effort to maximise our influence in determining the future of the common fisheries policy and the future of our fishing communities. That is why we are asking for a greater role for Scotland in those negotiations. Surely, we all agree that the current position is unsustainable. Last year, the Labour Government chose to send from the House of Lords a junior minister with responsibility for bee health to an important fisheries meeting, despite the Scottish Government's request to attend; the UK Government turned down the Scottish Government's request to have the Scottish fisheries minister present. Surely, any reasonable person recognises that that is wholly unacceptable.

The new Tory-Lib Dem Government in London says that it is relaxed about Scotland attending and speaking at meetings when a predominantly Scottish interest is being discussed or there is another good reason for us to do so. Yet, every time that we have asked to do that, it has said no. The UK Government cannot on the one hand be relaxed about the Scottish Government having the opportunity to put the case for Scotland's fishing communities, but on the other, when a logical case is put as to why Scotland should take the lead or be able to speak at a meeting, say no every time. The only time that has been allowed to happen was when the First Minister intervened and persuaded the Prime Minister to overturn DEFRA's decision. That situation must change if Scotland is to maximise its influence as we move forward.

The make-or-break issue in the CFP negotiations will be the extent to which decision making can be decentralised and returned to Scotland and the other member states, to work on a more local and regional level. I am pleased that the Parliament is united in recognising that that is the make-or-break issue and that we can send a clear, loud and united message from Scotland that it must be delivered. At the moment, we are awaiting further information from the Commission—which it has promised to publish soon—on how a regional model might work in a way that is acceptable in terms of the treaties and legal conditions. Our argument is that it is important to knock down the legal obstacles to ensure that such a model is delivered. If we agree that the CFP, under the current arrangements, has failed miserably, we cannot allow that to continue; so, let us knock down any of the obstacles that

prevent decision making from being returned to member states and Scotland, in order to give our fish stocks and fishing communities a future.

Members have referred to the importance of our fishing industry in Shetland, Orkney, the west coast, Mallaig, north-east Fife, north-east Scotland, Eyemouth, the Western Isles, Scrabster, Lochinver, Pittenweem, Buckie and elsewhere. Our fishing industry remains crucial to the future of Scotland, which is why I am confident that we can take a team Scotland approach to the negotiations and speak with one voice as we work with our MEPs and other member states. I have had meetings with the Spanish and Irish ministers, and we will continue to do what Sarah Boyack asked for and put our case to other member states and capitals in Europe as well as working with the UK Government. The UK Government will have to work with Scotland and will, I hope, take into account our predominant interest in the UK's case. Seventy per cent of the UK's fishing industry is based in Scotland; therefore, it is vital that the UK Government listens to what Scotland has to say.

In closing, Rod Campbell said that he visited the Scottish fisheries museum in Anstruther. I have fond memories of my visit in the past year or so. I recommend making a visit to all members, who will see that the history of fishing is woven into Scotland's story.

We must get the review of the common fisheries policy right so that we can write a new chapter for Scotland's fishing communities and save Scotland's fishing industry.

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:40

Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (Fastlink)

1. Derek Mackay (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with Strathclyde partnership for transport regarding fastlink. (S4O-00174)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment and I last met SPT on 14 July to discuss various matters, including the fastlink project. Our officials have also been in regular contact with SPT officials recently, as SPT worked on finalising the fastlink business case.

Derek Mackay: The project is good for Glasgow and potentially good for the surrounding areas. Can the minister tell us more about the next key stage?

Keith Brown: As announced in the spending review yesterday, the Government's capital programme makes funding available to meet the Government's commitments to implement the core phase of the Glasgow fastlink proposal. The next key stage will be the acceptance of the business case, which my officials are reviewing as a priority and on which they will report to me shortly.

We welcome the close work between SPT, Glasgow City Council and Transport Scotland officials, which resulted in the delivery of the final fastlink business case on 31 August. We also welcome the signing of the memorandum of understanding between the two parties, which details their respective responsibilities. We are also pleased with the progress on the creation of a further memorandum of understanding between SPT and Renfrewshire Council, which outlines further regional intentions to extend fastlink to provide access to Braehead. Those are the next key stages.

Cancer (Early Detection, Diagnosis and Treatment)

2. Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what measures it is taking to improve the early detection, diagnosis and treatment of cancer. (S4O-00175)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities

Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): We have launched an ambitious new programme as well as encouraging improved participation in the national cancer screening programmes and increasing awareness of symptoms and suspicious signs of cancer. The initiative will encourage referral at an earlier stage. The draft implementation plan for the detect cancer early initiative was launched on 1 August to engage with key stakeholders.

Jim Eadie: Has the cabinet secretary had time to study the *Daily Record* of 6 September? If not, I have a copy that I am happy to share with her. The *Daily Record* text for Tommy campaign aims to raise £1.2 million for a cancer research laboratory in honour of Celtic legend Tommy Burns. Does she agree that the Tommy Burns memorial laboratory is a fitting tribute that will offer hope to the one in three Scots who will develop cancer in their lifetime? Will she join me in urging the whole of Scotland to text for Tommy so that many more people will benefit from world-leading cancer research and treatment?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am pleased to give my support to the *Daily Record* campaign. I have already texted for Tommy to support this valuable project and I encourage others across the chamber to do likewise. The campaign is important for two reasons: it gives us the opportunity to remember one of Scotland's great sporting heroes and it helps to ensure that research into the diagnosis and treatment of cancer continues to be supported in Scotland.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I wish to associate myself with the cabinet secretary's remarks. I want to ask her about the uptake of breast cancer screening and bowel cancer screening. There is a lack of uptake in both cases, particularly in deprived areas. What action will the Government take to increase uptake?

Nicola Sturgeon: Jackie Baillie is right to raise the uptake of cancer screening programmes, particularly in some of our more deprived communities. It is precisely to improve uptake of the screening programmes—as well as other points—that this Government has decided to establish the detect cancer early initiative. That will be supported by additional funding of £30 million. I hope that all members will get behind the programme. The earlier we detect cancer, the better the chance that our world-leading clinicians have of saving lives. That is what the programme is all about.

A90 (Laurencekirk)

3. Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it has given to the findings of the cost refinement exercise carried out by Transport

Scotland for a grade-separated junction at Laurencekirk. (S4O-00176)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): We have reviewed the report and supplied it to the Public Petitions Committee for its on-going consideration. The report provides a more informed preliminary estimate for developers and other stakeholders of the scale of the investment that is required to construct a grade-separated junction or junctions at Laurencekirk.

Nigel Don: I thank the minister for passing on that information, some of which I have seen.

Given that Laurencekirk, which lies between Brechin and Stonehaven, is in the middle of a 20-mile section of the A90 that has no bridge or underpass, that there are obvious safety issues at the south junction, despite recent improvements and that the local plan implies substantial further housing development, does the minister accept that the provision of a grade-separated junction falls within the category on page 199 of the "Scottish Spending Review 2011 and Draft Budget 2012-13" of essential

"safety and congestion relief improvements"?

Keith Brown: There are various stages to go through before the stage that Nigel Don mentions is reached. The cost refinement exercise, the purpose of which was to give more certainty to potential developers and the council about the ultimate cost, has been produced. Members will remember that the original cost was between £10 million and £30 million. We thought that, in response to the point that the petitioners made, we had to give a bit more certainty about that. Having done that, it is now up to the Public Petitions Committee and others with an interest in the matter to make their views known.

As the member pointed out, the matter is intrinsically related to potential development and therefore to the development plan for the area. If there is a new burden on the road—we expect that there will be if 880-odd houses are built in the area—that will obviously have an impact on the road and on developers' contributions. Those matters must be considered together. We have reached the stage of having particular engagement on that with the interested individuals—with protesters, local members and others.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): The local community will be frustrated by the minister's answer. Too many lives have been lost and too many people have been injured at the junction. Over the past 10 years, there have been four fatal collisions, 15 serious accidents and 22 accidents that have resulted in slight injuries. How many more accidents does the local community

need to witness before action is taken? I urge the minister to take action now.

Keith Brown: I have listened to the calls for action, not least from the protesters and people with a concern in the area. I have also listened to Mike Rumbles, who asked us to carry out a cost refinement study. We have done that. We have taken action, and that allows us to progress matters. Alison McInnes is therefore not right to say that the Government is not taking action. She did not mention the role of the council or future developers in making further progress or the progress that has been made through the safety changes that are still being implemented on that stretch of road. We have taken action, and we will continue to see matters through as the debate continues after the cost refinement exercise.

NHS (Safeguards for Staff Raising Concerns)

4. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what safeguards there are to protect national health service staff who raise concerns regarding the quality of care and treatment. (S4O-00177)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): The partnership information network policy on dealing with employee concerns, which sets the minimum standard to which NHS Scotland boards must adhere, confirms that employees should be actively encouraged to raise concerns that relate to the delivery of care without fear of penalty or victimisation. The policy is consistent with current employment legislation and best practice. I encourage any member of staff who has concerns to raise them in that way.

Mary Scanlon: According to a recent British Medical Association survey, many staff are unaware of whistleblowing policies. How will the Government ensure that there is better communication and feedback to NHS staff who have raised concerns in the knowledge that there will be no fear of retribution? Will the cabinet secretary ensure that NHS boards report on actions that have been taken in response to concerns that staff have raised?

Nicola Sturgeon: It is worth pointing out to Mary Scanlon and others that the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 protects NHS Scotland staff who act honestly and reasonably in raising concerns that they have about levels of care either internally or, in certain circumstances, externally.

The Government takes whistleblowing very seriously. We have carried out a review of the partnership information network guideline on dealing with employee concerns, to which I referred, and that review and its outcome perhaps

give us an opportunity to consider how we can raise the profile of the matter among NHS staff. I am therefore happy to consider the first part of Mary Scanlon's question, as well as the second part on ensuring that NHS boards facilitate the proper working of the policy. I am happy to continue dialogue with her on those points.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Under the Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011, we have introduced a new system of complaints for the public. Following on from the Mid Staffordshire inquiry, what steps will the cabinet secretary take to ensure that all national health service staff in Scotland understand that they have an absolute responsibility to report concerns about practice that might affect patient safety? Has the Government considered introducing a whistleblowers helpline for staff to contact if they feel that their concerns are not being addressed by local management?

Nicola Sturgeon: I give consideration to all suggestions, and am happy to do so. With regard to the part of Richard Simpson's question about the Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011, I stress, as I did to Mary Scanlon, that there already is statutory protection for NHS workers in the situation that he describes.

With regard to the specific action that we have taken, the review of the PIN policy led to a new PIN guideline that was developed nationally in partnership by the Government, employers, the trade unions and professional bodies, and addresses whistleblowing as a standalone policy. Mary Scanlon is right to say that the issue now is to ensure that there is awareness of that policy. We must get the point across to staff that they have not only the right to raise concerns but—to use Richard Simpson's phrase, which I welcome—the responsibility to do so. I am happy to work with all members to ensure that that happens.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): The cabinet secretary will be aware of concerns that have been raised by staff in Ayrshire about NHS Ayrshire and Arran's intention to move trauma and orthopaedics from Ayr hospital to one centre at Crosshouse hospital and the threat that that might pose to the long-term future of accident and emergency services at Ayr hospital. Can the cabinet secretary assure me of her continuing commitment to A and E at Ayr hospital and her awareness of the need to keep trauma and orthopaedics at the hospital? Can she confirm that staff should not feel threatened by management for raising concerns about the matter?

Nicola Sturgeon: No one should ever feel threatened when they raise concerns.

If NHS Ayrshire and Arran or any health board has service change proposals, it will need to go

through the normal consultation process. If the proposals constitute major service changes, they will ultimately come to me for approval or otherwise.

Perhaps it is more important that I assure the member that I understand the concerns around the continued retention of Ayr's accident and emergency services. I put on record again this Government's absolute commitment to the retention of the accident and emergency unit at Ayr hospital.

Water Rates (Eligibility for Exemption)

5. Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will review the eligibility criteria for exemptions from the payment of water rates. (S4O-00178)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): The water services charges exemption scheme was set up as a temporary measure in 2002 to help small organisations that had received relief from water charges to make the transition to paying. The scheme was subsequently extended, with some revisions, and will run to 2015.

The Scottish ministers have asked Scottish Water to review the current arrangements, working with stakeholders such as the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and licensed providers, with a view to devising a new scheme to run from 2015. As other water customers pay for the exemption scheme through their water charges, I would expect any new scheme to operate within the same financial envelope.

Elaine Murray: I thank the cabinet secretary for his reply and Stewart Stevenson for the written response that I received yesterday.

When the minister considers the new scheme, I ask him to bear in mind the example of Dryfesdale lodge visitor centre at Lockerbie cemetery, which is run by a charity that was set up in 2003. It has information on the area, but also acts as the gateway to the memorial that commemorates the victims of Pan Am flight 103, which means that it welcomes quite a number of overseas visitors who come to the memorial to their relatives. That charity pays more than £10,000 in water rates. If a new scheme comes in, and exemptions continue, will the minister ensure that eligible recently constituted charities such as that one can be included?

Alex Neil: I am happy to endorse that point. We will consider whether organisations that were previously excluded should be included. I should emphasise that the scheme is not exclusively available to charities; it is available to other organisations that are not registered charities. I am aware of one or two organisations in Dr

Murray's constituency that have met with some difficulty. I have asked Scottish Water to work with those organisations and to accommodate them as far as possible, as I am conscious of the impact that those charges can have on the overall viability of well-meaning organisations.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Roderick Campbell has a supplementary question. May we have a brief question and a brief answer? *[Interruption.]* May we have Mr Campbell's microphone on?

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): The cabinet secretary has largely covered the issue that I was going to raise in my supplementary question. I wanted to draw attention to the fact that eligibility for the scheme is based on status at 31 March 1999, which has caused difficulties for some charities. When he reviews the scheme, will the cabinet secretary ensure that Scottish Water takes account of dates?

Alex Neil: I am very much aware of the issue. As we look to the new scheme we will take members' points into account. I am not currently in a position to make specific promises, because we are in the process of reviewing the scheme, which will be refreshed in 2015. However, we are listening to what people are saying.

Open Market Shared Equity Scheme

6. John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will reintroduce the open market shared equity scheme. (S4O-00179)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): This year we allocated almost £5 million to the open market shared equity scheme. The grant has now been allocated to potential purchasers, allowing them three months to find a property to buy.

We recognise the need for Government support for the growing number of people who are priced out of home ownership. That is why we will continue to support home ownership in a balanced and sustainable way, which includes the growth of innovative products such as shared equity.

John Pentland: I thank the minister for his response, which answered my question.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Pentland. That was most helpful.

Scottish Futures Trust (Non-profit Distributing Programme)

7. Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how the Scottish

Futures Trust promotes the non-profit distributing programme. (S4O-00180)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): The Scottish Futures Trust leads on delivery of the non-profit distributing programme, which is valued at £2.5 billion. The SFT is supporting public sector procuring bodies such as NHS Lothian and Transport Scotland to deliver NPD projects. The SFT is also in frequent contact with private sector companies regarding the detail of the project pipeline and the commercial opportunities therein.

Aileen McLeod: What progress is being made in meeting local authorities' requests to take advantage of the NPD programme under the Scottish Futures Trust for financing capital projects?

Alex Neil: We will make announcements before Christmas. Local authorities are heavily involved in a number of NPD projects. The NPD £2.5 billion covers transport, health and education. We are consulting widely in all those areas, particularly with the participating authorities, which in some cases are local authorities. The feedback that we have had from local authorities is that if the SFT was not here the Government would need to invent it.

Pressure Sores (Awareness Campaigns)

8. Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will support an awareness campaign regarding the prevention of pressure sores. (S4O-00181)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): An integrated programme for tissue viability was launched in 2008 and was supported by investment of more than £1 million. The programme has produced online resources for front-line staff, to raise awareness of the need for continuous improvement in the application of evidenced-based care, to improve the prevention, detection and treatment of pressure ulcers. Staff are supported in the delivery of care by a network of tissue viability nurses and quality improvement leads in each national health service board area.

Fiona McLeod: May I draw the minister's attention to a suggestion from one of my constituents? Peter Hodge, of Lenzie, suggested that all wheelchairs should have an advice label on them that would remind people that prolonged use raises the incidence of pressure ulcers.

Michael Matheson: Advice on the prevention of pressure sores is provided as part of the existing assessment process in relation to wheelchairs. Following the assessment, the person is informed of the potential risks and the measures that they can take to avoid developing a pressure sore. That is part of the on-going programme on the provision

of wheelchair services in Scotland. Guidance should be provided to individuals when they are issued with their wheelchair.

Freedom of Information (Registered Social Landlords)

9. Paul Martin (Glasgow Provan) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it plans to extend the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 to include registered social landlords. (S4O-00182)

The Cabinet Secretary for Parliamentary Business and Government Strategy (Bruce Crawford): Last year, the Scottish Government consulted on extending coverage of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. That consultation process considered whether registered social landlords should be included in any extension of the 2002 act's coverage. As was announced on 26 January, ministers have concluded that it would be premature to extend coverage until the proposed FOI amendment bill has been considered and until the economic situation improves significantly.

Paul Martin: In my experience, the Link Group has lacked transparency and consistency in its dealings with the Robroyston community in my constituency. Will the minister meet me to discuss that further?

Bruce Crawford: I am happy to meet Paul Martin at any time.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S4F-00146)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I am delighted to say that I will meet later today Vion's chief executive officer, Ton Christiaanse, whose company is to establish a new centre of excellence in Broxburn that will create 250 new additional jobs and safeguard 1,000 others. Among the 250 new jobs will be up to 100 modern apprenticeships. That is in line with the Government's aim to use public support as a lever for job creation and training opportunities. I know that the whole Parliament will welcome that latest in a long line of major international companies that are showing their confidence and faith in Scotland's future.

Iain Gray: One hundred modern apprenticeships are always welcome but, as we saw last week, 72,000 young Scots are unemployed. Such levels were last experienced under the Tory Government in 1992, so why on earth did the First Minister cut further education funding in his budget yesterday?

The First Minister: I am glad that Iain Gray welcomes modern apprenticeships. We should remember that the level of modern apprenticeships—at 25,000 a year for the next five years—is 60 per cent higher than the level that we inherited from the Labour Party. As he knows, the remarkable point about the budget is that funding for further and higher education and for educational opportunities for our young people is substantially increasing in Scotland, even against the worst cuts from Westminster in a generation.

Iain Gray: The fact is that Scotland's colleges deliver many modern apprenticeships. The First Minister cut further education funding last year and has cut it again—by 20 per cent in real terms over the piece.

I spoke to Scotland's Colleges today. Colleges do not believe that they can sustain their contribution to apprenticeships with the scale of cuts. A thousand jobs have gone from our colleges and it is clear that student places are next.

Last week, Mike Russell told us that he would shut colleges. Let us have the truth about the Scottish National Party's education cuts: how many colleges will it get rid of—10, 20 or 30?

The First Minister: If we are dealing with the truth, let us be accurate about what Mike Russell

said only last week. He said that mergers of colleges were a productive idea, as with the recent merger in the city of Glasgow, which was—if memory serves—even supported by the Labour Party in that great city.

The 25,000 modern apprenticeships a year will be achieved, as the 100,000 training places will be. The documents that were published yesterday show that our investment in post-16 education will rise from £1.92 billion to £1.99 billion, which is an increase of 3.5 per cent. That is a remarkable performance, given the spending cuts that Westminster is imposing on the Parliament and the Government.

I would have thought that Iain Gray would, perhaps in passing, welcome the opportunities for all strategy—a guaranteed training or educational opportunity for every youngster between 16 and 19 in Scotland. Should not the entire Parliament unite behind that?

Iain Gray: Yes—indeed. I agree absolutely with the SNP's George Kerevan, who said that that initiative was

“a policy straight out of Labour's election manifesto, but welcome for all that.”

The trouble is that those who have to deliver the training places do not believe that they will be able to do it when they face a 20 per cent cut. Back in the 1990s, when we had similar levels of youth unemployment, even the Tories created new colleges and universities to expand opportunity, but the Government is going to close them down. It is not just colleges, because the First Minister is going to get rid of universities, too. Everyone knows that Mike Russell has a hit list. So let us have the truth: which universities has the First Minister decided to close?

The First Minister: I know that Iain Gray, throughout his time as Labour leader, has led with his chin at First Minister's question time, but that takes the biscuit. Has he seen any of the statements from university principals in the past 24 hours? Professor Seamus McDaid, the convener of Universities Scotland, said:

“This is a very significant investment in Scotland's universities and one which will put the sector on a competitive footing for the future. The Scottish Government has acted to close the ... funding gap facing Scotland's universities.”

Professor Tim O'Shea, the vice-convener of Universities Scotland, said:

“The protection of our international standing is vital”,

and the Scottish Government continues

“to lever-in ... over £1 billion every year to the Scottish economy.”

Best of all, Professor Anton Muscatelli—who has not always been the most enthusiastic person in commenting on the Scottish Government, so he should have his day today—said:

“I strongly welcome the investment announced by the Scottish Government in Universities in today's Spending Review. This is a fantastic commitment by the Scottish Government which fully meets the funding needs of Scottish higher education, and makes us completely competitive with other higher education systems.”

Given that endorsement from Professor Muscatelli, will Iain Gray find it in his heart to realise that the Scottish Government is investing in the future of Scotland?

Iain Gray: The fact is that the First Minister is not going to close Anton Muscatelli's university or Tim O'Shea's university; he is going to close the University of Abertay Dundee, which has 500 staff and 5,000 students and is the best university in the country in environmental science and computer gaming. It is top of Mike Russell's hit list. Will the First Minister tell us now—yes or no—is he going to close Abertay?

The First Minister: I quoted the convener and vice-convener of Universities Scotland, who speak for all the universities. As I pointed out, Iain Gray has totally misrepresented the education secretary—twice now in this question session. Given that nobody in the country believes that the Labour Party, if it had been in government, would have funded our universities to anything like the same extent, can he find it in himself to agree with Universities Scotland and with the words of Anton Muscatelli that this is a “fantastic” settlement for our universities?

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister—or perhaps that should be His High Excellency, as I understand from *The Times* he now likes to be styled—when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S4F-00140)

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

Annabel Goldie: The First Minister likes to wax lyrical at every opportunity about powers that he does not have, such as that over corporation tax, which he wants to be devolved. How many businesses in Scotland would benefit from his recently published proposal for a corporation tax cut?

The First Minister: The corporate tax cut in Scotland that could be proposed by a Scottish Government that had those powers would create tens of thousands of new jobs in Scotland. I hear that business is against such a thing, but I heard

from the Confederation of British Industry that it is thoroughly in favour of such a move. Of course, it was the CBI in Northern Ireland that saw the advantages of such a move there. I wonder why the CBI in Scotland cannot follow its example.

I notice that only two moves along the bench from Annabel Goldie is David McLetchie. If I remember correctly, David McLetchie signed up to Wendy Alexander's declaration that if any other country in these islands had powers over corporation tax, this Parliament and this Government should have them as well.

Annabel Goldie: It is not the CBI or David McLetchie who is sitting over there to answer questions but the First Minister. That is not the question I asked; I shall give him an answer to the question I asked, because he does not want to admit it. According to the Scottish Parliament's researchers, fewer than 3 per cent of all businesses in Scotland would benefit from his proposal. By the Government's own admission, it would take 20 years to create the 27,000 new jobs that it estimates would be created by reducing corporation tax.

I am all in favour of cutting tax for business but the First Minister has a tax power that he can use right now. The tax is called business rates and it is paid by the vast majority of businesses in Scotland and not just 3 per cent.

In a press release from the Deputy First Minister no less, we are told that the small business bonus scheme, delivered by the Conservatives—*[Laughter.]* Let me dispel the raucous laughter. Without the votes from these benches there would be no small business bonus. The scheme created 40,000 new jobs in just four years at a fraction of the cost of the First Minister's corporation tax proposal.

Why on earth was yesterday's budget silent on extending more help to more businesses, large and small, to cut their business rates and create more jobs right now with the powers that we already have?

The First Minister: I do not know whether Annabel Goldie bothered to look at the reaction of the Federation of Small Businesses to yesterday's budget but it was incredibly enthusiastic, not just about measures to end the disparity between small and large retailers in Scotland, but about the continuation of the small business bonus in particular. It is the most extraordinary, fantastic incentive, helping 80,000 small businesses across Scotland and giving small business a £3,000 advantage over businesses elsewhere in these islands.

One of the great things about our having a majority Government is that Annabel Goldie will no longer be able to claim the credit for Scottish

National Party policy. I therefore put it to her as simply as possible, as a matter of arithmetic, that we will no longer depend on the votes of the Conservative party on the budget as it goes through over the next few months. Does it not follow that, by definition, the decision to continue with the small business bonus—that fantastic scheme that benefits 80,000 small businesses across Scotland—must now be entirely the responsibility of this SNP Government?

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): As Iain Gray did not get an answer to his final question, will the First Minister confirm the report in *The Herald* on Monday that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning is in favour of the University of Dundee and the University of Abertay Dundee merging?

The First Minister: That is not what Iain Gray asked. As I tried to point out a number of times, Iain Gray twice said that the cabinet secretary had proposed the closure of further and higher education institutions and universities. The cabinet secretary did no such thing. He opened up the possibility of mergers, and we have seen mergers in the further and higher education sector, including in the university sector. For example, as I am sure Jenny Marra knows, Edinburgh College of Art recently merged with the University of Edinburgh.

For accuracy, I put it to Jenny Marra, who asked her question much more carefully than her current party leader did—a candidacy for the future might be in the offing—that mergers between higher education institutions have happened many times in Scottish history. A merger is entirely different from a closure, and Iain Gray is scaremongering.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware of the mass resignation of the lay members of the Vale of Leven monitoring group—a group set up by the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy. They resigned because they felt that their views were substantially ignored by the health board, as demonstrated by the board's proposal to close the Christie ward, which provides in-patient mental health services. On the basis that there is an increase in the number of mental health cases, that Gartnavel is unable to cope with the numbers, and that patients from my community are being sent to Lanarkshire and Ayrshire, will the First Minister or the health secretary meet me and the lay members involved to discuss their concerns?

The First Minister: I am sure that the health secretary will be glad to agree to that meeting. Obviously we are disappointed by the decision of the lay members, but we are grateful to the group for its input into the board's implementation of the vision for the Vale. We are fully aware of the strength of feeling and support for the Christie

ward. That is why the cabinet secretary approved the vision for the Vale in July 2009. Therefore, the health secretary will be delighted to meet the member to pursue talks. I point out to the member as gently as I can that if it had been up to her and the Labour Party, there would not be a Vale of Leven hospital to have such talks about.

Borders Railway (Cost Cap)

3. Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government plans to impose a cap on the costs of the Borders railway project. (S4F-00149)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): We are committed to delivering the Borders railway project within budget.

Lewis Macdonald: Does the First Minister understand the concerns arising from reports this week of mounting costs and mounting delays in this non-profit-distributing project? If he does, and given his Government's choice of that funding method, will he explain what else he will do—if he is not pursuing a cap—if the sole remaining bidder seeks to further increase the price of completing the project?

The First Minister: The timescales referred to in the media earlier this week are consistent with our programme for delivering the Borders railway on budget and by December 2014. We put the construction figure between £235 million and £295 million and we are sticking to that. The Minister for Housing and Transport will make an announcement on the future delivery of the project in the near future.

I say two things to Lewis Macdonald. The track record of Transport Scotland under the Scottish National Party Administration in delivering huge projects on time and under budget—the M74 and the M80, for example—is impeccable, compared with the record under the Labour-Lib Dem Administration. Of course, when Lewis Macdonald was a transport minister, not only did he not put a penny into the Borders railway project, which he claimed to support, but he was a major sponsor of the private finance initiative. Only this week we have seen yet again detailed the cost to future generations of Scots of that misguided policy.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Can I further remind the First Minister that, on the Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration's watch, the cost of the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine line went from £23 million to £85 million and was two years late—incidentally, with not one piece of the Borders line being laid, notwithstanding—

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Do you have a question, Ms Grahame? [*Interruption.*]

Members: Question!

Christine Grahame: There was a question.

The Presiding Officer: Can we have the question, please?

Christine Grahame: Tavish Scott, the minister, said that the Borders line would be up and running by 2007. Does the First Minister therefore agree that he needs no lessons on delivering transport projects on budget or on time from the Opposition?

The First Minister: Yes I do. The cost of railway projects is an important aspect that this chamber should acknowledge. The Airdrie to Bathgate link cost £375 million and was the largest commuter line to be opened in Scotland in a century. It was officially opened this year and was within budget. That is testament to the track record of this Government compared with that of our predecessors.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): It has been five years since the Waverley Railway (Scotland) Bill was passed in 2006. Does the First Minister really expect the people of Midlothian and the Borders to believe that trains will roll into their communities in 2014, give that the timetable keeps going back and back? In 2009, the then transport minister stated:

“a contract for the construction of the railway work will be delivered in autumn 2011.”—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 24 November 2009; S3O-8498.]

The Presiding Officer: Can you just get to the question, Mr Hume?

Jim Hume: We are now in autumn 2011. Can the First Minister give us a specific date when we can all go online and book our tickets to Galashiels?

The First Minister: I repeat what I said two questions ago to Lewis Macdonald: the timescales referred to in the media are consistent with our programme for delivering the Borders railway on budget and by December 2014. The confidence that Jim Hume can have in that statement is based on the strong delivery record of Transport Scotland in this Government's term of office, when project after project has been delivered on time and on budget. We should not allow the mistakes of the past, committed by other parties, to make us lose confidence in the ability of this Government to find a way to deliver the project on time and on budget.

Transmission Charges

4. Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what recent discussions the Scottish Government has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding transmission

charges for companies wishing to connect to the UK grid. (S4F-00143)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Government, supported by other voices across the chamber, has long argued that in the rapidly changing energy sector the current transmission charging regime makes no sense and must be changed. Scotland has some of the greatest low-carbon energy resources in Europe, yet the locational pricing approach sees Scottish generators in the areas of highest renewable resource paying the highest charges in the UK.

We had substantial hopes that we were on the brink of a breakthrough on the matter, and we are still confident of a better outcome, but I would like the Office of the Gas and Electricity Markets to declare its direction of travel sooner rather than later.

Aileen McLeod: Earlier this week, Scottish Renewables chief executive Niall Stuart claimed that the proposed 1,600MW of wave and tidal projects that are planned for Pentland Firth and Orkney waters face an annual grid charge of £56 million, compared with the subsidy of £11 million that they would receive if they were sited off the south-west coast of England. Is it the case that that unfair discrepancy in connection charges could jeopardise Scotland's fulfilment of its massive potential in renewables? Will the First Minister again urge the UK Government to look at the issue?

The First Minister: I have pressed the issue many times with the previous UK Government and the current UK Government. Just this month, in his most recent response to my argument for a level playing field for generation across the UK, Mr Huhne, the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, indicated broad agreement with that approach.

I remind members across the chamber that the last time there was a motion on the subject in the Parliament, it was agreed—with no votes against—that there should be a more equitable approach to transmission charging across the UK, and one that did not discriminate against Scotland or particular parts of Scotland. The result of the relevant division was: For 57, Against 0. The motion carried the support of the Scottish National Party, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens. There were 52 abstentions. I still do not understand why the Conservative and Labour Parties could not find it in their hearts to argue that Scottish generators should get an equal deal so that we could mobilise the great resources of Scotland.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I know that the First Minister has welcomed project transmit, which has been undertaken under the

current coalition Government, and I am sure that he will welcome the extension of the project's timeframe to allow all the issues to be thrashed out in more detail.

However, the First Minister will, no doubt, have noticed from the report by Scottish Renewables that came out earlier this week the large discrepancies that exist in connection charges, particularly in island areas. Is there now a case for separating the issue as it relates to island areas from the issue as it relates to the rest of the UK in order to break the logjam?

The First Minister: There should not be a logjam. We had every reason to believe that the announcements from Ofgem that were expected this autumn would end the massive disparity that exists. We believe that we have the support of the UK Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change for that, and we are still confident that we will obtain a resolution of this long-standing and quite disgraceful piece of discrimination.

I am surprised to hear Liam McArthur welcome the delay in the reaching of a conclusion. We had good reason to believe that matters would be resolved this autumn. That resolution is of such importance because investment decisions cannot wait for Ofgem to have another six months of talk. We need action, and we believe that we had an agreement in principle that action would be taken.

I know that Liam McArthur will add his voice to the many other voices across Scotland that say that the present disparity must end and must end now.

Further Education (Job Losses)

5. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking following the loss of 1,000 jobs in the further education sector over the last year. (S4F-00148)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): It is important for each and every member and constituency that we protect college places for young Scots. We are providing a record number of training opportunities. That includes a commitment to provide, for the first time, a learning or training place for all 16 to 19-year-olds.

Reform of the college sector means that we can deliver those crucial new opportunities for young Scots. The Scottish Government has reiterated to college principals the importance of avoiding compulsory redundancies, and that has been achieved in almost every college.

Ken Macintosh: I am intrigued to know how yesterday's announcement of 20 per cent cuts in colleges' budgets will help to prevent future job losses.

I am glad that the First Minister mentioned college places. Will he guarantee that, despite the cuts, he will meet his election manifesto promise to maintain the number of college places for Scotland's students over this parliamentary session?

The First Minister: We will meet not only that manifesto commitment but the others that the Scottish people so strongly supported.

As far as compulsory redundancies in colleges are concerned, I welcome again the Labour Party's support for the education ministers' urging Scotland's colleges to go down the same road taken by the other areas of the public sector that are in the Government's control and avoid compulsory redundancies. Many colleges have already given that commitment.

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): Does the First Minister agree that there is nothing more inspirational for fans and players alike before a Scotland rugby international game than the sound of the pipes? Does he share the disappointment of hundreds of Scottish fans who have travelled halfway across the world to support the national team, and will he do what he can to ensure that the ban is lifted? *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Mr Eadie, that has nothing to do with the question that was posed.

Supreme Court and High Court of Justiciary (Criminal Cases)

6. Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government has received a response from the Advocate General to the final report of the review of the relationship between the High Court of Justiciary and the Supreme Court in criminal cases. (S4F-00141)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I understand that the Advocate General wrote to Lord McCluskey yesterday indicating that he would reflect further on the review's conclusions. Lord McCluskey's review group has recommended a resolution to the clear anomaly whereby appeal to the United Kingdom Supreme Court is refused by the High Court in Scotland but there is still potential for leave to be granted to appeal to the Supreme Court. That is not possible for cases from English courts, and the review group agreed that there was "no comprehensible reason" for that inconsistency. I hope that, in considering the review, Lord Wallace will work with the Scottish Government to develop provisions for inclusion in the Scotland Bill that will resolve that unsatisfactory anomaly.

Annabelle Ewing: In light of Willie Rennie's comments last week, does the First Minister agree

that it would be helpful to know whether the Liberal Democrats in the Parliament support Lord McCluskey's review group report? At this stage, we have no firm position from the Advocate General on the inclusion in the Scotland Bill of the review group's suggestions. Does the First Minister feel that it would be helpful to know where the Liberal Democrats in the Parliament stand on that? *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: The First Minister is not responsible for the Liberal Democrats in the Parliament.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Does the First Minister accept that Lord McCluskey's review group confirmed that

"the Supreme Court should continue to have an appellate jurisdiction in relation to issues of Convention rights arising in Scottish criminal cases"?

That is precisely the point that led to the First Minister's and Mr MacAskill's rather intemperate attacks on the court and the legal profession.

Does the First Minister also accept that the review rebuts his view that it would be better for people to wait years to be heard in Strasbourg than to be heard in London?

Given that the review group has disagreed with him on those matters, will the First Minister indicate how he plans to rebuild the relationship between the Government and the judicial system? I am sure that he recognises that that relationship is critical to giving people confidence in the Government and the justice system.

The First Minister: I am delighted to find that I am not responsible for the Liberal Democrats.

The way to rebuild confidence in the Scottish criminal justice system is to strengthen its historic independence. Lord McCluskey is a distinguished former law officer who served under a Labour Administration. His review group contained Sir Gerald Gordon, who was once described by Lord Hope as the master of Scots criminal law. We could not have had a more high-powered review group examining the matter.

Lord McCluskey indicated that his group would make recommendations within the current constitutional position, and I accepted that that was the basis on which the review group would proceed. Given the current constitutional arrangements, is it not reasonable for us to unite as a Parliament behind the two central recommendations of the McCluskey report? The first is that it is unsatisfactory and unequal that the Supreme Court is allowed to take on cases without the leave of the High Court of Justiciary. That is wrong, and the Supreme Court has no corresponding right that affects the English courts. The second recommendation is that the Supreme

Court should rule on points of law and not on points of disposal, which should be left to the criminal authorities and courts of Scotland.

By appointing the McCluskey group, I have tried to get the Parliament to unite behind the defence of the independence and integrity of the Scottish criminal justice system. In order to do that, I accepted Lord McCluskey's proposal that he should make recommendations within the context of the current constitutional position. We have had those recommendations, so I ask the Parliament to unite behind the McCluskey report and insist that his recommendations are now inserted into the Scotland Bill.

12:31

Meeting suspended.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth

Tourism (Dundee)

1. Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive how it plans to boost the Dundee economy through investment to increase tourism. (S4O-00184)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): We are determined to maximise tourism growth throughout Scotland and to attract new visitors. In a visit to Dundee on 11 July, I learned at first hand about the potential of the Victoria and Albert at Dundee project. Our significant financial contribution to that project is helping to ensure that there will be a major new visitor attraction that will deliver significant economic and other benefits for Dundee and the rest of Scotland.

Jenny Marra: I welcome the £15 million of Scottish Government funding for the Victoria and Albert museum project in Dundee. The project is critical for our city and close to our hearts. Will the minister be more specific about the schedule of payments of that £15 million over the next three years to allow the project board to plan forward into the future?

Fergus Ewing: I am delighted that the member welcomes Fiona Hyslop's decision to make the substantial investment of £15 million in Dundee, which represents a third of the total capital costs of the project. The Dundee *Courier* has reported that the V&A is expected to be open by 2015. I had the pleasure of being at a presentation by all the parties that are working together on the project, and I understand that the V&A at Dundee could attract 500,000 visitors initially and 300,000 a year thereafter. I also understand that the plans for the V&A are already helping to secure new hotel investment in Dundee.

To answer the member's questions, plans are well afoot, and everyone is working closely together. I am delighted that she welcomes the Scottish Government's financial contribution to that excellent project.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): I thank the minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs for their foresight in supporting the V&A at Dundee project. The

minister has talked about the number of visitors and the economic benefits to Dundee. Will he talk about how the economic benefits might wave out to a wider area than only Dundee?

Fergus Ewing: I think that the project will attract interest throughout Scotland and the world. The architect is a Japanese gentleman by the name of Kengo Kuma, who is internationally renowned, and the project will involve extending into the Tay to create a beautiful new riverscape—if I can describe it in that way—in Dundee. The project is one of several developments in Dundee, which include the thriving computer games sector, which I also visited in July, and the exciting developments in renewables there. Dundee is thriving and the Scottish National Party Government is helping it to do so.

Wind Farms (Planning Applications)

2. Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will ensure a balanced response to wind farm applications. (S4O-00185)

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Aileen Campbell): Every wind farm application is subject to a thorough and comprehensive consultation in order that all relevant considerations can be assessed and weighed up before a decision is made. It is important that we balance our renewables ambitions and the associated economic benefits against local impacts. Such decisions are important, and public engagement is a key part of the robust and transparent planning process, which must take into account impacts, including cumulative impacts, on the landscape, natural and cultural heritage, communities, defence, aviation and roads.

Graeme Pearson: Does the minister acknowledge that there are concerns in communities about wind farm developments? Will she conduct a review of the current subsidies that are provided to developers but paid for by Scottish households in order that an effective approach to fuel poverty might be identified for the 750,000 households that are adversely affected by the escalating costs of electricity?

Aileen Campbell: Public consultation is a key part of the planning process. Although there is an estimated additional cost to consumers' bills, relatively speaking it is not as much as the price hikes in energy bills from other companies. We understand that no one wants to see consumers' bills being added to, but we want to incentivise renewable energy and ensure that we can take forward our renewables obligations.

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): On the issue of having a balanced

response to wind farms, what impact, if any, on tourism figures has been measured in areas that already host wind farms, such as the Highlands?

Aileen Campbell: Government research has shown that by allowing sensitively sited wind farms to go ahead, the interests of tourism and sustainable energy production can remain compatible. Indeed, John Lennon, the chair of the travel and tourism department at Glasgow Caledonian University said:

"There is no doubt that wind turbines do intrude on the landscape, as they are not natural structures. However, research we have carried out, in locations like Stirling Castle, where a windfarm can clearly be seen, is that tourists are largely indifferent towards them. They are more worried about the impact of nuclear or coal-fired power stations".

I am sure that that argument can be translated quite effectively to the constituency that Rob Gibson represents, and represents well.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Does the minister accept that there is a perception that there is a distinct lack of guidance to local authorities on the appropriate siting of large-scale onshore wind farms, which has led to many cases of what can only be called sporadic development of such installations? As sporadic development is specifically disallowed for all other forms of development, why does the Government tacitly encourage sporadic development of wind farms?

Aileen Campbell: As set out in the Scottish planning policy, planning authorities should set out in the development plan a spatial framework for onshore wind farms over 20MW, and that framework should identify areas of protection and constraints. Of course, additional planning advice is available online to help planning authorities to reach a balance.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): It would clearly not be a balanced approach to the development of wind power if wind developments were effectively being traded off against other developments, as was clearly alleged by a certain Mr Donald Trump, who wrote to the First Minister claiming to have been repeatedly promised that an offshore wind farm would not go ahead, as an incentive for him to go ahead with his golf resort. Regardless of whether those promises were made—

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Do you have a question, Mr Harvie?

Patrick Harvie: Regardless of whether those promises were made before the Scottish National Party came to power or since, will the minister commit to an immediate inquiry to find out the truth of those allegations of serious misconduct? Either

serious misconduct has been committed or, frankly, Mr Trump is lying.

Aileen Campbell: Ministers always assess every planning application on its merits, taking into account the views of consultees, interested parties and, of course, the public.

Job Creation (Glasgow)

3. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its refreshed economic strategy will assist in boosting job creation in Glasgow. (S4O-00186)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): Our economic strategy has specific actions that Glasgow will benefit from, including the south Glasgow hospitals project, which is part of our significant new programme of capital investment, and priority funding of the Clyde Gateway Developments urban regeneration company, to drive the regeneration of the east end of Glasgow. Later this year, we will introduce a cities strategy that will build on the status of Glasgow as a renewables supercity and promote the continued growth of business tourism.

Bob Doris: I know that the minister knows that I believe that an enterprise zone for Glasgow would be a positive way forward for job creation, but that is not the substantive point of my supplementary question.

On the guarantee of an education or training place for every 16 to 19-year-old in Scotland, what will be done to create real jobs at the end of that education or training period for my constituents in Glasgow?

Fergus Ewing: I accept the invitation not to comment on the first part of the member's question.

Plainly, we are determined to stimulate the economy to provide opportunities for young people at local and national levels, with 25,000 apprenticeships and the embedding of our approach in the reform of post-16 education, which has a system-wide focus on meeting the needs of learners and employers.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn): Will the minister clarify the intention behind enterprise zones? I represent a constituency with a high claimant count and I would welcome any chance to increase the opportunities for my constituents. Will the minister clarify whether, under his regime, enterprise zones are likely to duplicate the problems that were found before, where jobs were taken from one area of high employment and enticed into another?

Fergus Ewing: The matter relates more to question 5, but I will answer Patricia Ferguson's question directly.

We will make announcements on enterprise zones in due course and we will consider the criteria and how we wish to proceed. The objectives are to increase employment and job opportunities for all—for example, in Allied Vehicles in Glasgow, which I visited on Monday; in the "Foundation Glasgow—the story of a city" exhibition, which I visited on Monday; and in all the good developments in Glasgow and the rest of Scotland that I see as Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism. We will build on that success with the enterprise zone initiative.

Value-added Tax

4. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding reducing the rate of VAT. (S4O-00187)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The Government's updated economic strategy sets out how we are focusing our efforts on accelerating the recovery. However, it is clear from the recent global economic data—including the International Monetary Fund's downward revision of the growth forecasts on Tuesday—that the Chancellor of the Exchequer must enact a plan B to protect the recovery.

As part of our proposals, the First Minister has advocated a targeted reduction in VAT on home repairs, which would provide a boost to construction activity in Scotland. It is clear, however, that the United Kingdom Government must act to protect the recovery.

Graeme Dey: The minister will be aware that the Irish Government has introduced a temporary reduction in the rate of VAT pertaining to the tourism and golf services sector. Has the Scottish Government raised with London the possibility of its addressing an 11 per cent disparity in VAT rates between Ireland and Scotland, which is placing our tourism and golf sectors at a competitive disadvantage?

Fergus Ewing: I advise Graeme Dey that I met the UK Minister for Tourism and Heritage just last week and urged him to consider the measures that have been taken in Ireland. I further inform the member that 23 countries in the European Union currently have a reduced rate of VAT for their tourism and hospitality sectors.

I welcome the approach that Ireland has taken, but it has a Government that has the powers to act.

Enterprise Zones (West Scotland)

5. Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had in relation to establishing an enterprise zone in the West Scotland region. (S4O-00188)

Fergus Ewing: The Scottish Government is currently working to introduce four enterprise areas in Scotland, which will include sites with a particular focus on low-carbon manufacturing opportunities to maximise their economic impact and attractiveness to investment.

Stuart McMillan: The minister will be aware of my comments during last week's economy strategy debate about the potential to link an enterprise zone with the national renewable infrastructure fund to help an area such as Inverclyde in West Scotland. Will he agree to meet me so that we can discuss my proposal further?

Fergus Ewing: I commend Stuart McMillan for pursuing that matter with persistence, in committee yesterday and in the chamber today. He is right to do so, and I am happy to accept the invitation to meet him to discuss the issue further. We are confident that enterprise zones are a lever that we can use to help to grow the Scottish economy.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Further to Patricia Ferguson's comments, what evidence has the Scottish Government obtained, and what research has it carried out, in considering whether to establish an enterprise zone in West Scotland or any other area, to show that enterprise zones will stimulate new economic activity, rather than just displacing it from other areas, as happened in the 1980s when the policy was first pursued by the Thatcher Government?

Fergus Ewing: Our plans aim to ensure that the lever is used to increase enhanced economic activity. That is one of the reasons why we have clearly indicated that our particular—although not exclusive—focus will be on low-carbon manufacturing opportunities. We are about to debate that area shortly, and I think that members on all sides of the chamber agree that substantial opportunity exists in it for enhanced economic activity—more business and more jobs—rather than displacement. I very much hope that Richard Baker will welcome the Scottish Government's approach and that an announcement on that will be forthcoming from him.

The Presiding Officer: George Adam will ask question 6—I am sorry; he has a supplementary.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): You had me worried for a moment, Presiding Officer.

Will the minister join me in encouraging Renfrewshire Council to build on its positive

relationships with its private sector partners to facilitate a Glasgow airport enterprise zone? That would not only boost Paisley's economy but assist the Scottish Government in promoting Scotland's growth area of low-carbon manufacturing.

Fergus Ewing: My experience has been that Renfrewshire Council has rarely needed any encouragement from me to make vigorous representations on just about everything, particularly under Mr Mackay's vigorous former leadership.

George Adam makes the reasonable point that Glasgow airport is once again an engine for growth. I commend the recent announcement of new jobs there and I take a close interest in such matters.

We all want every part of Scotland to succeed. Every member for every part of Scotland advocates—rightly—the cause for his or her area. We must make tough decisions but, in doing so, we are happy to receive representations from all parties and all parts of Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: We come to question 6 now.

Local Government Finance Settlement (Funding Floor)

6. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what assessment it has made of the impact of introducing a funding floor for local authorities. (S4O-00189)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The impact of introducing a new funding floor will be that all local authorities will receive at least 85 per cent of the Scottish average of revenue support.

Liz Smith: Setting the floor at 85 per cent is estimated to have no direct financial benefit to some local authorities. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that taxpayers of those authorities, such as Perth and Kinross Council, will not lose out?

John Swinney: If the funding floor is set at 85 per cent of the average, it is clear that some will not benefit—that is a statement of the obvious.

Perth and Kinross Council is close to my heart—I live in and represent the Perth and Kinross area, so I declare an interest as a council tax payer there. Council tax payers in that area will experience no detriment, because the Government has committed to making available the resources to implement the funding floor in addition to the core settlement for local government. With that answer, council tax payers in Perth and Kinross can rest easy tonight.

Police Forces (Merger)

7. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what annual impact it expects the savings made as a result of the merger of Scotland's police forces to have on the Scottish budget. (S4O-00190)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The creation of a single police service for Scotland will protect and improve local services, despite the unprecedented financial reductions that we face. Stopping the duplication of support services eight times over will enable us to invest in the front line. Once the programme of change has been completed, the reform of our police service will deliver an estimated annual recurring cash saving of £106 million.

Kenneth Gibson: Will the cabinet secretary confirm that all the savings that will be made from the reform will be reinvested in the criminal justice system and particularly in helping to maintain the 1,000 additional police forces on our streets across Scotland, which have helped to reduce crime to a 35-year record low?

John Swinney: I am not sure whether I can commit to 1,000 extra police forces—[*Laughter*—] but I am delighted to confirm that the Government has fulfilled its manifesto commitment to put 1,000 extra police officers on Scotland's streets. That has of course contributed to the very low crime levels that Mr Gibson properly described.

The Government has set out its three-year spending proposals for the criminal justice system. We want that system to be properly and fully resourced to maintain local policing's effectiveness. Those considerations will be at the heart of any funding settlement that applies to the criminal justice system beyond the spending review's three-year period.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): If Mr Swinney is going to produce more police forces, let me be the first to offer Shetland as an example of an area that would happily take one. Given his confidence about his figures, is he prepared to give an assurance to my constituency that the same number of police officers will be in place after his single police service is created as are in place today?

John Swinney: I thought that the talk of extra police forces would be music to Mr Scott's ears. When Mr Gibson was making his generous offer, he might have had Mr Scott in mind, given his valiant efforts on the subject. I confirm for Mr Scott that the same number of police officers will be available in Shetland post reform as are available pre reform. The purpose of the exercise is to ensure that, at a time when we face questions about the sustainability of public finances and

services, we protect and support the things that matter. I readily acknowledge that, for the people of Shetland, that means the effectiveness and visibility of the local police force. I happily give the assurance that Mr Scott seeks.

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give assurances that any savings that are achieved will not be made by reducing the terms and working conditions of police support staff?

John Swinney: Obviously, a process of reform has to be gone through, so there will be changes to the arrangements in the police services and forces. Undoubtedly, there will be changes to the deployment of individuals in the police service. I cannot conceive that there will be a requirement for changes to terms and conditions, but there certainly will be changes to roles and responsibilities and to deployment. That is a natural product of the reform process, but I do not think that it will extend to terms and conditions.

Public Services (Payments to Contractors)

8. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether a time limit applies for payments to private companies delivering public services and, if so, whether this applies to payments made to subcontractors. (S4O-00191)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Government recognises the importance of prompt payment of invoices, for the Scottish economy in general and for particular businesses. That is why we pay about 96 per cent of invoices within 10 days and why we have changed the standard terms and conditions for goods and services to include a clause that requires invoices at all stages of the supply chain of Scottish Government contracts to be paid within 30 days. We encourage other public bodies to follow suit.

Mark Griffin: When I was on a recent visit to a company in Cumbernauld, the managing director told me that the biggest issue that faces his and other small and medium-sized enterprises is prompt payment for work completed, which can make the difference between a company staying solvent or going bust. How will the cabinet secretary ensure that, in line with his answer today, payments to subcontractors are made within the time period that he mentioned?

John Swinney: The issue is serious and I acknowledge the significance of the effect on businesses. That is why the Government's standard terms and conditions have been changed. After we introduced our 10-day payment period, which I thought was a great contribution, I

found out that many subcontractors were not getting their payments within a credible timescale thereafter. Main contractors were hoarding money that we had paid out and which should have been passed on to contractors. That is why we changed the payment terms to encompass a 30-day period for the entire supply chain.

If Mr Griffin has specific examples of that not being fulfilled, I would be delighted to receive them and I would act on that. That applies to any member of Parliament, because I understand the seriousness and necessity of prompt payment, particularly in the current economic climate. I assure the member that ministers will want to act if we see any evidence of bad practice.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): The cabinet secretary has done a lot of good work on prompt payment. However, I wonder whether any work has been done on the performance of local authorities, health boards and other bodies that are funded by the Scottish Government. Are there ways of boosting the performance of those bodies, other than encouragement?

John Swinney: I do not have any specific review material to hand, but I will examine Mr Brown's point as it relates to bodies that are within the Government's control. I believe that the 96 per cent figure that I gave might cover the health service, too, but I will write to Mr Brown on that specific point. Obviously, local authorities are independent bodies. When I suggested the introduction of the 10-day period, that was met by a sharp intake of breath among many of those who are responsible. People have given extraordinary commitment to ensuring that the changes have been delivered. They are an example of practical action that we can take that does not cost money, but which helps the flow of business in the economy and benefits the economic recovery in general.

Living Standards (Alternative Measures)

9. Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it has given to social and environmental measures as an alternative to gross domestic product as a means of assessing living standards in Scotland. (S4O-00192)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Our Government economic strategy set out an ambitious framework for delivering increasing sustainable economic growth. That identifies the drivers of sustainable economic growth and our desired characteristics of growth.

At the heart of the Government economic strategy is a framework that ensures that faster sustainable economic growth is balanced

alongside important social, regional and environmental objectives. That includes a set of purpose targets on a range of economic, social and environmental measures. It is supported by our national performance framework.

Jamie Hepburn: Two factors suggest that now is the time to consider social and environmental measures not as an alternative but as a complement to GDP as a measure: first, the appointment of Joseph Stiglitz to the Council of Economic Advisers and the good work that he has done in that area; and secondly, the Oxfam humankind index by Oxfam and its partners, which has been brought to the attention of MSPs. What work is the Government doing in that regard?

John Swinney: I am looking closely at the issues raised, particularly by the Oxfam material, which I have seen and considered.

Since 2007, the Government has attempted not to use GDP alone as the indicator of progress but to consider it within the context of a wider range of economic, social and environmental measures. I would not characterise our approach as essentially one that looks only at GDP. We look at a range of indicators, and within that context I will explore further the issues raised by the studies to which Mr Hepburn referred.

Job Creation (Fife)

10. David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to support job creation in Kirkcaldy and the rest of Fife. (S4O-00193)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): We are prioritising our spend on capital to maximise the impact on jobs, including the construction of the Forth replacement crossing, which will secure more than 3,000 jobs and support more than 1,200 jobs during its construction.

Our investment in a supportive business environment also supports job creation in Kirkcaldy and the rest of Fife, such as the 750 permanent jobs created by Amazon at its fulfilment centre in Dunfermline.

David Torrance: In the minister's opinion, what contribution has the £2 million town centre regeneration grant from the Scottish Government for phase 3 upgrade of Kirkcaldy High Street made to the creation of jobs in Kirkcaldy? What steps will the Government take to maintain that momentum in future years?

Fergus Ewing: It should make a very positive contribution to Kirkcaldy—a town that I was pleased to visit during the summer, when I saw the success of PR2 Engineering, Just Slate, Yellow Jacket Europe, and the business gateway

incubator centre. Kirkcaldy is doing well. There is always room for improvement and we are always open to suggestions from the people of Kirkcaldy, as we were when the Cabinet visited the town towards the end of the summer.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): The minister will be aware that the decision by the Ministry of Defence to close RAF Leuchars could have a detrimental effect on the Fife economy and jobs. Does he agree that Fife will require investment to ensure that it does not suffer too greatly at the hands of a decision made by the coalition Government at Westminster?

Fergus Ewing: Yes, I agree that appropriate investment will be required. I met leaders from the local authority and enterprise agency in Fife during the summer. On 13 September, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth attended a business breakfast with the Fife economy partnership.

These are very important matters. In Leuchars, as in Kinloss, a huge amount is being done to help to find alternative employment for those people who have lost their jobs. Marvellous work is being done by excellent individuals, and I am very positive about the results of that work in helping people to find alternative careers after the hammer blow that resulted from the closure of those RAF bases.

Public Sector Pensions

11. Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government on the future of public sector pensions. (S4O-00194)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I have met and written to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on a number of occasions regarding public sector pensions in Scotland. I wrote most recently on 16 September.

Gil Paterson: I have been approached by a high number of constituents who have expressed concerns about this issue. Will the cabinet secretary assure those constituents that the Scottish Government will do all that it can, within its very limited powers, to fight their corner and lobby the British Government to scrap these proposals altogether?

John Swinney: For some time, during the previous session and over the summer after this Administration's re-election, we have expressed in writing and in various meetings—at the highest level of this Administration and the highest level of the UK Administration—our complete disagreement with the UK Government on the approach that it proposes to take, particularly

about the timing of what is proposed. That has involved conversations and meetings between the First Minister and the Prime Minister and the First Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister; I was involved in the discussions, into the bargain. I assure Mr Paterson that throughout the summer this Government has made its point of view very clear to the UK Government.

As I said to Parliament yesterday, unless the United Kingdom Government changes its view, the Scottish Government believes that we will have no alternative but to apply the increases in employee contributions across the national health service, teachers, police and fire pension schemes. To do otherwise would be to require a £102 million per annum reduction in the funding that we would have available for public services and public sector employment in Scotland, the consequences of which would not be at all welcome or appropriate. I regret that we have had to take that decision, but I hope that my answer explains to Mr Paterson the basis on which we have done so.

I confirmed to Parliament in my statement yesterday that the local government pension scheme will take its own decisions on the issue of contributions by employees.

The Presiding Officer: Question 12 has been withdrawn by Colin Keir.

Spending Review (Justice)

13. James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth has had with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice regarding the next spending review. (S4O-00196)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I have had regular discussions with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice—some may say that they have been far too frequent—in the course of developing the spending plans that I presented to Parliament yesterday.

James Kelly: How much money has been allocated in the spending review for the transitional period before the move to a single police service and a single fire service? Further to the cabinet secretary's earlier comments on police numbers, does the guarantee extend to protecting firefighter numbers, which would allay some of the fears that have been expressed in relation to the 5 per cent reduction in firefighter numbers that the Government announced recently?

John Swinney: The Government has made a commitment in the spending review to implement the move to a single fire service and a single police service. The financial provisions have been

made within the budget allocations, which enable that to take its course.

On James Kelly's question about firefighters, the Government's objective in all its reform measures is to maximise the levels of public sector employment that we have within Scotland, because we believe that that is good for the economy and good for the operation of public services. We have had very constructive discussions with firefighters' representatives in Scotland about taking forward the reform agenda and they have been very active participants in that debate. I would expect the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to maintain that dialogue in the years to come.

Businesses in Administration (Assistance)

14. Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what measures it employs to assist businesses that have entered administration to trade out of administration, specifically in relation to relief from business rates liabilities. (S4O-00197)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Government offers a comprehensive package of business rates relief worth an estimated £2.6 billion over the five-year 2010 revaluation period, which will apply to the businesses that are referred to in Mr Ingram's question.

Adam Ingram: Will the cabinet secretary consider establishing a single point of rates administration for Scotland, as happens in Northern Ireland? That would help to alleviate the problems that are encountered by multisite Scottish businesses such as A&J Menswear in my constituency, which is striving to trade out of administration. Will he instruct his officials to meet the company with a view to assisting it to do so successfully?

John Swinney: I would certainly encourage A&J Menswear to continue its efforts to trade out of administration, and I would be delighted to make available whatever assistance and guidance the Government can make available to the company to help it in that process. If a meeting with officials would help, I would be happy to arrange that. I have already made clear to Mr Ingram the advice that is available through Scottish Enterprise, but if there is any additional assistance that we can offer through direct dialogue with the company, I would be delighted to put that in place for him.

Disused Mineshafts

15. Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support is available to those at risk from the subsidence or potential collapse of disused mineshafts. (S4O-00198)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The Coal Authority is responsible for public safety relating to land subsidence that has been caused by coal-mining operations.

The Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991 is used to administer any claims for damage to land, buildings and structures resulting from subsidence damage. The Coal Authority has a duty to take remedial action by undertaking repairs or by making compensation or depreciation payments in respect of the damage caused. The Coal Authority also provides an emergency response service to incidents that pose a risk to public safety. That emergency call-out service deals with incidents on a 24-hour basis every day of the year.

Bill Kidd: In the Knightswood area of my constituency, there has been a collapse of long-disused mineshafts, which has resulted in two houses having to be demolished. Fortunately, no one was injured in the collapse and disappearance of a kitchen in one of those houses. That has had a detrimental effect on my constituents, who worry about subsidence and the possible collapse of their homes, as well as the potential effect on the value of their properties.

Will the minister visit the area with me to look into what is a concerning matter and forward his views to the Coal Authority?

Fergus Ewing: I thank the member for giving notice of the details of that important matter. I am aware of the incident, which I believe affects four properties in Crusader Avenue in Knightswood.

I can advise the member that the Coal Authority and Glasgow Housing Association have been working closely with the affected residents to make the area safe, to provide appropriate support and advice, and to find suitable alternative accommodation.

The Coal Authority has undertaken checks on three identified mineshafts in the immediate area and has reported that there are no signs of any surface deterioration. However, it is working with Glasgow City Council and Glasgow Housing Association to ensure that full inspections of properties are carried out. Where there is damage that has been caused by abandoned coal mine workings and shafts, the Coal Authority is responsible and, under the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991, will fully remedy the damage.

Economic Activity

16. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is doing all within its power to boost economic activity. (S4O-00199)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Government is doing all that it can within its powers and responsibilities to boost economic activity.

Rhoda Grant: The cabinet secretary will be aware that, yesterday, Graeme Brown, the director of Shelter Scotland, said:

“A 50% cut in affordable housing investment is a devastating blow to the housing sector and now there is no way the SNP Government will be able to meet one of its flagship manifesto commitments of 30,000 new socially-rented homes over the next five years.”

Does the cabinet secretary acknowledge those very real concerns? How will he meet his manifesto promises?

John Swinney: I believe that the allocations that were made in the spending review that I announced yesterday will enable the Government to honour its manifesto commitments on housing. I am confident that the necessary resources are in place, and the Minister for Housing and Transport and the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment are entirely confident that the plans that we have formulated will enable that to happen. I look forward to that message being communicated to, and welcomed by, all those who are interested in the important contribution that housing development makes to economic activity in Scotland.

Low-carbon Economy

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-00902, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the low-carbon economy.

14:55

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): Last week, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth launched “The Government Economic Strategy”, which reaffirms the Scottish Government’s prime purpose of pursuing sustainable economic growth.

Economic conditions have changed since we launched our first economic strategy in 2007. Although we face many challenges, we are also presented with new opportunities that, we believe, offer considerable potential to Scotland.

A key opportunity, which our strategy establishes as a new strategic priority for Scotland, is the transition to a low-carbon economy. By promoting the low-carbon transition, we can reindustrialise Scotland as a renewable energy powerhouse and a centre for low-carbon technologies, while securing a high-quality environment and sustainable legacy for future generations. Through its contribution to building a more dynamic and faster growing economy, we will increase prosperity, be better placed to tackle Scotland’s health and social challenges and better able to establish a fairer and more equal society.

Scotland is rich in economic potential. Our natural resources give us an unparalleled competitive advantage. Our people are creative, ambitious and resilient; our entrepreneurs, scientists and engineers are world leaders.

The low-carbon sector could maintain 130,000 jobs by 2020—we already have 70,000 people working in that sector, so we can in effect double the number by 2020—and be a focus for new private sector capital investment. That is in addition to the 200,000 jobs in the oil and gas sector and the exciting opportunities that exist in the field, particularly in subsea work and decommissioning.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will the minister give way?

Fergus Ewing: I will give way to Mr Harvie later on when I have made more progress.

We cannot let those opportunities pass us by.

One of the greatest opportunities for Scotland is in renewable energy. Offshore wind alone could reach 10GW of generating capacity. It could bring in £30 billion of inward investment and deliver

28,000 jobs. It could also reach £14 billion in electricity sales by 2050.

Those are glittering prizes and staggering figures, but they are just one element of the renewables revolution. We have ambitious targets, such as the target to meet 100 per cent of our demand for electricity from renewable energy by 2020; to produce from renewables what we consume. That is achievable. However, it is not easy, so we cannot be complacent.

The “2020 Route Map for Renewable Energy in Scotland” reflects the challenges and opportunities of that new target. It goes further than any previous plan for renewable energy in Scotland and sets out a comprehensive path towards achieving our ambition to be the green energy powerhouse of Europe.

The national renewables infrastructure plan, which has identified locations throughout Scotland that offer the greatest potential for private developers, outlines how more green jobs could be created through the development of regional manufacturing zones built around key port locations. The £70 million national renewables infrastructure fund will help to lever in private sector investment to develop the necessary infrastructure to support that.

A low-carbon economy that promotes the sustainable use of resources will make us more resilient to unpredictable commodity prices and volatile fuel prices and offer greater protection to those who are most at risk from rising costs. Next month we will publish the first annual progress report on our energy efficiency action plan, setting out significant achievements that have been made during the past year. For example, almost 300,000 Scots benefited from our energy saving Scotland local advice network, including 6,800 households that received help to upgrade to new efficient boilers. Almost 30,000 insulation measures were installed under our universal home insulation scheme.

I am pleased to announce today that, as further support for Scottish householders, we will launch the solid-wall insulation loan scheme in Orkney and Fife this autumn. That is a £550,000 pilot scheme to offer owner-occupiers interest-free loans of up to £15,000.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Does the minister recognise that there are concerns in some parts of the country, not about the universal home insulation scheme per se, but about the ability of smaller local businesses that have expertise in the area to compete with large contractors in securing those contracts?

Fergus Ewing: We always want such schemes to operate as effectively as possible and are happy to engage with any local businesses or their

representatives. I engage regularly with bodies that work in the field and represent various trades and I will be happy to continue to do so. If Mr Macdonald has any particular suggestions to make or individuals he believes that I could usefully meet, I will be more than happy to take up those suggestions and work with him on that.

Opportunities exist across the Scottish economy for business and industry. In an independent study, Scottish businesses were estimated to stand to save £1,800 million by reducing waste and making more efficient use of materials. That money saved could grow businesses and help to create jobs. Scotland's zero waste plan has shifted our focus to the resource potential of the waste that we produce. Food waste, in particular, is a resource that could benefit Scotland. If we were able to use anaerobic digestion to process the current level of our food waste and produce a gas fuel, I am told that we could produce enough electricity to power Dundee. Greater resource productivity is a driver of competitive advantage, just like greater labour productivity, and the Government's economic strategy reflects the importance of resource efficiency as a key driver of growth in the transition to a low-carbon economy.

I turn to skills. To take the opportunities that I have described, we must have the right people with the right skills and expertise. Skills Development Scotland has published the national plan for the energy sector that sets out actions to shape future work programmes and prioritise how we invest resources. The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council has also provided financial support for the recently established energy skills partnership, providing a collaborative approach across Scottish colleges.

An additional £1 million has been made available for Skills Development Scotland to create up to 500 modern apprenticeships in 2011-12, specifically to support Scotland's energy and low-carbon industries. The low carbon skills fund provides financial support to employers who upskill and reskill their employees in low-carbon technologies, already benefiting more than 800 Scottish workers. Those actions are helping to create a solid skills foundation and supporting inward investment.

There can be no doubt that Scotland is committed to making the transition to a low-carbon economy. Our target in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 to reduce emissions by 80 per cent by 2050 sets out actions that will far exceed our own time in the Parliament. Earlier this month, my colleague Stewart Stevenson announced a batch of annual targets for the period 2023 to 2027. That underlines Scotland's long-term

commitment to the low-carbon agenda and sends a clear signal to investors.

Many international speakers, panellists and delegates will respond to that signal when they arrive in Edinburgh next week to take part in Scotland's second international low-carbon investment conference, which the Scottish Government is proud to support. It will build on last year's success, which drew in investors, financiers and key business figures from the renewables sector. This year's event will also focus on investment in smart cities, clean technologies and energy and resource efficiency.

Scotland's demonstration of its position as the destination for low-carbon investment makes clear what we mean about the transition to a low-carbon economy. It is about making ourselves more competitive now and protecting our environment for future generations, combating fuel poverty now and making the economy more resilient to future energy price shocks, and about Scotland leading the world now and showing the way towards a sustainable future.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the Scottish Government's determination to achieve and deliver sustainable economic growth by promoting the transition to a low-carbon and resource-efficient economy across all sectors; acknowledges the potential for up to 10 GW of electricity from offshore wind in Scotland and that the potential for still more large-scale development of offshore wind, wave and tidal energy over the coming decades represents the biggest opportunity for sustainable economic growth in Scotland for a generation; notes the vision and purpose underlying the 2020 Routemap for Renewable Energy in Scotland, the enterprise agencies' National Renewables Infrastructure Plan and associated National Renewables Infrastructure Fund and the Energy Skills Investment Plan; supports the Scottish Government in setting the right policy and funding framework to reinforce Scotland's position as a destination for global low-carbon investment; agrees that its ambitious approach to climate change is critical in providing long-term certainty for business and investors, and recognises the Scottish Government's commitment to resource efficiency through the Energy Efficiency Action Plan for Scotland and the Zero Waste Plan, which is already expanding waste reprocessing capacity and cutting carbon emissions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

I call on Lewis Macdonald to speak to and move amendment S4M-00902.3. You have nine minutes, Mr Macdonald.

15:06

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer.

We welcome the debate on a low-carbon economy and the opportunity to address some of the issues that arise in seeking a low-carbon future for Scotland. The minister talked about how the transition to a low-carbon economy can

support sustainable economic growth. We agree that it can, but we also recognise that the achievement of both economic and environmental benefits at the same time is not inevitable and that every reduction in carbon dependence will not necessarily contribute to an increase in economic growth.

Labour's concern in the debate is how to achieve a win-win outcome of more job creation and fewer carbon emissions, which will require Government not just to proclaim the potential benefits, although that is important, but to identify the barriers to progress and the actions that are required to overcome them.

Scotland is fortunate in this respect: we have academic and scientific strengths not just in energy engineering and technologies, but in the wider challenge of understanding climate change and what has to be done to slow it down and mitigate its effects. For example, the Royal Society of Edinburgh produced a major report during the last parliamentary session that informed the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's inquiry into Scotland's energy future, which in turn influenced the development of Scottish Government policy.

This year, the RSE has published a detailed report "Facing up to climate change: breaking the barriers to a low-carbon Scotland", which again highlights many of the practical issues that we need to address if we are to turn rhetoric into reality. The report stated that its

"single most important finding is that change is held back by the lack of coherence and integration of policy at different levels of governance."

That conclusion should dispel any complacency on the part of ministers who aspire to give a lead in delivering precisely that coherence and integration of policy that the inquiry found to be lacking. All the route maps in the world will fail to deliver if the destination is not clearly agreed in the first place. That said, we acknowledge and support efforts to increase coherence across different levels of Government, and we encourage ministers to continue to build on those efforts.

Labour led the first Scottish Government to develop a green jobs strategy some six years ago and established the policy framework that has seen wind power, in particular, and other new forms of technology become a large and growing part of Scotland's energy mix. We are proud of our record in Government and we will support initiatives that build on our approach.

In this year's election, we called for a green new deal to support the installation of low-carbon energy sources, such as solar panels, in up to 10,000 homes. We argued that that would create jobs and training opportunities as well as carbon

savings and cost benefits to consumers. We welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has taken forward action in that area to allow local councils and housing associations to take advantage of feed-in tariffs, and it has established a team to plan for further actions that will qualify for support under the renewable heat incentive. We would like ministers to go further in all those areas to allow the greatest possible benefit to social housing providers and tenants from the available forms of support and to spread the good practice of local councils that are already acting to support low-carbon energy initiatives.

We would like action to support the retrofitting of energy efficiency measures in Scotland's homes as a way of tackling fuel poverty and cutting carbon emissions, but it is also important that every opportunity is taken to improve the energy efficiency of new housing stock, in both the owner-occupied and rented sectors.

One of the most disappointing aspects of yesterday's budget and spending review, which Rhoda Grant highlighted a few minutes ago, is the decision to cut funding for new affordable housing supply by 50 per cent over the next two years, from £268 million to £133 million. That squeeze on housing providers can only set back the achievement of our low-carbon objectives.

The Royal Society of Edinburgh expressed concern in its report about insulation standards already being squeezed as money has got tighter over the last 12 months. Those budget cuts will only make the situation worse.

District heating and combined heat and power schemes can save energy that is currently being produced and wasted. The savings, in both carbon and cost, can be substantial, as the experience of the Aberdeen Heat and Power Company has shown. In this year's election, Labour argued for more such schemes, and we know that the costs of district heating schemes can be cut by more than half if they are provided as part of a new development rather than retrofitted. This is another area in which we believe that Government can do more. Investment in new housing should be accompanied by investment in the transition to a low-carbon economy. To be fair, the Royal Society of Edinburgh's critique is not of failings at any one level of Government, so much as of failure to join up the policies and actions of public authorities at different levels.

The current electricity market reform proposals are a case in point. The United Kingdom Government's proposals for a carbon floor price for coal are potentially in conflict with the development of carbon capture and storage as part of Scotland's transition to a low-carbon economy. UK Ministers would no doubt argue that raising the carbon price of coal sharply will

incentivise new technologies. However, there are significant risks that pricing coal out of the market will actually prevent the development of CCS for coal-burning power stations and that the supply of electricity from conventional power stations will be reduced sharply before other technologies are ready to fill the gap.

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Does the member note that there are now seven operational carbon capture power stations in China and two in the United States, whereas across the whole of Europe there is none? Does that not reflect a failure of policy that stretches rather further back than the election in May 2010?

Lewis Macdonald: No, I do not accept that there has been a failure of policy on carbon capture and storage. I do not yet make that accusation against the current UK Government, but I highlight the risk that it runs with the carbon floor price if it is not very careful.

We have always argued that it is wrong for Government at this stage in the development of new technologies to rule out any low-carbon source of energy supply. We have made that criticism of the Scottish Government's approach and we are equally entitled to raise that concern about the UK Government's approach. I hope that the Scottish ministers will join us in seeking answers to the questions that must be put to UK ministers about the impact of the carbon floor price on carbon capture and storage.

The RSE made recommendations, which are supported by others, on the infrastructure and management of the electricity grid in Scotland. The RSE states that the optimal exploitation of renewables in Scotland chimes with the priorities of the European Union, the UK Government, the Scottish Government and National Grid, but that there is a need for a coherent and agreed plan.

We support that, but we also believe that the Scottish Government has primary responsibility for enabling the upgrade of the grid within Scotland, not least the Beaulieu to Denny line. Far too much time has already been lost in providing that critical piece of infrastructure. The export grids that ministers are fond of highlighting require the Beaulieu to Denny line to be in place first, and the Scottish Government therefore has a responsibility for that.

There are also issues around the joining up of policy in Scotland. I again refer to the RSE report, which highlighted concerns about the balance of transport policy. For example, the report praised the policy of concessionary bus fares for improving travel options, reducing car journeys and supporting rural bus services, but it expressed worries about whether the national rail priority of

cutting intercity times was in conflict with the commuter needs of the main city regions. The report suggested that there is a need for clearer leadership and greater consistency in those and other areas, where other public bodies may be in the front line but the Scottish Government could clearly have a role to play.

All of those issues are part of the low-carbon debate. Although energy and waste are important, a low-carbon Scotland will be achieved only if there is a joining-up of policy across Government and between different levels of government. We believe that a lot has been done in Scotland since devolution, but there is a lot still to do. We need action to deliver against commitments and targets that all parties can support, and in that spirit I move amendment S4M-00902.3, to leave out from “acknowledges” to end and insert:

“recognises also that delivery of that objective will require effective implementation of a range of policies by government at every level, and believes that these should include retrofitting of domestic energy efficiency measures, more resources to tackle fuel poverty and limit price impacts on consumers, as well as action on grid infrastructure, support for a diverse energy mix and measures to give local communities a stake in the future low-carbon economy.”

15:15

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

Many who are veterans of these debates will be aware that my view on the green agenda is one not so much of enthusiastic support but more of reluctant acceptance. I make that qualification to make it clear to as many as possible that while the Conservatives move along the road we do so perhaps concerning ourselves more with the implications of the detail and ensuring that we do not make any mistakes based on overenthusiasm.

That is why, when we talk about the transition to a low-carbon economy, we in the Conservative Party genuinely believe that there is an opportunity to rejuvenate the economy of Scotland to build new industries. In fact, we genuinely believe that there need not be a clash between the needs of greening the economy and the fundamental economic growth that is so important.

We supported the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 when it passed through the Parliament, although we expressed our concerns as it passed. Nonetheless, in response to reports that it may cost up to £8 billion to achieve the targets, I repeat the warning that Conservatives have given in this chamber before: that we need to ensure that we are not reducing emissions by wrecking the economy. That is where we stand and it is the position that we will continue to take.

The motion before us is hard to disagree with. It is a comprehensive motion that covers the

complete agenda of what is necessary to achieve our objectives. Even the proposals in the Labour amendment are not fundamentally disagreeable and, consequently, may find support on this side of the chamber.

The key elements that we have chosen to highlight in our amendment are the impact of offshore renewable installations, which my colleague Jamie McGrigor will deal with in more detail later, and the element that I included and which I want to speak about at some length: nuclear power and where it stands in Scotland's future. That will come as no surprise to anyone, as it is an issue that many of my colleagues and I have raised before.

When we look at Scotland's future energy needs as we green the economy, it is essential that we understand that there are a number of key elements in energy requirement. There is the need to ensure that when we flick the switch the lights come on. It is not as simple as it sounds. It means that when people go to their work in the morning they have to be sure that there is power to run the factory or whatever. It also means that, if someone is in a home that depends on electricity for its heating and lighting, they must not be left without. That energy must be available and affordable.

That is a key element of where we are today. We already know that electricity prices are higher in real terms than they have been at any time in the past. We know that the demand exists, yet we have a Government that is determined to put its eggs in not one but two key baskets: renewable energy and carbon capture and storage.

Stewart Stevenson: Did the member notice that Siemens has announced that it is withdrawing entirely from the nuclear industry? In doing so, it laid out clearly the fact that it could not continue to develop nuclear power stations without considerable public subventions and that it does not see that as sustainable in the long term. Does the member agree with that assessment?

Alex Johnstone: It has never been the Conservatives' position that we should have new nuclear power stations at any cost. What I am talking about today is the cost of energy and the cost of achieving the objectives that we in this Parliament have set for ourselves.

Renewables are dependent on support mechanisms—feed-in tariffs or renewables obligation certificates—so that source of energy is significantly more expensive than some of the alternatives.

Carbon capture and storage has all the advantages of coal-fired or gas power stations, which we know of, but it has the additional cost of dealing with the waste product. In this environment, if we are to have affordable and

available electricity supplies in the longer term, and if we are to cut the impact of carbon emissions on our economy, we must take the opportunity that is afforded us by our nuclear power stations to generate low-carbon—carbon-free in the eyes of many—electricity and use that to achieve the objectives that we have set out.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: I cannot, I am afraid. I am working my way towards a finish.

It is clear from statements that have been made by the minister that he accepts the principle that lifetime extension of our existing power stations is a major part of decarbonising electricity generation in Scotland in the longer term. Yet, lifetime extension alone will not achieve that objective. Our 2050 targets can be reached only if we have nuclear-generated electricity available to us at that time, and that will not come from our existing power stations with lifetime extensions. That is why I have made it clear in my amendment that it is vital that the Government take the lessons that it has learned, continue its willingness to consider lifetime extension of our existing power stations as a viable option and use its experience and understanding to deliver a ground-breaking level of leadership that will take us forward and permit the operating companies to consider the replacement of our two nuclear power stations with facilities that will be cleaner, safer and more efficient, and which will deliver a carbon-free electricity system for Scotland in the long term.

I move amendment S4M-00902.1, to insert at end:

“; recognises the Scottish Government’s responsibility in the positioning of offshore wind turbines and wave and tidal machinery with respect to the safety and sustainability of marine species, both migratory and non-migratory, and the marine environment, and the potential impact on cetaceans; further notes that, by accepting the importance of lifetime extension, the Scottish Government has now acknowledged the vital role that nuclear power stations play in achieving Scotland’s carbon emission targets, but believes that, for this to be carried through to 2050, the Scottish Government must now bring forward a plan for the inclusion of new nuclear generating capacity to replace Hunterston B and Torness at the end of their working lives.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the open debate. There is not much time to get in all the members who wish to speak, so I ask for speeches of six minutes, please.

15:22

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I am proud to be a member of this Parliament and proud of the fact that the previous Parliament approved the most ambitious climate change legislation that exists. I am surprised that the

legislation ended up being passed unanimously, having heard what Alex Johnstone said just now. In recent times, we have heard David Cameron pontificating about the Conservatives’ green agenda—so green that the Conservatives changed their party logo to a tree. However, if atomic Alex Johnstone gets his way, maybe his preferred leadership candidate can change the logo of the party in Scotland—whatever its name may be—to either a belching chimney or a nuclear power station.

Much has already been done in Scotland to create a low-carbon economy, but much more needs to be done. I am glad that the Government is doing all that it can in that regard. I am proud to represent a constituency in the energy capital of Europe. Already, in my constituency and throughout Aberdeen, much has been done to create a low-carbon environment. Lewis Macdonald mentioned Aberdeen Heat and Power Company; I am pleased that politicians of all hues in Aberdeen have backed that company. The key for me is not just the saving in carbon emissions, but the saving in costs to the people who pay the bills.

We have heard about the volatility of fuel prices. As a result of the schemes that exist in Aberdeen thus far, residents’ fuel bills have been cut by up to 50 per cent, which is pretty spectacular stuff. Beyond that, the emissions from buildings have been cut by 56 per cent. Much more needs to be done on combined heat and power, however, and I am proud that the Government recently gave £1 million to Aberdeen Heat and Power Company to extend the services that it provides. Combined heat and power is one of the things we need to see across Scotland. There have been failures in certain areas and ministers have been talking to experts in areas where it succeeded.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): According to the budget yesterday, all that has been invested by the Government is a £5 million loan fund. Is it sufficient?

Kevin Stewart: Aberdeen Heat and Power Company received £1 million from the Government recently and is also seeking moneys from elsewhere, including the private sector. In itself, that can create the required investment. I pay tribute to those who work at Aberdeen Heat and Power Company—in particular, Janice Lyons, who has been in the vanguard of this work and who deserves tribute. The work that she has done has led to the organisation’s receiving the outstanding achievement in housing award at the UK housing awards 2008, and the sustainability award in the innovation and progress category of the *Guardian* newspaper public sector awards in the same year. That shows how good Aberdeen Heat and Power Company is.

I also thank the previous Government for having the foresight to locate the Scottish European Green Energy Centre in the University of Aberdeen. I am sorry if I am being too parochial, but that is the way it is. That organisation's existence has led to a number of achievements, not least of which is the securing of €40 million for the development of the European offshore wind deployment centre. That is extremely important for the city and the shire and the sooner it is in place, the better. It is a partnership between the public and private sectors. I pay tribute to Aberdeen Renewable Energy Group, Vattenfall Wind Power UK and Technip for bringing it forward.

In Aberdeen city and shire, we have developed a huge amount of skills to be used in the renewable energy sector. I hope we will be able to ensure we can develop further skills to be at the forefront of this new industry. I fully agree with the motion in the name of the minister and I urge everyone to support it.

15:28

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I want to concentrate on energy from a constituency point of view. There are wider agendas in achieving a low-carbon Scotland, including a step change in housing insulation and a serious drive towards a green transport strategy.

I want to ask what should be included in a definition of green energy, and to ask that question in the context of Forth Ports Ltd's plans for Leith docks. At a recent meeting with the chief executive of Forth Ports, I was told that the company—which has recently been taken over by Arcus—was abandoning its housing plans for the Leith docks area in order to develop a renewable energy hub based on offshore wind and large-scale biomass, the latter as Forth Energy in partnership with Scottish and Southern Energy. For Forth Ports, these two go hand in hand, but I want to challenge the green credentials of large-scale biomass while welcoming the prospect of Leith docks as a site for the manufacture and assembly of wind turbines, as envisaged in Scottish Enterprise's national renewables infrastructure plan. There have been massive campaigns in Leith over the past year or more against the proposed large-scale biomass plant at Leith docks. This action has been spearheaded by the formidable and admirable no Leith biomass group.

I have submitted detailed objections that cover the many specifically local implications as well as the wider climate change consequences. Given the subject of our debate, I want to concentrate on the latter, although visual, traffic and local environmental concerns are all covered in my submission, which is on my website and the

Scottish Government's website—I thank the Scottish Government for that.

Greener Leith is a key organisation that opposes the proposal, and its website refers to many important reports that question the green credentials of large-scale biomass. For example, it refers to a new report that has been produced by a coalition of European non-governmental organisations, which raises a host of environmental concerns about the growth and use of biomass for electricity generation, and includes a startling graph that shows that a biomass plant that uses a typical European-managed forest would result in increased carbon emissions for the first two and a half centuries. Perhaps that is not too surprising if we consider that burning wood emits more carbon in the short run than burning coal. The scenario could be even worse if unsustainable plantations are used, and stopping that would be impossible in the future, despite the current guarantees from Forth Energy.

On its website, Greener Leith highlights a key quote from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, which has said:

"In particular, we are concerned that the methodology deployed to calculate the lifetime green house gas savings"

of the scheme—that is, the Leith biomass plant proposal—

"includes an assumption of zero emissions from land within the growing cycle of the fuels ... This is likely to be incorrect and therefore leads to a potentially significant underestimate of green house gas emissions from the fuel. The calculation of green house gas savings from transport may also be underestimated."

Forth Energy has consistently promoted the idea that burning wood fuel and replenishing crops after harvest limits the levels of carbon that are released into the atmosphere, but an increasing number of environmental organisations have stated that that position is too simplistic. The long-term effects of biomass combustion on the atmosphere and on climate change depend on the type of feedstock that is used, how sustainable the source is, and the alternative energy sources that are displaced by investment in such plants. It is remarkable that Forth Energy continues to categorise biomass energy as carbon neutral, as a large body of evidence has been produced by groups such as Friends of the Earth to demonstrate that biomass is not anywhere near as efficient as alternative clean energy sources, which represent far more effective use of Government funding and deliver instant carbon reduction. Biomass would not only displace traditional fossil fuel sources; it would affect the ability of wind and tidal power to distribute clean carbon-neutral energy throughout Scotland.

The moving planet march that will take place in Edinburgh this weekend will aim to highlight the

fact that moving from fossil fuels to clean energy sources is essential in tackling climate change and poverty. As outlined in Friends of the Earth's recent briefing on the event, that means that policy must be directed to ensuring investment in appropriate sustainable technologies.

Kevin Stewart: What are Mr Chisholm's feelings about small-scale biomass, such as the biomass boiler that is being used to deal with the energy needs of the new Marischal college project in Aberdeen, which has received European funding?

Malcolm Chisholm: I was going to come on to that issue, although I may not have time to cover everything that I wanted to cover. Small-scale biomass—particularly for combined heat and power—is exactly what we need, rather than large-scale biomass. I was going to refer to an earlier Friends of the Earth publication entitled “Energy from Biomass: Straw Man or Future Fuel?” which made that particular point. It supported small-scale biomass plants and highlighted the issue of transportation of biomass material. That is, of course, a major concern for the proposed Leith plant, because the wood would be brought in from thousands of miles away. We must take all such factors into account. I am seriously concerned that the plant that has been proposed for Leith docks is not small scale, that the proposal would involve intensive harvesting overseas and long-distance transport, and that no concrete plans have been provided to date on how the heat by-product of combustion would be effectively distributed to the wider city.

I realise that there is a live application, but I do not see why the Government should not have a policy against large-scale biomass. It has a policy against nuclear power stations that does not rule out submission of individual applications. The Government should therefore have a policy against large-scale biomass. If it will not go that far, it should at least have a moratorium, pending further research on its climate change implications.

15:35

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the motion in the name of Fergus Ewing and the opportunity to speak in this debate.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government has placed a low-carbon economy at the heart of its economic strategy and I believe that this is how we should be moving forward as a nation. The Scottish Government has previously spelled out the need for harnessing renewables. That has been followed up by practical action in the form of the national renewables fund, with the commitment of £70 million.

At this point, it would be remiss of me not to put on record my acknowledgement of the substantial contribution that was made by Jim Mather when he had ministerial responsibility for enterprise and energy in the previous session of Parliament, particularly in terms of what he did to highlight the job opportunities that are presented by the development of a low-carbon economy in Scotland.

All of us—individuals, energy companies and the Government, in terms of its procurement policies—can do more to secure a low-carbon economy. Therefore, I am heartened that this Government has carried on the good work that it started when it published its discussion paper, “Towards a Low Carbon Economy for Scotland”, in March 2010.

The Scottish Government has shown its commitment to meeting targets that are associated with the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. Equally, the development of a low-carbon economic strategy will aim to make Scotland more capable of resisting the volatility that is associated with ever-increasing energy prices.

The future is clearly tending towards a low-carbon economy, and that is even more apparent when we consider the aim to have almost complete decarbonisation of road transport by 2050.

Promotion of long-term sustainable growth is vital to taking our country forward. A low-carbon economy is part of that sustainable and growing future. Of course, the future of Scotland's energy needs should not and does not include nuclear energy as part of the energy mix.

This is an opportune debate with regard to Scotland having a role on the global stage, given that we have a quarter of Europe's offshore and energy wind potential. In that regard, I note the aims that the Scottish Government has set out in “A Low Carbon Economic Strategy for Scotland”, which states that 60,000 jobs could well be created by 2020, including 26,000 jobs in the technologies that are associated with low carbon.

The prospects for Scotland's low-carbon economy are healthy, particularly in the context of the global low-carbon economy's being forecast to grow to £4.3 trillion in four years' time.

As I stated previously in the chamber, Scotland is severely constrained under the current devolved settlement. That is even more apparent with regard to the topical issue of transmission charges. The present charging system discriminates against the Scottish interest. That is apparent when we consider the heavy price that must be paid to connect to the UK national grid.

Energy, including renewables, is one of the growth sectors that have been identified and links up with the new strategic priority of a transition to a low-carbon economy.

I welcome the pledge to introduce a single point of information for businesses on Government financial support. An online one-stop finance information service is a development that will signpost a better investment approach for Scotland's business sector and companies that might wish to locate in Scotland. Hopefully, that will ensure that companies will focus on growing market sectors of the economy, such as the low-carbon economy.

In addition, a key component of ensuring that Scotland has a global reach is to ensure that we develop a sense of renewal in respect of Scotland's infrastructure. Associated with that development is the substantive aim of making Scotland a leading centre of low-carbon investment.

I know that the Scottish Government is committed to developing the climate challenge fund, and that funding of £10.3 million is in place for 2011-12. That will no doubt ensure that Scotland develops an international profile in terms of the low-carbon economy.

It would be remiss of me not to take this opportunity to caution the Government not to rush to meet its targets by approving waste-to-energy plants, such as the proposed pyrolysis plant in Coatbridge. Those developments must be treated with caution, and any approvals should be subjected to severe scrutiny to ensure that we do not follow the wrong pattern on the wrong investment in the wrong developments in Scotland.

Today's debate is timely, and I look forward to the progression of many of the issues that we are discussing this afternoon in the coming months and years. We can develop a programme that delivers a low-carbon society and brings real benefits for the people, especially those on low incomes. Scotland can play a major role in developing low-carbon technologies, and it can become a powerhouse for future energy production in Europe. I support Fergus Ewing's motion.

15:40

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): I associate myself with the amendments from Lewis Macdonald and my colleague Alex Johnstone.

I say to Stewart Stevenson and Fergus Ewing that after reading the Government motion, we lodged an amendment because we thought that it might be nice to have a debate. The motion that

we have before us is a song sheet that is uncharacteristically modest. Parliament is being asked only that it

"recognises the Scottish Government's determination".

I would have thought that we might more appropriately have been invited to genuflect before, to shout "Hallelujah!" three times each morning in support of, or to bask in the divine glory of the Scottish Government's determination.

Kevin Stewart: Hear, hear.

Jackson Carlaw: I hear Mr Stewart. Many of us are already becoming weary of the ability of new members on the Government side of the chamber to find fresh ways to lay themselves prostrate before ministers. *[Laughter.]* Mr Stewart, the greater peacock of the two former Aberdeen councillors who have now joined us in the chamber, is certainly finding fresh ways to achieve that.

The problem—which Lewis Macdonald's amendment also highlights—is not that members on all sides of the chamber do not support everything that the Government seeks to do or understand the opportunities that exist in the renewables sector, but the lack of appreciation that those are still, in many respects, opportunities that need to be developed. Although we have a route map, many of us are still not satisfied that the targets that we have set—which are chest-thumpingly ambitious and which have earned respect and admiration throughout the world—are ones that we are able to meet.

Fergus Ewing: Is Jackson Carlaw aware that the UK Government has endorsed our target of meeting 100 per cent of our own energy needs by 2020? Does he accept that the serious challenge in meeting those ambitions is to get the right answers on electricity market reform, on project transmit and on providing a robust grid connection? Without those answers, it is unlikely that we will be able to meet our targets—and the answers rest entirely with the UK Government.

Jackson Carlaw: As does much else besides. The minister makes my point for me: although there is opportunity, there is not yet certainty.

I find it extraordinary how, throughout the previous session of Parliament and in the first days of the current session, SNP members have railed against nuclear power. I heard one eager new SNP member saying to his front bench colleague, "Can I just sum up this debate? Nuclear bad, renewable good".

However, even as SNP members were doing that, the First Minister was in London meeting senior executives from EDF Energy to explain to them that the Government—as Fergus Ewing subsequently confirmed in the chamber—is

perfectly relaxed about the lifetime extension of Scotland's existing nuclear capacity.

As the Conservatives argued in the previous session of Parliament, and as one of our amendments to a motion—which ministers voted against—specifically stated, the SNP must recognise, despite all its hostility, that nuclear power will be part of Scotland's carbon-free power grid, not only in the current decade but in the next, and quite possibly in the decade after that. We must have from the SNP a little less of the anti-nuclear rhetoric and a recognition—which we on the Conservative side of the chamber have—that nuclear power has a part to play in the future of power generation in Scotland while we develop the opportunities—

Kevin Stewart: We heard from Mr Stevenson that Siemens is withdrawing from the nuclear market. Countries around the world—including Austria and Germany—are moving away from nuclear power and trying to use alternative technologies. Is the UK somewhat different from all those other places?

Jackson Carlaw: Mr Stewart needs to question the First Minister, who—as I said—met senior executives of EDF and said that he was perfectly relaxed about the lifetime extension of nuclear power stations, for which Conservatives have argued and against which SNP members have argued. Some members shake their heads; they need to consult the record of the previous debate on the subject, in which SNP members repeatedly made such remarks.

We need to develop the opportunities in renewables, but we need to do that secure in the knowledge that we are prepared to accept that nuclear power still has a long-term role to play in securing our power while we develop and make the transition to the new technologies.

A moment ago, Mr Stevenson intervened on Lewis Macdonald to say that policy had failed on the development of carbon capture. The United States has proceeded with the new thorium nuclear capacity, which is an even more low-carbon technology. Is our failure to do the same a policy failure?

Stewart Stevenson rose—

Jackson Carlaw: I am in the last seconds of my speech.

I draw attention to the last part of the motion, which says:

“already expanding waste reprocessing capacity”.

Those of us who heard Mr Lochhead last week are concerned. The Government says that it does not favour mass waste incineration, but more mass waste incinerators are set to be approved during

the parliamentary session than were approved in the 10,000 years of history before it.

The Scottish National Party might stand and say, “Green, green, green,” but it hides behind others, whether they are reporters or councils. As Malcolm Chisholm said, the Government needs to say clearly that mass waste incineration has no role in Scotland's zero waste policy. Many of us are concerned that mass waste incinerators are proceeding unchecked and against the will of the people of Scotland.

15:46

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I welcome the Scottish Government's motion on the low-carbon economy. The Government's ambitious and challenging purpose and targets will make Scotland a world leader in renewable technology and in climate-change targets. The targets of generating 100 per cent of electricity from renewable sources by 2020 and of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 42 per cent by 2020 are demanding, but they are necessary in order to achieve and deliver sustainable economic growth that creates thousands of well-paid jobs in manufacturing and service industries.

The £70 million national renewables infrastructure fund shows the Scottish Government's commitment to renewable energy. It has helped to gain investment from the private sector and will help to deliver 28,000 jobs in the next decade.

The introduction of four enterprise areas that focus on low-carbon manufacturing opportunities will help to attract new investment in green energy and increase Scotland's low-carbon market share, which was worth £8.8 billion in 2008-09 and is forecast to rise to £12 billion by 2015.

In my Kirkcaldy constituency, Briggs Marine Environmental Services in Burntisland is serving phases 1 and 2 of offshore wind farms, which are worth millions of pounds to the company and the local economy each year. The company is in a position to extend its contracts when phase 3 goes ahead, under which some 700 turbines are planned for the Firth of Forth alone.

At Fife energy park, Burntisland Fabrications—BiFab—has just completed the new Oyster 800 wave generation prototype for Aquamarine Power. In July this year, the First Minister unveiled that fantastic piece of engineering. In 2013, BiFab will start the construction of bases for phase 3 deepwater offshore wind turbines. Also situated at the energy park is the new hydrogen experimental unit, which will involve work with the University of St Andrews on developing hydrogen cells for commercial use.

Only a few weeks ago, Kennedy Renewables started work on Fife's first commercial wind farm—Little Raith wind farm. When that is completed, it will have the capacity to provide 24.75MW, which is enough to provide electricity for 14,500 homes. Over its lifespan, it will benefit local communities by some £1.23 million. Just on Tuesday, Fife Council granted planning permission for a second wind farm with the same capacity at Earlseat. That project will fund 125 modern apprenticeships in renewable energy, in partnership with Adam Smith College in Kirkcaldy. In an area of high youth unemployment, that commitment deserves praise and will help to meet the sector's skills shortage.

Longannet power station is pushing forward with carbon-capture technology. If successful, the technology will remove 25 per cent of Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions from our carbon footprint. Only last week, there was an article in *The Scotsman* about Pelamis Wave Power with the headline

"Renewables firm on crest of a wave".

The company, which is based in Leith, is looking for investment as a result of the success of its prototype off the coast of Orkney to help it scale up its manufacturing to commercial levels and to provide Scotland's first commercial wave farm. Three energy suppliers—E.ON, Scottish Power and Vattenfall—are actively developing plans for marine farms using Pelamis machines.

Dundee and Aberdeen are also well placed in the renewables sector, which shows that the east coast of Scotland is taking advantage of more than 40 years of experience in North Sea oil and gas. That will help to boost local economies and Scotland's exporting of low-carbon technologies to countries such as China, Spain, India and Romania, making that worth an estimated £845 million to the Scottish economy. We should consider the potential to produce electricity from large-scale and small-scale hydro installations, which can add a further 200MW to our capacity.

The low-carbon economy is not just about renewables. We have to promote low-carbon and active travel. The push for more freight to go by rail will be helped by the Scottish Government's future transport fund and Scottish green bus fund. When it comes to energy conservation, the £50 million warm homes fund will deliver energy efficient homes in areas that are worst affected by fuel poverty. The success of the climate challenge fund has helped Greener Kirkcaldy to reduce hundreds of fuel bills among the poorest households in Kirkcaldy in the past two years. Almost 30,000 homes throughout Scotland have benefited from the Scottish Government's home insulation scheme, making them energy efficient and fit for purpose. In that context, however, I am concerned about recent attempts by energy

companies to endanger our improvements with unacceptable winter price hikes.

Another crucial pillar in the low-carbon economy is Scotland's zero waste plan, which aims to achieve the best overall outcome for Scotland's environment in waste management, waste prevention, reuse, recycling and recovery. That will happen only if local authorities, businesses and individuals provide leadership and play a key role in their areas of influence, supported by measures that the Scottish Government has put in place.

Co-operation and effective environmental policy in Scotland are crucial, but we need the power to push forward our renewable energy policies. If the UK Government would agree to release the £200 million fossil fuel levy, which belongs to Scotland, Scottish regions could benefit through support for development of renewables, additional match funding and private investment. Control over the Crown estate is vital to ensure that offshore renewables benefit local communities, and to create economic growth in a low-carbon economy.

15:52

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Presiding Officer, I hope that you will forgive me if I have to leave in the middle of my speech, but I took a nosebleed when I came into the chamber—no George Osborne jokes, please.

Most of us recognise the seriousness of climate change and the urgency with which we must act. We want our children and grandchildren to live happily without fear of environmental decline. I appreciate the work of Scottish Governments past and present and the previous UK Labour Government in recognising and then setting in place the foundations to take forward the greening of our society and economy. However, as with all policies, green or otherwise, how we achieve things and the devil in the detail matter as much as the lofty ambitions that are set out in Government publications, such as those that we saw yesterday.

After the spending review announcement, I would like the minister to give some clarifications. Just how much has been allocated to renewables? The Government says that it will provide £200 million over the next three years to support the sector, but what is that money to do, who is it for and who can access it? I hope that the minister will clarify those points in summing up.

I have two main issues to raise. First, I want a green economy, but we must ensure that the benefits and burdens of creating a low-carbon economy are shared across Scotland and that we have real fairness and equality, not a facade of

fairness, equality and distribution. Secondly, I would like to raise concerns about community inclusion or, to be more accurate, community exclusion, which is resulting in communities across Scotland that were once pro renewables becoming vocal opponents, particularly of onshore wind energy schemes. Up and down the country, more and more people are left feeling that their concerns have been ignored by local government and national Government and that the interests of big business are being prioritised over those of communities.

The draft budget emphasises the leveraging of private investment into the renewables sector. The private sector will have a significant role to play. However, when referring to the Crown estate yesterday, Mr Swinney said that he wished to see the Scottish Parliament

“take on responsibility for the Crown estate, so that the resources that are generated in Scotland can stay in Scotland for the benefit of our communities”.—[*Official Report*, 21 September 2011; c 1919.]

I hope that he will take that approach with renewables, too.

Mr Swinney has allocated £70 million to a national renewables infrastructure plan. Is that part of the £200 million or is it additional money? It is apparently designed to attract the private sector. Again, where is the detail? How does he intend to achieve that and, fundamentally, is that approach the right one?

Over the next few decades, hundreds of millions—probably even billions—of pounds will be made from renewables, yet we subsidise multinationals and private equity firms to make those millions. The profits are often sent off to the boardrooms of Europe—Madrid, Amsterdam or wherever—while offering relatively few crumbs in community benefit to local people. In relation to onshore wind, press reports this week informed us:

“Two thirds of wind turbines in Britain are owned by foreign firms—netting them millions of pounds in taxpayer-funded subsidies.”

When I look at the ownership of wind farms in Scotland, I do not quite see, as Mr Swinney would say, resources being

“generated in Scotland”

staying

“in Scotland for the benefit of our communities”.

There is a commitment to increase community renewables to a target of 500MW by 2020. That is admirable but, with the emphasis on seeking private sector investment for major schemes rather than local, public schemes, how exactly is that to be achieved?

With the right political choices, there could be huge opportunities for household, co-operative, local authority and public estate schemes. Pursuing community, publicly owned schemes would help to provide revenue streams for cash-strapped local authorities, housing associations and social enterprises in the third sector and for the national health service. In fact, the possibilities are endless. We could and should assist social enterprises and public sector organisations into the energy and renewables sector. In photovoltaics, for example, they could provide the equipment, the tenant or resident would get the cheap electricity, and the excess cash generated through the feed-in tariff would fund further development or indeed other activities. We have a chance to share the benefits of renewables throughout Scotland, but I fear that we may be witnessing a missed opportunity.

As far as public estates are concerned, there are renewables opportunities in the forestry estate and the estate of Scottish Water. “Building a Hydro Nation” sets out a grand vision for Scottish Water to develop a renewables capacity, yet only yesterday in the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee we heard Scottish Water tell us that it does not have the funds to do that. In fact, we saw in the budget a cut to Scottish Water’s promised loans to deliver just its core activities.

On onshore wind, I make a genuine appeal to Scottish ministers. The overconcentration of multiple wind farm applications in specific geographical locations is causing great concern. From the border between Lanarkshire and West Lothian through to Edinburgh, there are approximately 15 different wind energy developments, with more than 300 turbines planned. In some localities, such as Harburn, residents feel under siege. The people I am talking about are not nimbys. They are good people, who will take their fair share of anything, but they feel that there is a genuine unfairness with the current approach, which resembles a free-for-all.

I met the minister last week on that very issue. I have spoken to members of all parties and know that many of them share my concern. We urgently need a national spatial plan that prevents the overconcentration of wind farms and spreads the burden and the benefit. I ask members who feel that the issue may not affect them to look at Scottish Natural Heritage’s website and its wind farm map for Scotland, because this is coming to an area near them.

I support a low-carbon economy, but there are a great deal of difficulties that we have to overcome.

15:59

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): In yesterday's debate on the spending review, there was, understandably, much discussion about the need to encourage economic growth in Scotland and the Government's record in doing that.

Sustainable economic growth has been the Scottish Government's core purpose since the Scottish National Party came to power in 2007. Scotland's economy needs to be sustainable not only in the sense of being environmentally responsible but in terms of creating a sector that will be with us for the very long term. Renewable energy offers Scotland the opportunity to achieve both those goals.

The SNP has set an ambitious but achievable target of generating the equivalent of 100 per cent of electricity demand from renewable sources by 2020. We are well on the way to achieving that and I am sure that the minister was as pleased as I was yesterday evening when we heard from Ray Hunter of Renewable Energy Systems that our targets are totally achievable. It is unfortunate that Jackson Carlaw is not in the chamber to hear that. About 58 per cent of current consumption will be met from renewable sources once the projects that have received consent or are under construction are added to those already completed. That plan for such a major role for the renewables sector is not only essential if we are to meet our world-leading carbon emissions reduction targets; it is essential for the future of Scotland's economy.

To answer Jackson Carlaw's point about nuclear energy, I cannot remember a time when this Government has not said that existing nuclear power plants have a role to play in the medium term until we can move to more renewables.

Scotland enjoys 25 per cent of Europe's offshore wind and tidal energy potential and 10 per cent of its wave energy potential. In the years and decades ahead we have the opportunity to generate and export substantial amounts of renewable energy, providing jobs and opportunities for thousands of people in Scotland.

The national renewables infrastructure plan has already identified the key role that the north-east will play in the offshore renewables industry, building on the hard-won offshore skills and experiences that have been built up in the region by the oil industry over several decades. The national renewables infrastructure plan will be backed up by £70 million and there will be a significant return on investment for the Scottish economy. Neil Findlay cannot stand up and say that there is a budget line for only £5 million and then mention the £70 million in his speech. He

needs to go back and study the budget document a bit more closely.

The return on investment for the Scottish economy will help to establish Scotland as the international centre of excellence in renewable energy. My colleagues from Aberdeen have already mentioned the combined heat and power plants and the significant amount of energy that the Aberdeen renewable energy group test bed for wind turbines will generate for the people of Aberdeen.

However, despite several years of work by the Scottish Government and others, there remain significant and unnecessary obstacles to Scotland fully seizing the opportunity that the renewable energy industry offers us. Most significant of those is the continuing ludicrous system of transmission charging, which would see energy developments in and around Aberdeen facing charges of almost £20 per kilowatt while an identical development in the south of England would be heavily subsidised for every kilowatt. That system of pricing is archaic and long overdue for reform. It takes no account of the need to reduce carbon emissions and to move to a low-carbon economy. Until it is finally replaced, it will fundamentally undermine the UK Government's claim that it is serious about tackling climate change.

As one of my colleagues said, as long as the fossil fuel levy, which, legally, can only be spent in Scotland on renewables projects, remains locked away in the Treasury bank account instead of being put to work in Scotland, the UK Government's warm words on climate change will always ring just slightly hollow in the chamber and in the rest of Scotland. That £200 million would make a significant difference to the Scottish Government's efforts to encourage the development of a low-carbon economy, and the Treasury's continued intransigence is disappointing to say the least.

Ultimately, Scotland will also need action at a European level. The construction of a North Sea supergrid will open up electricity markets for energy companies in Scotland to provide clean, renewable electricity. That project is critical to Scotland's low-carbon future and is another reason why Scotland needs a strong, independent voice arguing for our interests in Europe.

I know that the Scottish Government's determination to move to a low-carbon economy will be taken as a positive sign by the many people in Scotland and beyond who welcomed the leadership that we showed in setting our climate change targets. Measures such as the carbon accounting that now accompanies the Scottish budget are vital to ensuring that progress continues to be made in reducing carbon emissions.

We have come a significant distance in our efforts to address climate change, and I am confident that, under the leadership of this Administration, we will continue to go further. On such an important issue, there is simply no other option. I support the Government motion.

16:06

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Like others, I welcome the debate, which follows on from a helpful debate on energy that we had shortly before the summer recess.

Before he disappears from the chamber, I thank Fergus Ewing for his announcement about the solid-wall insulation pilot in Orkney. Given the levels of fuel poverty in my constituency, that will certainly be a welcome development, although Lewis Macdonald made an interesting and pertinent point about the ability of local installers to access such programmes and how that affects the development of wider benefits from such investment.

I would not suggest for a minute that the Government has not placed low-carbon issues at the forefront of its agenda. As Lewis Macdonald indicated, it is following a pattern that was established by the Executive that preceded it. On many occasions during the previous session of Parliament, John Swinney put on record his recognition of the fact that he was building on a fairly solid platform.

Maureen Watt was right to identify the useful role that targets can play. It is true that we have set ambitious targets that will not be achieved by assertion alone but, over the past eight to 10 years, we have seen evidence that targets play an important role in stretching industry and setting a clear pathway.

I welcome the debate and the motion, whose range and breadth Jackson Carlaw was a little ungenerous in criticising. The fact that it is wider ranging than the motion that we debated in June, particularly as regards energy efficiency, is to be welcomed. During that debate, a number of us were rather critical of the Government for downplaying the role of energy efficiency. The Association for the Conservation of Energy rightly expressed the view that, although the target of generating 100 per cent of Scotland's energy from renewables by 2020 is achievable, improvements in demand reduction would inevitably make our renewables target easier to achieve. That is self-evident. As the lowest cost of energy is for the energy unit that is not used, there are multiple benefits to focusing a little more attention on energy efficiency as part of our move towards a low-carbon economy.

In its briefing for the debate, Friends of the Earth makes a relevant point about the job-creation opportunities that exist in energy efficiency as opposed to the sexier end of renewables development. It points to the fact that energy conservation is estimated to generate 370 jobs per terawatt hour. That is quite a striking figure in the context of the job and wealth-creation opportunities that the Government says the transition to the low-carbon economy presents.

The job and wealth creation that comes from energy efficiency and renewables, as well as from transport and waste, which others have referred to, is very evident. I see that day and daily in my constituency in Orkney. David Torrance mentioned Aquamarine Power's procurement of its device at BiFab in his constituency. The amount of money that Aquamarine Power and other developers have invested in Orkney as part of the deployment and testing of their devices has been nothing short of incredible. Leask Marine has been able to invest in a vessel to support not just Aquamarine Power but other developers in due course. The benefits stretch through the supply chain to those with no apparent immediate or real connection to the renewables industry. Whether in the accommodation sector or the restaurant sector, for example, the spill-out benefit—the multiplier effect—should not be underestimated.

Challenges exist. I have referred to individual developers who are taking forward individual devices, but it is not difficult to imagine the pressure on the supply chain to deliver as we scale up, not only in my constituency but across the board.

The points that have been made on transmission were well made and I have every sympathy with them. However, I take issue a little with the First Minister's criticism earlier of the extension of project transmit, not least because the industry expressed concerns about truncating the process. Not allowing the issues to be fully developed would have been likely to lead to the wrong decision, albeit one made by the deadline. The grid issues are central. The sums that would need to be invested are, in many respects, eye watering. However, when we look at what happened with the gas grid development in Europe over the past decade and more, it becomes clear what we need to do and how achievable it is.

Although the point about economic growth is salient, not least for selling some of the hard decisions and behavioural changes that we need to make, there is another point that goes beyond that. The efficient use of resources, energy security and the contribution to a healthier environment get downplayed a little too much. The

Royal Society of Edinburgh makes that point in its briefing.

My concern with the motion is that it does not address some of the concerns with the renewable heat target, which has been set at 11 per cent. There is a growing view that 14 per cent may be a more realistic target.

The motion also downplays skills, which are close to the heart of many who have been involved in such debates over the years. Some of us attended a recent event in the Parliament on the future of the science, technology, engineering and mathematics—STEM—subjects, and there are challenges with bringing the pipeline of skilled professionals through to populate all parts of the low-carbon economy.

David Torrance made some good points about the importance of transport and that, too, is rather downplayed in the Government's motion.

However, I am attracted to Lewis Macdonald's amendment particularly because of the prominence that it gives to the stake for local communities, which is close to my heart. Neil Findlay touched on finance initiatives in relation to that, and Friends of the Earth makes similar suggestions. Although I recognise that the Scottish Government has gone some way in that regard, it is not only about job and wealth creation as a whole but about the way in which local communities gain a sense of ownership over the issues.

The motion talks about

"providing long-term certainty for business and investors".

We all agree with that. There is enough technical risk in the low-carbon economy without layering political risk over the top of it. However, I observe that the constitutional uncertainty to which a number of SNP back benchers referred is unlikely to give that business certainty. Therefore, I encourage SNP members to downplay that, talk up what we can do in collaboration more and talk less about what we do in separation.

16:13

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP):

Everyone in the Parliament knows that Scotland has the potential to be a major player in the low-carbon economy. We have already heard about various aspects of how Scotland can contribute while having a massive economic advantage. I will not go over all the points that have been raised, but I will touch on a couple of the issues.

It is relevant to highlight the launch of the Scottish Government's new economic strategy and to welcome the commitment that it shows by setting the low-carbon economy as a new strategic

priority. It sends out a powerful message not only to Scotland but to the wider world that the country is open for business. A number of large-scale investments have already brought high-quality jobs to Scotland in recent months. Page 51 of the strategy sets the criteria that I find optimistic. It reflects on that new priority and says that we have

"the opportunity to place Scotland in an advantageous position within the global economy and ensure that the benefits of this transformational change are shared across the economy and all our communities."

With that in mind, I will discuss the transmission charging regime. My colleague Aileen McLeod questioned the First Minister on that earlier this afternoon and my colleague Maureen Watt touched on it in her speech. We all know that it has been a long-running saga. One of the reasons why the upgrading of the infrastructure is so important is that we need to ensure that our communities, irrespective of where they are, have the opportunity to benefit from the electricity that they generate and put on to the grid. I understand the argument for the system that we currently have and the points about the costs of transporting energy from a rural part of Scotland to somewhere in the central belt, but it is not fair. The current regime is a barrier to renewable energy generation in Scotland.

My second point is about the more localised matter of the national renewables infrastructure fund, what it can do and how it can best be used to provide sustainable economic growth. Last week, in the debate on the economic strategy, I proposed tying the NRIF in with one of the new enterprise zones. I used the example of Inverclyde, because it has been an enterprise zone in the past. Some would suggest that it should not be in the running again, and some criticise the whole idea altogether—we heard some sceptical comments about enterprise zones from the Labour members during question time. However, I am happy to reiterate what I said last week. The last time that Inverclyde had enterprise zone status, the Tories were in power at Westminster and Labour was in power in Inverclyde Council. It was not a success. In fact, it was a 10-year opportunity wasted.

We now have the urban regeneration company Riverside Inverclyde, which is working hard to turn round years of declining population and hope. As with everywhere else, there are massive challenges facing Riverside Inverclyde because of the economic situation. I would therefore be grateful if the minister would consider designating Inverclyde an enterprise zone, while linking it with the national renewables infrastructure fund. Inverclyde's location and industrial expertise put it in a strong position to become an economic player in the renewables sector.

The workforce will come back to Inverclyde. Many of its people are dispersed across Scotland, the rest of the UK and the rest of the world. However, the skills base still exists and many people would like the opportunity to get back to work and contribute to society. Making Inverclyde an enterprise zone would be a good chance for them to do that. It is not inconceivable that the creation of a new enterprise zone with a focus on low-carbon manufacturing opportunities aligned with investment from the NRIF would provide Inverclyde or a similar area in the west of Scotland with a sustainable economic future. Employment would increase, including more modern apprenticeships, which would help to increase manufacturing output and assist the Scottish economy. More money would be in the local economy, and that would help to sustain businesses and traders. Commercial traffic on the Clyde would increase as manufactured products were transported.

Those are just some of the potential sustainable outcomes that could benefit an area such as Inverclyde, if it was fortunate enough to get the opportunity. I raised the matter at question time before this debate and was pleased that the minister agreed to meet me so that we can discuss the proposal further. Whether it is in West Scotland or in the whole of Scotland, we have a wonderful opportunity to make a long-lasting and positive difference to the country and the population.

I am pleased to see that Alex Johnstone has come back into the chamber. I always enjoy his contributions. I might not always agree with him, but he tends to bring a bit of humour to the debate, whether he means it or not, and he always gets a wee laugh. However, I was a wee bit lost when he was talking about the investment in renewable energy only surviving because of public interventions. I might be wrong about this, but surely there have been public interventions over the years to create the nuclear power stations that exist in the UK. If he is going to use that argument, he must be consistent and apply it to nuclear power as well.

I am conscious of the time. I am happy to support the motion in the minister's name. I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate.

16:19

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. Members who have listened to and taken part in the debate know the importance of working towards a low-carbon economy. Climate change and global warming are not made up or fantasies. Our collective global and generational carbon footprint is taking its toll on our planet, as we can

see. Rarely does a week go by without our seeing on our television screens the terrible effects of hurricanes, tsunamis, floods and droughts, which claim many lives and destroy communities around the world. We hear frequently about rising sea levels and can see for ourselves the devastating impact of coastal erosion, which eats away at the coastline and frequently takes with it people's homes and livelihoods. I am sorry if Mr Johnstone feels that I am being overly enthusiastic about wanting to combat that.

There is no doubt that action has to be taken, but whether members believe that the Scottish Government's plans are ambitious or unrealistic might depend on where they sit in the chamber. There is nothing wrong with ambition, but it must have a credible degree of attainability. That is why I am concerned by the views of industry experts such as Professor Tony Mackay, who believes that the Government's renewables pledge is "just not possible" and Dr Euan Mearns from the University of Aberdeen, who fears that the Government's plans may make Scotland

"a world leader in a white elephant."

Patrick Harvie: Is the member aware that pretty much every target that has been set either by this Scottish Administration or by previous ones for increasing the proportion of renewable energy has had cold water poured on it by people within the industry, many of whom have a vested interest in the old-fashioned, dirty, polluting technologies that we need to move away from?

Mark Griffin: I take that point on board, but we cannot simply dismiss the opinion of professionals in the industry. We should take on board opinions from across civic life in Scotland and from industry experts.

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Griffin: I have already taken one. I want to make some progress.

Coming from an engineering background, I was interested in the recent policy statement from the Institution of Mechanical Engineers regarding negative emissions and carbon recycling. The IME highlighted an issue that I raised in a previous debate on renewables: the importance of recognising the many different ways of reducing emissions. The Government cannot simply focus on one or two green energy sources—for example, onshore and offshore wind farms, which evidence shows cannot be relied on in the long term given that average wind speed continues to fall across the UK.

We can see just how difficult the job ahead is by looking at the 2050 decarbonisation targets. Despite the excellent work that has been done by

firms such as Argent Energy, which is based in Newarthill in Central Scotland and is the country's foremost biodiesel producer and which works with businesses on reducing their carbon emissions, we are not on course to meet that 2050 target. To do so, we would have to reduce carbon emissions by 5.5 per cent per annum, but the best rate that we have achieved so far is 2.3 per cent per annum—in the 1990s. That is further evidence of the need to research and invest in other methods.

I mentioned in a previous debate that we must use the carbon fuel that we have in the most efficient way possible, and the minister showed that he shares that sentiment in his opening speech. We cannot continue to have a situation in which power stations convert only 35 per cent of the energy and discharge 65 per cent as waste heat. The Government should engage with industry to initiate a feasibility study into the costs and technical obstacles involved in using the wasted hot water to provide neighbouring communities with district heating schemes.

We have discussed carbon capture technology for fossil fuel power stations and other large-scale, static producers of CO₂, but we have heard no proposals on how emissions from planes, ships and cars and the historical greenhouse gases that are already in the earth's atmosphere can be dealt with. Governments have largely ignored the potential of technology that can extract greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, which can then be stored or recycled, reducing the levels of CO₂ in our atmosphere to a concentration that could be agreed through discussion with the climate science community.

An example of that technology is air capture, which is at an advanced stage of design and is reaching the pilot demonstration phase. It involves the extraction of greenhouse gases—primarily CO₂—from the atmosphere, regardless of where in the world the gas was emitted. The removal of CO₂ from the atmosphere creates negative emissions and allows the captured CO₂ to be stored or processed and recycled. We have already seen the benefits of carbon capture from high-polluting industrial sites. For example, Carbon Recycling International, which is based in Iceland, successfully captures CO₂ from energy-intensive industries and converts it into renewable methanol, a clean fuel that, when blended at various levels with petrol, can be used as a drop-in fuel for existing cars and hybrid vehicles.

Scotland is in a unique position to lead in this new carbon capture technology, due to the massive storage potential in the depleted oil and gas fields in the North Sea. With an EU carbon trading scheme, Scotland could position itself to receive significant income from other countries, as they would effectively be paying Scotland to

absorb and store their emissions. At the same time, thousands of jobs and opportunities would be created in a new industry that manufactured air capture devices and processed the captured carbon.

It is the view of many in the industry, including the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, that air capture can play an important role in reducing greenhouse gases and growing the Scottish economy. I hope that the Government will seriously examine that technology when planning for the future.

16:25

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP):

Today's debate shows just how far the Parliament has come towards making Scotland a low-carbon economy. The fact that we can seriously discuss achieving renewables capacity equivalent to 100 per cent of our electricity consumption is testament to what this Parliament has achieved in a few short years.

I associate myself with Mark Griffin's comments about heat and, in particular, heat being wasted and the potential for renewable heat. We need to focus on that issue.

That said, I will focus on electricity generation. In Scotland, our renewables capacity is currently some 33 per cent of electricity consumption, rising to 58 per cent if we take into account capacity that has been consented or is being built. Although we have much further to go to achieve our targets, we must not underestimate what we have achieved. In comparison, England has managed to achieve only 5 per cent of consumption from renewables. We should recognise that this Parliament has made considerable progress.

The Scottish Government's economic strategy has rightly placed green technology at the heart of economic recovery and aims to create 130,000 jobs in the renewables industry by 2020.

Dundee has a huge role to play in Scotland becoming a world leader in low-carbon technology. It is ideally placed to support the development and manufacturing of wind turbines for offshore wind farms, as it has a deep port and a skilled engineering base, and a number of key firms are already established in the city or plan to set up in it in the near future. Dundee already has a reputation for engineering success and research and has been identified by a number of key stakeholders in the renewables industry as an ideal location for them to establish their base in Scotland.

Steve Remp, of pioneering offshore wind firm SeaEnergy, recently expressed his desire to see Dundee become a master base for the renewables

sector. He called the energy-rich waters around Dundee

“Scotland’s shop window to the world.”

Basque wind turbine manufacturer Gamesa recently reaffirmed its desire to set up a base in Dundee, with the promise of a £127 million investment across the country and more than 200 jobs in Dundee alone.

We have heard positive noises from Mitsubishi, which has also identified Dundee as a preferred location. The Korean manufacturer Doosan is looking at Dundee as a potential site for a major plant, with plans to invest £170 million in Scotland over the next 10 years in partnership with Scottish Enterprise.

A number of smaller projects are also in the works around Dundee. For example, Dutch manufacturer Tocardo is considering siting 20 bi-directional tidal turbines in the Tay estuary. We have heard from a number of members about other projects across Scotland.

Such projects are ambitious. They have the potential to make significant changes to Scotland’s energy mix. SeaEnergy’s Inch Cape offshore wind farm project in the outer Firth of Tay could lead to the construction of 180 turbines, which would have an installed capacity of around 1,000MW—that is enough electricity to power 700,000 homes and exceeds the current output of Hunterston B.

A number of views have been expressed during the debate, but I think that most members would think that 180 turbines, with the associated opportunities for green jobs and for the economy, are a much better option for Scotland than a nuclear plant that would take billions of pounds of subsidy, with decades being required for decommissioning and centuries for monitoring the hazardous waste.

Alex Johnstone suggested that nuclear power is somehow carbon free. If a working nuclear power station appeared out of thin air, its fuel materialised at the site and it simply vanished at the end of its life, it could be argued that nuclear power was low carbon. However, we all know that that is not the case. Nuclear is by no means carbon free.

Alex Johnstone: Does the member accept that the figures, particularly for construction—which I am sure we could get if we asked for them—pale into insignificance compared with the carbon cost of building a wind turbine?

Joe FitzPatrick: No. There is obviously some carbon cost to wind turbines, but it pales into insignificance compared with what nuclear power stations produce.

A report by Storm van Leeuwen and Philip Smith, both former nuclear engineers, contains a joule-by-joule analysis of CO₂ production throughout the nuclear cycle, with three pages of references to back up their research. It shows that, if we ignore dismantling, with present ore grades 80g of CO₂ is produced per kilowatt hour of electricity. If we include dismantling, the figure rises to 140g per kilowatt hour. The amount of energy needed to secure uranium fuel will depend on the ore grade. Although relatively high ore grade uranium is available, uranium mining is picking the richest seams across the world. That will become more difficult and carbon intensive in future, and the carbon footprint of nuclear will increase as a result.

The problem is not just with CO₂. There is a whole basket of other greenhouse gases, including chlorine, fluorine, organic compounds and many others. One example would be—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): And only one example, please. I would be grateful if you could close.

Joe FitzPatrick: The one example that I would like to give is the production of Freon. An American study shows that enrichment plants in the United States produced 405 tonnes of Freon 114, which has a global warming potential nearly 10,000 times greater than CO₂. If we factor in the Freon output from nuclear power production, the carbon impact almost doubles.

We have come a huge distance, and it is very important that we do not allow new nuclear to distract us from our renewables future. Scotland has the potential to be the renewables powerhouse for Europe, so let us not be distracted by new nuclear.

16:32

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): There is much that I endorse in Joe FitzPatrick’s speech. He began and ended by reflecting on how far we have come. It has been a long time coming: roughly 150 years since Tyndall identified the basic mechanism of the greenhouse effect and the better part of 50 years since the evidence began to accumulate that the effect was taking place as a result of emissions related to human activity.

It should be therefore be quite a happy moment for a Green party politician to be able to stand here and talk about a Government that places the phrase “low-carbon economy” front and centre in its economic strategy. Sadly, I come out of the debate with mixed feelings. Fergus Ewing gave the game away just two minutes into his speech, when he said that all the economic opportunities from renewable energy and low-carbon industries

must be seen as additional to continued dependence on fossil fuels.

The terms “low-carbon economy” and “low-carbon sector” were used in Mr Ewing’s speech as though they are interchangeable. They are not. One is an assertion about the entire economy. A low-carbon economy means much more than just generating more renewable electricity: it means burning less fossil fuel. A low-carbon sector means that there are some economic opportunities in this sector and some in that sector, and it does not really matter if one is high carbon and the other is low carbon. There is a contradiction in that approach. If the low-carbon economy is seen simply as an addition to the high-carbon economy, we are no further forward.

I have congratulated the SNP on its action whenever possible, and I have never shied from criticising it when I feel that I have to. The SNP record on renewables is good—it can always be better, but it is good.

However, on fossil fuels, under the SNP we have seen a significant expansion of opencast coal extraction; a proposal for a new coal-fired power station on which we still await a decision; political support for new exploratory oil drilling; and a refusal, so far, to rule out hydraulic fracturing to capture shale gas, which is another means of securing new, unconventional fossil fuel reserves.

The amendment that I lodged has not been selected but, hey, how many Opposition amendments are going to get through in the next four and a half years? I am going to talk about it anyway. As my amendment suggests, the world already has more than enough—probably twice as much than is needed—known and identified reserves of fossil fuels to make irreversible climate change unavoidable. The challenge ahead of us is not to burn the stuff that we have found. It will always be economically beneficial in the short term to burn fossil fuels, but we need to wean ourselves off doing that. We need to leave the coal in the hole; we must leave the fossil fuels where they are. If we extract that fossil carbon and put it into the global economy, whether it shows up in Scotland’s emissions targets or anybody else’s, irreversible climate change will be unavoidable.

Fergus Ewing: I understand Mr Harvie’s views. What I do not understand is whether he believes that the nearly 200,000 people who are employed in the oil and gas sector in Scotland should continue to work in that sector, or is he saying that, because of the imperatives that he has described, they should all now forfeit their jobs and all oil and gas production and exploration should simply cease?

Patrick Harvie: I am saying that the Government’s priority must be to shift our

economic focus from the jobs that are currently in the fossil fuel industries towards the opportunities that exist in renewables. It should do that instead, rather than seeing the renewables jobs as additional, which is unfortunately the emphasis that the minister supported in committee, looking forward with joy in his heart, it seemed, to another 50 years of fossil fuel extraction—something that we simply cannot afford to pursue.

That is the approach of not just the Government, of course, but a Scottish bank. The Royal Bank of Scotland is currently financing the single most destructive industrial process on the planet in the pursuit of tar sands, the most polluting fossil fuels available to us. In society at large, too, the values of consumerism still dominate, leading to increased energy demand and resource depletion. There are opportunities to do more, but this is not just about what we do more of; it is also about what we do less of.

I implore the Government to use the local government borrowing powers that John Swinney spoke of yesterday to invest in publicly owned renewables so that we get the economic benefit for the public sector as well as the clean energy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you for finishing on time, Mr Harvie.

16:37

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members’ interests.

This has generally been a good debate. Malcolm Chisholm cannot see the trees for the burning wood. John Wilson reminded me how much I miss Jim Mather’s excellent mind maps—bring him back. I thank all those organisations that provided briefings for the debate, including the Scottish Wildlife Trust, RSPB Scotland and the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

All of us support the aim of moving to a low-carbon economy, but there are obvious differences about how we should achieve that and how big a role renewables can play. There is controversy over the cost of Scottish Government funding of action to achieve its emissions targets, as it will inevitably result in an impact on spend across other portfolios. The Government paper that was obtained through a freedom of information request by *Scotland on Sunday* revealed that, according to Government officials, the cost of meeting the 2020 emissions target is £8 billion—as Alex Johnstone pointed out—including £3.9 billion in transport costs and £3.2 billion in spending mainly on the conservation of energy.

In the previous session of Parliament, Derek Brownlee said:

“We need to make sure we are not reducing emissions by wrecking the economy.”

He had a point.

Like Maureen Watt, we believe that it is too soon to exclude nuclear power from the energy mix in Scotland. Wood Mackenzie published an independent assessment of Scotland's energy options, as recommended by the Government's own economic advisers, which noted that, were both nuclear plants—Hunterston and Torness—to be removed, Scotland would lose a very significant volume of low-carbon power.

We were glad to secure an amendment to section 65 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, which enables local authorities to establish schemes for reducing council tax when improvements are made to the energy efficiency of homes. Moreover, to achieve a low-carbon economy, Scotland must invest in high-quality public transport.

A number of members described the good work done in their constituencies or regions. It was encouraging to read the news reports from the Scottish Renewables marine energy conference held at the Eden Court Theatre in Inverness earlier this week, which attracted 200 delegates. Ministers must heed the warning of Ken Street, head of business development at the ocean energy division of Alstom Hydro, who said that while the industry was at a tipping point, hurdles remain for firms moving from single devices such as those being tested at the European Marine Energy Centre in Orkney. He also said that there are real challenges over energy transmission, and long-term commitment from the Scottish Government is needed.

Our Scottish Conservative amendment refers to the possible impact on migratory and non-migratory marine species and cetaceans of offshore wind farms and wave and tidal developments. I raise the issue because concerns have been expressed to me by people in the Highlands and Islands region about the proposed massive offshore wind development in the outer Moray Firth. There are fears about its impact on migratory stocks of salmon and sea trout and, possibly, on cetaceans. I hope that work is ongoing to identify any possible problems, but my confidence was somewhat undermined when I heard that a senior Marine Scotland official had said to a senior marine lab official that salmon had been forgotten in the plan. It appears that the consultants, Brown & May Marine, while aware of the cetaceans, did not realise the huge importance of the migratory fish in the Moray Firth. It would be churlish to point out that, under the special areas

of conservation rules, it would be the UK and not Scotland that risked facing enormous fines. If Scotland was separate, the Scottish Government would face those fines. What is important is that enough pilot studies and research are carried out beforehand in order to identify whether there will be problems in the marine environment.

The development could be the biggest offshore wind farm project in the world, so it is very exciting. However, the Government must ensure that it does not throw the baby out with the bathwater with regard to vital elements of the present economy.

Fergus Ewing: As I spoke at the conference at the Eden Court theatre, met Alstom Hydro and Marine Scotland and saw the presentation on that excellent work, I wish to give general reassurance that all these matters are under consideration. If Mr McGrigor has concerns, he should write to me about them to ensure that they are fully considered. If he does, I will ensure that that happens.

Jamie McGrigor: It is very kind of the minister to say that I can write to him and I certainly will do so.

Some 17 important salmon rivers debouch into the outer Moray Firth. Several of them are special areas of conservation, such as the Moriston, the Beauly and the Spey, because of the migratory species. The European eel is protected on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's red list and is also migratory. The proposed energy site is to be built on sandbanks around the Smith Bank, an important sand eel breeding area. Sand eels are a vital element in the marine food chain for young fish and seabirds. The outer Moray Firth is also rich in cetacean life, such as bottlenose dolphins and porpoises, not to mention the visits from killer whales that come to eat the seals. Some of these protected species are under international, not just EU and UK, designations.

It has been a good debate, and I support the amendment in Alex Johnstone's name.

16:44

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): This has been an interesting debate and there is much agreement around the chamber about the importance of a low-carbon economy, not least because of the jobs and inward investment that it will provide. Mark Griffin highlighted the real importance of a low-carbon economy. We need to deliver this as part of our global commitment to countries living with the effects of climate change. We do not have the power simply not to act; but there are benefits to acting, which will help us here.

When discussing a low-carbon economy, we must deal with the issue of those living in fuel poverty. It has often been put to me that our rush to renewables is costing those who are in fuel poverty. We must ensure that that does not happen. The real prize is having renewable fuel that allows people to have affordable fuel and heating in the future. We need to ensure that those who are now living in fuel poverty are protected from the investment that is required to move towards that prize. If we do not move towards renewable heating and electricity, power costs will increase and more people will be dragged into fuel poverty. We need to be mindful of that; we really cannot forget it.

Liam McArthur mentioned that the heat target is too low. The Government has set a 100 per cent target for electricity from renewables, but the heat target has not really changed. We need to be much more ambitious, as fuel poverty is measured by people's ability to heat their homes. We need to consider community heating schemes and recapturing heat from power stations. Mark Griffin and Joe FitzPatrick talked about that. We also need to look at microrenewables and how we can get them to those who need them most by utilising feed-in tariffs and ensuring that financing arrangements are available. We need to ensure that those who can least afford to bear the brunt do not do so. It is for the Government to consider proposals such as an infrastructure bank that would provide investments for those who cannot afford things and use that money again to help others down the line.

We cannot ignore energy efficiency. Moving to renewables is all very well, but we must be able to use the energy that we generate much more efficiently. We need to look at building standards.

Mike MacKenzie: The member may not be aware that the most recent building standards—the 2010 standards—include 30 per cent more energy efficiency measures. They are already challenging the construction industry, especially in the creation of affordable housing. That is happening in the member's region in particular because of the extra rural costs. Therefore, I am surprised that she is asking for even higher building standards.

Rhoda Grant: It is anathema to build affordable housing that is not affordable to heat. We must be very careful about doing that. Greater costs are involved, but they need to be borne up front, not left to those like many of my constituents who have night-storage heating and inadequate insulation, for example, and really cannot afford to switch on a heater. Older people and families live in such conditions, so we need to consider the matter.

A couple of years ago, I think, I was at the Highland housing expo in Inverness, which showed how we could use insulation and building design to cut down heating costs. Indeed, a house there had no heater. If a person felt a bit chilly, they could put on their oven or their hairdryer for a couple of minutes and the whole house would heat up. We need to work towards that approach.

We also need to look at the housing stock that we already have. Social rented housing needs to have a minimum standard of insulation. We need to move towards that.

I mentioned microrenewables. We have suggested a green new deal that would insulate 10,000 existing homes. We need to work on such things. Obviously, retrofitting is more expensive. As other members have said, we need to ensure that the work goes to small and medium-sized businesses if we want to benefit our local economies, get an economic boost from it, and create local jobs. That could be tied up with apprenticeships—the minister talked about that earlier.

Members have talked about getting communities involved in renewables. That is a big issue that relates to onshore renewables and wind power, and it is missing from the motion and the amendments. The issue has become controversial, but we cannot meet the 100 per cent target without onshore wind power. We need to consider where it has developed and we need a plan to ensure that communities are not overburdened, but we must also ensure that all the communities that are involved benefit. Perhaps we will have to consider shares in developments rather than cash on the table, up front, to involve communities for the lifetime of a development and to allow communities to benefit from fluctuating prices and profits from such projects.

We need to consider planning guidelines to ensure that development can happen more easily, but we also need to ensure that communities can be heard during that time. I speak to a lot of constituents who are frustrated because they feel that they are going to have a wind farm imposed on them and no one will listen to what they say. We need to ensure that there is a strategic plan for where such structures will be and that we let communities benefit.

I know that I am running out of time, but I need to speak about grid infrastructure. If we are going to meet our targets, we need to be able to move the electricity back and forth. There are areas in my constituency in the Highlands and Islands, especially in the islands, where the grid infrastructure simply is not there, which means that developments cannot get started. For example, I have been told that, in the Uists, the only capacity that is available is what is left over

when it is not being used by other people. Communities cannot benefit on that basis, and we need to examine that situation.

We must have joined-up policies to ensure that we can deliver a low-carbon economy. I urge the Government to develop them.

16:51

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): We often say that climate change is one of the most important challenges facing our country, and many contributors to today's debate have made that very point. The other side of the matter is how we respond to making the transition to a low-carbon economy, which is clearly one of the greatest opportunities that is currently before us. We are fortunate in Scotland to have the natural resources and expertise to enable us to be at the forefront of a new global economic condition. We have tremendous potential in our renewable resource, our capacity to develop carbon capture and storage, our high-tech research and our business acumen. As the Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism said, we aim to meet the equivalent of 100 per cent of our electricity demand from renewable sources. I note that some commented that that seems overambitious. In response, I say that many of the conversations that have been had with the power industry suggest that it is eminently achievable.

What we do not need, and what the Government will absolutely not promote, is new nuclear facilities. Therefore, when we come to decision time, the Tories should not look for support for their amendment, because of its inclusion of that subject. Nuclear power is a hugely expensive technology of the last century and it need play no part in Scotland's long-term energy future.

Alex Johnstone: Will the minister accept that the statistics on which he bases his ambition to achieve 100 per cent of our electricity requirement from renewable sources involve the transfer of power back and forward across the border, which means that he has conceded that Scotland needs and will have a new nuclear power station, but it will be built in England and we will buy its electricity across the grid?

Stewart Stevenson: I do not accept that. I accept that there will be transfers of energy across the border—going south, because we are already a significant exporter of electricity and will become even more so. I note that over the extended period—I think that it was two years—when Hunterston was not delivering to the network, we did not miss that nuclear capacity.

I will deal with comments that were made during the debate. Lewis Macdonald made an effective contribution, much of which I agreed with. He said that transition is possible but not certain. That is, of course, correct. It will not happen without our driving it forward; it will not happen through passivity. He talked about the need to join up different levels of government. That is a perfectly proper point to make. With Alison Hay of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, I jointly chair a group that is working with local authorities to take steps to improve the contributions at that level by engaging officials rather than just politicians and related decision makers. Our relationship with the UK Government—previous and present—on this agenda has been effective. I have been at the environment council with Chris Huhne, Caroline Spelman and Ed Milliband. Although we disagree on matters of detail, we are completely aligned in our central purpose, and we have worked well together.

The challenge is to take many of the countries of Europe along with us. At the most recent environment council meeting, we moved to a substantially better position than existed before, as 26 of 27 countries were able to sign up to a motion that recognised the need for higher targets. We must now translate that into higher targets throughout Europe, as that is important. We will continue to work with other administrations—at local government, UK and Europe level—to seek to deliver on that.

Members have expressed support for carbon capture, and I introduced some of the relevant issues when I intervened on Lewis Macdonald. In many ways, there has been some timidity on the part of officials in various jurisdictions—that is perhaps a greater issue than ministers' enthusiasm, or not. We are now behind the curve, but we do not have to be there.

Alex Johnstone mentioned Tory overenthusiasm, which is a novel concept that I look forward to hearing more of.

I will give members a little sense of some of the opportunities. The Scottish Wildlife Trust yesterday gave me a report that suggested that restoration of our peatlands alone could contribute 2.4 million tonnes of abatement per annum. As Scotland's emissions as a whole currently amount to 50 million tonnes, one could almost persuade oneself that peatland restoration could do the job on its own. Of course, it is a bit more complex than that, but we certainly want to continue to make progress in that area.

Kevin Stewart mentioned the success of combined heat and power in Aberdeen—indeed, Lewis Macdonald has made similar contributions on previous occasions in the chamber—which is an important demonstration of what can be done.

Malcolm Chisholm understands that I will not comment on specific proposals on which the Government may need to make decisions, but I highlight that we have supported more than 50 small-scale biomass projects in small and medium-sized enterprises, which represents around 12MW of energy. There is certainly a place for biomass.

I hope that Malcolm Chisholm recognises the value of the objective analyses that SEPA—which is, of course, a Government agency—brings to bear on applications. He—like other members—stressed the importance of good heat distribution. In my previous ministerial role, I visited the Michelin plant in Dundee and noted the difficulties that it was experiencing in obtaining an appropriate heritable right of way—known in England as a wayleave—for getting heat to adjacent houses and businesses. There are some issues in that regard that we must revisit.

John Wilson mentioned the climate challenge fund, which has supported more than 400 projects in communities throughout Scotland. That is a substantial contribution to empowering people in Scotland and ensuring that we are all moving together on this agenda.

Jackson Carlaw wished us to genuflect before the Government's achievements. We will certainly consider that, although some of our knees are getting a little creaky, which may make genuflection a bit more difficult than it might have been in the past. However, when it is at the altar of SNP achievement, I am prepared to sacrifice my knees.

There are significant difficulties with nuclear as much as with anything else. We in Scotland cannot make as much of it in terms of new jobs and new opportunities as we can by putting our efforts into renewables technologies. That is where we must be in Scotland.

The Labour amendment is fine as far as it goes, but it is flawed in the sense that it asks for more money—this is the wrong time and the wrong place. We look forward to engaging with the Labour Party and others on a number of issues.

I will reflect the position at the end of my speech as I did at the beginning. We have a challenge and an opportunity. The global economy has experienced much uncertainty in the past four years. Our important way forward is through low-carbon growth, which gives us energy security and new jobs. We as a Government wish to encourage demand for low-carbon goods and services. I hope that the Parliament will support those aims at decision time and vote for the Government's motion.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-00904.1, in the name of Elaine Murray, which seeks to amend motion S4M-00904, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the common fisheries policy, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that motion S4M-00904, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the common fisheries policy, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)

Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 114, Against 2, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament supports the Scottish Government in its efforts to achieve the best possible outcome for Scotland during negotiations on the future of the failed Common Fisheries Policy in order to protect Scotland's historic fishing rights, protect fish stocks, tackle discards, support Scotland's aquaculture industry without burdening it with unnecessary regulation, promote Scottish seafood and give greater power to fishing nations to manage their fisheries and protect the marine environment; however recognises that these discussions will be undertaken by the UK as a member state, and therefore urges the Scottish Government to work closely with the UK Government to ensure that the long-term interests of the Scottish fishing and aquaculture industries and Scotland's marine environment are at the centre of the forthcoming discussions on reform.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-00902.3, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, which seeks to amend motion S4M-00902, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the low-carbon economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)

Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 53, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-00902.1, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S4M-00902, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the low-carbon economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)

Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)

McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 12, Against 70, Abstentions 34.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-00902, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the low-carbon economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)

Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)

Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 80, Against 2, Abstentions 33.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the Scottish Government's determination to achieve and deliver sustainable economic growth by promoting the transition to a low-carbon and resource-efficient economy across all sectors; acknowledges the potential for up to 10 GW of electricity from offshore wind in Scotland and that the potential for still more large-scale development of offshore wind, wave and tidal energy over the coming decades represents the biggest opportunity for sustainable economic growth in Scotland for a generation; notes the vision and purpose underlying the 2020 Routemap for Renewable Energy in Scotland, the enterprise agencies' National Renewables Infrastructure Plan and associated National Renewables Infrastructure Fund and the Energy Skills Investment Plan; supports the Scottish Government in setting the right policy and funding framework to reinforce Scotland's position as a destination for global low-carbon investment; agrees that its ambitious approach to climate change is critical in providing long-term certainty for business and investors, and recognises the Scottish Government's commitment to resource efficiency through the Energy Efficiency Action Plan for Scotland and the Zero Waste Plan, which is already expanding waste reprocessing capacity and cutting carbon emissions.

Affordable Childcare

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-00808, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on the Save the Children report "Making Work Pay—The Childcare Trap". The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the many families in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth and across Scotland who struggle to meet childcare costs; further notes with grave concern the findings of a survey carried out by Save the Children and the Daycare Trust that parents on low incomes are being forced out of work by a combination of high childcare costs and a lack of support to meet those costs; understands that the survey shows that a majority of families struggle to cover childcare costs regardless of income but that the burden is especially heavy for families in poverty; notes in particular the findings that a quarter of parents in severe poverty have given up work and a third have turned down a job mainly because of high childcare costs; believes that affordable childcare is an essential part of making work pay and that supporting the poorest parents into work is the best way to tackle child poverty, and believes that the conclusions of Save the Children's report, *Making Work Pay – The Childcare Trap*, should be given the utmost consideration.

17:05

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I thank the members who signed the motion that is before us to enable it to be debated and those who have stayed behind to participate in or listen to the debate. I thank Save the Children and the Daycare Trust for bringing to our attention the matters that are in their report "Making Work Pay—The Childcare Gap". I specifically thank Save the Children for assisting me in preparing for the debate and for bringing robotic dolls to the Parliament earlier today to publicise the debate. That generated some press interest and no shortage of sideways glances from bystanders.

Those of us who are parents know the trials and tribulations of organising childcare. I consider myself fortunate, in so far as my wife and I have been able to find reliable, good and affordable childcare for our young daughter. However, as "Making Work Pay" demonstrates, not everyone is so fortunate. Earlier this year, Save the Children and the Daycare Trust jointly surveyed more than 4,000 parents across the United Kingdom to explore their views on how the cost of childcare and access issues impact on their employment and family budgets and, in turn, to explore the effects on child poverty.

More than 14 per cent of those who were surveyed reside in Scotland, and the trends here are consistent with the overall findings. Those findings are striking, but they are not new. We

know a lot about the difficulties that parents experience and what could make a difference. The results of the survey focus on the experiences of parents who live on the very lowest incomes—those in severe poverty. It will be no surprise that those families face the greatest challenge in accessing affordable childcare. Of the parents who responded to the survey, eight out of 10 who are in severe poverty said that cost is a barrier to accessing childcare. Parents who live in severe poverty were twice as likely as other participants to cite cost as a barrier to accessing childcare above any other barrier. The majority of parents who are in severe poverty—61 per cent—said that they had struggled to pay for childcare, whereas the figure for parents on higher incomes was 37 per cent.

Of the respondents, 41 per cent said that their childcare costs were similar to their mortgage or rent costs. That such a large proportion of families find the cost of childcare to be on a par with paying for a roof over their heads is surely a stark demonstration of the challenges. The high cost of childcare is felt by most families, but for families in severe poverty the impact is particularly drastic. The survey establishes that parents who are in severe poverty often need to cut back on key essentials simply to pay for childcare. Nearly half of families living in severe poverty have cut back on food to afford childcare and such families are more than twice as likely as families on higher incomes are to cut back on household bills just to afford childcare costs. We can surely all agree that no family should have to choose between feeding themselves or heating their homes and paying for childcare.

Many children are missing out on opportunities to help them grow and develop. Parents who are in severe poverty are more than twice as likely as parents on higher incomes are to cut back on after-school activities. Many parents in severe poverty have to make difficult financial choices simply to pay for childcare. The cost of childcare has caused a third of parents who live in severe poverty to get into debt, whereas that has happened to less than a quarter of parents on higher incomes.

It is little wonder that many parents in the UK struggle with the costs of childcare when they face the highest childcare costs of any Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country relative to their income and spend 33 per cent of their net income on childcare. The pressures continue to rise. The Daycare Trust suggests that average costs for childcare have risen significantly since 2010. For instance, between 2010 and 2011, the cost of a childminder for kids aged two or over increased by 8.3 per cent, which is about four times as much as the uplift in the average wage in the same period. Make no mistake—the

ramifications of those pressures are serious and, again, are particularly acute for the poorest families.

The survey indicates that a quarter of parents in severe poverty have had to give up work as a result of not being able to afford childcare. Those are not parents who have been made redundant or parents who could not find work. They are parents who had work but felt that they had to quit because they could not afford to continue to work. One third of parents in severe poverty had had to turn down a job; a quarter had not been able to take up education or training; and one in 10 had had to move home as a result of difficulties finding suitable childcare.

Recent changes to working tax credit by the UK Government will only exacerbate those problems. Its decision to reduce the percentage of costs of formal childcare that is covered from 80 to 70 per cent will be very damaging to poorer families. There is no better demonstration of the concerns that were caused by the changes to working tax credit than those expressed by one of my constituents in Kilsyth, who took part in the survey and said they felt that

“it is very short sighted of the UK government to make cut backs in working tax credit and tax relief for child care as there is a real benefit to the health and well being of parents plus the economy of helping parents work.”

I turn to what we can do to go some way to tackling the problems that are identified in the report. First, we can call on the UK Government to reverse its decision to alter working tax credits in a negative way. I hope that the minister can state what the Scottish Government might be doing to that end.

Here in Scotland, we can call upon local authorities to provide their statutory hours of childcare provision in more flexible ways to support parents into employment. In the longer term, we can consider Save the Children's other suggestions—that those statutory hours of childcare provision be extended to two-year-olds, beginning with the poorest families; and that more be done to support out-of-school care for children aged up to 14 in low-income households.

Given the budgetary pressures, that may not be easy, but investing in that area may have wider economic and social benefits. It could also fit in well with the Scottish Government's expressed desire to increase preventative spending. It might also make life that bit easier for some of the most vulnerable families in the country. Surely we can all agree that that is a goal well worth achieving.

17:12

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate Jamie Hepburn on

securing this important debate. When I saw the report from Save the Children and the Daycare Trust, I was reminded of another report from the Daycare Trust that came out nearly 20 years ago, in 1993. That report recommended that income spent on childcare should be substantially disregarded in calculating income support or family credit entitlement—something that did not happen at the time.

I remember the report well because I asked the Prime Minister of the day, John Major, about it at Prime Minister's question time. When he did not answer my question I asked a written question, to which he answered, among other things, that low-income families do not use paid childcare. That was not one of John Major's cleverer answers because that was precisely the problem. Tragically, it is increasingly becoming the problem again today.

To be fair to the Conservatives, they introduced such a disregard in due course, and that was built upon by the Labour Government at Westminster until eventually, in 2004, 80 per cent of childcare costs were met through child tax credits. It is deeply regrettable that the current UK Government has cut that back to 70 per cent. That is what is exacerbating the problems of the affordability of childcare in Scotland and throughout the UK.

Jamie Hepburn's motion refers to a quarter of parents on low incomes having given up work because of childcare costs and a third having turned down a job on the same basis. The survey specifically asked Scottish parents; we are told that 30 per cent of Scottish parents said that they had cut back spending on food and 62 per cent had cut back spending on clothes in the past year in order to afford childcare.

The tragedy is that because of the actions of the UK Government, that situation is set to get worse, with the introduction of universal credit. Two options have been put forward for universal credit. However, Save the Children tells us that a single parent earning £15,000 a year and paying £230 a week for childcare would be £60 a week worse off under either option. The situation is very depressing, with the Westminster Government rolling back the advances that we have seen in childcare support over the past 15 years or so.

Turning to a devolved context for today's debate, I accept and understand the difficult budgetary situation that the Scottish Government faces and I therefore realise that action will not be as ambitious as we would ideally wish. However, the Scottish Government should look very seriously at the recommendations from Save the Children. I think that some reference was made in the announcement a couple of weeks ago to extending childcare provision to some two-year-olds, which I certainly welcome, but I hope that the

Government will also look at the other recommendations, particularly with regard to out-of-school support for families on low incomes.

I know that the minister has visited North Edinburgh Childcare in my constituency, which has always been an outstanding example of a childcare centre. In fact, one of my earliest campaigns 20 years ago was to support all the local parents who wanted to set up that centre. That example illustrates how childcare centres in more disadvantaged areas have been able to draw in funding—at present from the fairer Scotland fund and previously from the community regeneration fund—to subsidise childcare to a greater extent. I am not saying that places in that childcare centre are cheap by any means, but they are a bit cheaper because of that subsidy.

I hope that the Government will also look to use funding streams such as the fairer Scotland fund to support childcare centres such as North Edinburgh Childcare, which I always very genuinely say is the best childcare centre in Scotland and which I think has received widespread recognition through several awards—indeed, it currently runs the Scottish Government crèche at Victoria Quay.

I think that my time is up, so I congratulate Jamie Hepburn once again on introducing this very timely and important debate.

17:16

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): I thank Jamie Hepburn for bringing this motion to the chamber, as it raises a very worthy issue. I also thank Save the Children and the Daycare Trust for their excellent report, “Making Work Pay—The Childcare Trap”, which I think everybody should look at in some detail. From reading the report, it is clear that there really is a trap—Malcolm Chisholm and Jamie Hepburn have put much about that on record.

I want to deal with an issue that Jamie Hepburn touched on in his opening speech: the UK Government’s cuts to the working tax credit, which have been a real attack on many families and have further damaged those who are trying to stay in employment and meet childcare needs. Those who previously received the 80 per cent support were most likely already experiencing in-work poverty, even with 80 per cent of childcare costs being met. We can see very quickly what the impact of cutting that support to 70 per cent will be—Malcolm Chisholm fleshed that out with some figures. I hope against hope that the UK Government will look again at that matter and realise that the long-term effects of what it proposes will be completely counterproductive, both socially and economically.

Save the Children believes that to guarantee 80 per cent of childcare costs under the universal credit would cost £405 million across the UK, which would represent a mere 0.45 per cent increase in the total welfare budget. I suspect that that would be a wise investment, given the long-term effects of having children grow up in fully benefits-dependent households. We are only too well aware of the damaging intergenerational poverty that can be created. There are communities in Scotland that are still benefits dependent because no support was put in back in the 1980s. We do not want to see that happen at this time of crisis in the UK economy. That is an important thing to say.

In the information provided by Save the Children, one of my constituents describes better than I could the problem that parents face. They say:

“I feel that the government is making it extremely difficult for ordinary people with children to earn an honest living. The current situation is encouraging people to give up work and go onto benefits as many people are better off that way. This is surely not the correct way to go about things. I enjoy working and would not be happy on benefits, however this is becoming increasingly difficult to manage.”

If that individual finds themselves on the dole, perhaps their grandchildren will think that being on the dole is the normal existence for human beings—it is not the normal existence; we have to support people in employment and into employment.

There are challenges not just for the UK Government, but for the Scottish Government and for this Parliament. I do not deny that the extension of entitlement to two-year-olds is a huge challenge in the current financial climate, as is providing out-of-school care for five-to-14-year-olds. However, something that we could achieve more speedily is getting the commitment to provide 15 hours a week for three and four-year-olds to work better. I do not think that local authorities are flexible enough in their approach and I do not think that they use partnership nurseries as effectively as they could do. Some people just cannot take up the entitlement because they cannot put their son or daughter into a nursery at 10 o'clock in the morning, leave their job and pick them up again at half past 12. That just cannot be done, particularly if people do not have wider family support. We must look at reforming that area to make it work better for families.

I will finish by looking at the cost of childcare. Costs are too high, but I was interested to learn that costs in Scotland are higher than they are in the rest of the UK. I have spoken to Save the Children about the issue, and I wonder whether we are comparing apples with oranges rather than apples with apples. I want us to look at the quality

of the childcare and the educational experience that are provided for children when they start to follow the childcare pathway. It might be the case that the like-for-like costs are quite similar, but that, because of the involvement of more highly skilled staff, a better outcome in qualitative terms is obtained in Scotland. That might explain the differential, but more efforts need to be made to look into that.

I again commend Jamie Hepburn for bringing the debate to the chamber.

17:20

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): I hope you do not mind, Presiding Officer, but I had to bring the baby into the chamber with me because I could not find a babysitter. On that note, Save the Children says that Jamie Hepburn is on the night shift, so I will need to see him afterwards to pass the baby back to him.

I congratulate Jamie Hepburn on securing the debate and on his excellent speech. I acknowledge the work that Save the Children has done in providing briefings for all of us, and I know that much of the evidence and the facts that they have provided us with will come up in members' speeches.

I want to talk briefly about the living wage and, if I can find the time, college provision. Jamie Hepburn's motion says that supporting the poorest parents into work is the best way to tackle child poverty. I agree, but I also think that that work must be quality work. To my mind, what is needed are good jobs that provide a greater degree of security and which pay a decent living wage. I know that the Scottish National Party and Labour agree on that, as their support for the campaign for a living wage shows.

I welcome the commitment that the Scottish Government announced yesterday to uprate the current living wage to £7.20 an hour. The minister will be aware that I revealed that 1,000 Scottish Government employees were entitled to the living wage but were not getting it. I am pleased to say that the wages of a number of those employees are now being uprated, and are being backdated, but there are still some areas in which that process is not quite complete.

The minister might also be aware that, last week, the campaign for a living wage revealed that across Scotland 16,000 employees who are employed directly by local authorities receive less than £7.20 an hour. I appreciate that the Scottish Government cannot demand that they be paid at least the living wage, but it has a political role to play in demonstrating leadership and the capacity of the living wage to help people work their way out of poverty. I certainly feel that if the Scottish

Government and the local authorities demanded that all their employees be paid the living wage and built that into tendering contracts, we would drive a cultural change in the private sector that would benefit people right across Scotland. The Government has a leadership role to play in that regard.

On working conditions, there is an issue with temporary posts, zero-hour contracts and poor pay and conditions, which make getting and retaining a job extremely difficult. For some families, the thought that a temporary post might put them back on the job market in a few months' time means that they will not bother going for such a job, because they will lose their jobseekers allowance and will have to wait six weeks to get that money back in their pockets. Frankly, that is just too big a risk. Therefore, we need to ensure that the jobs on offer are quality jobs.

In the time that is left, I want to talk about college provision. I recently visited Jewel and Esk College in Edinburgh Eastern, which is an excellent college that does tremendous work. I was very interested to hear what it had to say about childcare support and the allocations for that to further education colleges. Until I visited the college, I did not realise that the allocations are based on historical uptake. In other words, the money that colleges get is based on the number of students that they used to have who had children to look after. That means that we always address the situation in the past but never drive cultural change for the future. If we want to get into colleges more students who care for children, we need to be more up front about the type of provision that we can offer them.

It is important to recognise that colleges deal with the situation in different ways. Jewel and Esk College provides childcare support directly to the student, while Stevenson College and Telford College pay the money to the provider. Such inconsistency across the sector does not help people who might be considering going to college for the first time. It would be great if the Government could think about running a serious advertising campaign to attract parents back into education, thereby recognising the power of education to lift people out of poverty as much as the power of work to improve their life chances.

I congratulate Jamie Hepburn on an excellent motion and an excellent speech. I hope that on many of the issues that we have talked about we can go forward together as a united Parliament.

17:24

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): As colleagues have done, I congratulate Jamie Hepburn on securing this valuable debating

time for an issue that is of great importance to many families throughout Scotland. I also thank Save the Children for producing an excellent report in "The Childcare Trap".

The scourge that is child poverty is a source of great shame to our society. The thought of a child being born into poverty, not receiving the opportunities that many of us take for granted and suffering—on some occasions—from malnutrition and illness is truly distressing.

All members of the Parliament can agree on that and we should do all that we can together to eradicate a problem that should belong in a bygone era. Save the Children's research shows that 90,000 children in Scotland live in severe poverty.

In the past few days, there has been much talk of boosting our economy, creating jobs, attracting investment and getting Scots back to work. It is difficult to argue that those are not vital to Scotland's prosperity. Most people would concede that the Scottish Government is doing a good job in achieving that, despite the economic difficulties. However, people must be able to go to work.

Short of winning the lottery, the simplest way to eradicate poverty is to boost household budgets, which is best achieved by securing productive employment. Kezia Dugdale made a good point when she talked about quality employment rather than just employment, as such. For many, the cost of childcare is simply too high, and there is a genuine disincentive to go out and work. Jamie Hepburn discussed that in some detail.

Childcare costs in the UK are among the highest in the world, and parents in Scotland face costs that are higher than the UK average. The Daycare Trust's 2011 survey showed that parents in Scotland pay on average £100 per week for 25 hours of care and there has been an 8.3 per cent increase in the past year alone—a time when fuel and food prices have also been on the rise and many parents have had their wages frozen. Matters have not been helped by the coalition Government's decision to reduce the amount that low-income families can claim towards the cost of formal childcare from 80 per cent to 70 per cent. I make no apology for repeating that extremely important point. That reduction means an average loss of more than £500 per year for the 44,500 families in Scotland who receive the support.

Research has consistently shown that the inability to secure or afford childcare remains the most significant of all the barriers to gaining employment. Indeed, the growing up in Scotland study found that 55 per cent of unemployed parents would work or study if they could find quality, reliable and convenient childcare.

Only last week, one of my constituents contacted my office because she was unable to secure adequate childcare so that she could attend James Watt College. She currently has to miss days at college to care for her child and may have to drop out of her course altogether, thus limiting her chances of gaining the type of employment that she wishes for and, of course, stunting not only her life chances but, ultimately, her child's.

Despite the additional funding that the Scottish Government provided for childcare support in the previous session of the Parliament, such situations continue to arise. However, despite budgetary constraints, there is a will to develop support for families to meet childcare needs. That support will include a new generation of family centres, in addition to flexible childcare options, which will include asking local authorities to provide their statutory hours of childcare in more flexible ways in order to support parents into employment.

Of course, I argue that the simplest way to address child poverty would be if we had access to our own substantial resources or control of our own tax and benefits system, which would enable us to do far more in Scotland to resolve such matters. One does not have to look far to see how much better things could be: Children in Scotland pointed out that, across the North Sea, Norway has the fourth-highest level of child wellbeing in Europe while the UK sits shamefully in 24th place, behind Slovenia. Furthermore, the child poverty level in Norway stands at 6.7 per cent, which is a quarter of the UK figure.

I am sure that the Scottish Government will continue to do all that it can with the resources that it has to improve the life chances of all Scotland's children. The early years strategy and sure start fund will offer real benefits to thousands of young Scots. However, I agree with Jamie Hepburn that we must also study Save the Children's report and consider what more can be done to help parents to get back to work and tackle child poverty.

17:28

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I commend Jamie Hepburn for giving the Parliament the opportunity to debate a significant report.

We all tend to accept as a given the importance of a positive early-years life experience. However, what happens in practice belies the commitment to supporting early intervention and early years services. We know, and it is well stated, that families that have work opportunities and work experience help to create more stable and more positive children, who are better able to take

advantage of the education system. We know that family stability is fundamental to a good start in life and we know that the quality of services is critical, as Bob Doris mentioned.

Malcolm Chisholm, Jamie Hepburn and Bob Doris mentioned the working families tax credit. It is quite bizarre that a Conservative-led Government that places great emphasis on work and families is making it exceedingly difficult for many families to work in the way that they now need to work. Families either need two incomes to survive or, when a parent is bringing up a child on his or her own, they need childcare so that they can work as well as raise their children. If the coalition values working families, it should rethink what it is doing with the working families tax credit.

Malcolm Chisholm referred to the 1990s and a debate that he attended in the House of Commons. I do not want to get into party politics, but in 1997 the Labour Government, followed up by the Labour-led Executive in Scotland, fundamentally changed the quality and nature of the debate around early intervention and early years services. The sure start fund, the working families tax credit, getting it right for every child, the workforce development fund and the changing children's services fund all helped to create a more structured and well-supported environment. When we debate the budget, we need to watch that we do not shift the priorities away from those critical services that people might think are of greater value. We ignore and abandon such initiatives at our peril.

I have one more thing to put on the record; I will end on it. We often look beyond Scotland for examples of good practice in how we should support children and families. Perhaps we need to pause and reflect on the good practice that happens here in Scotland. Why not look at that good work and build on it? Liz Mercer and her team in the Cathkin community nursery in Rutherglen achieved the highest possible gradings in a recent inspection. Lynn McCafferty and her team at Brucehill nursery in Jackie Baillie's constituency are leading the field in children's emergent literacy. In my constituency are Doris Robertson and her team in the West Johnstone family centre, where the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education reports noted the very good quality of care and learning that are being made available to children. We do have good practice in Scotland—we have fine examples, but they need to be well supported and financed so that families, parents and the children get the best possible start.

My final plea to the minister is that by all means we should learn about good practice elsewhere, but let us concentrate on establishing a Scottish

model and sing the praises of what is happening here in Scotland.

17:33

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I add my congratulations to Jamie Hepburn and thank Save the Children for its important and thought-provoking report, which flags up so many of the barriers that are facing those who are in lower-income groups and the difficult choices that they have to make when they are looking after their children.

Notwithstanding some of the comments from Labour members about the UK Government, I have to say that the Labour Party in Scotland and the former SNP minister who has just left the chamber did a great deal to refocus the debate. Hugh Henry was right when he said that we have much that we can be proud of.

There is no doubt that early childhood development through good-quality care or educational opportunities is crucial to determining the future health and wellbeing of children. The statistical evidence for that is non-contestable. The possible attainment gaps are well established; they can open up at as early as 22 months and, if we do not do something radical about that, it is difficult to close them later in life.

I therefore welcome the debate very much, but I suggest that the discussion is not just about childcare but about an opportunity that goes well beyond providing invaluable support to parents: the provision of early years education to enhance and promote children's wellbeing and development. Indeed, not getting that right can have profound and potentially expensive ramifications later in a child's life. I believe that all parties in the chamber have done a lot to move that debate on, which is good news.

I hear the criticisms of the UK Government in relation to the tax and benefits issues, but I do not entirely agree with what Malcolm Chisholm and Hugh Henry said in that regard. I believe that the Westminster Government has taken to heart the importance of early education. One of the first policies that it implemented was the entitlement to 15 hours a week of free early education. That is an important provision that we can build on in Scotland. The message from parents that they want greater flexibility and the free entitlement, particularly for those in disadvantaged communities, can take us a long way down that road.

An important point, which I think Bob Doris raised, is partnership issues for both nursery and childcare provision. We face far too many rigidities in Scotland in that regard, because, through local authorities, the state can dictate a bit too much at

times just what placings are available. That is unfortunate, because parents want much greater flexibility and choice. However, it should not be just about convenience for parents, as the social and educational interests of the child must always be at the heart of provision.

The Save the Children report provides compelling evidence of the difficulties facing many families because of what it describes as the childcare trap and it sends out a strong message to employers—the point made about colleges in this regard is important, too—that they have a vital role in supporting families and our young children. We need to take that message to heart, so I warmly congratulate Jamie Hepburn on bringing the debate to Parliament.

17:37

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Jamie Hepburn on securing the debate and I congratulate Save the Children and the Daycare Trust on their report. Other members have covered the issues that the report highlighted, but I think that it is worth repeating some of them.

It struck me that I did not know that the cost of childcare is significantly higher in Scotland than it is in the rest of the UK. I did not know that eight out of 10 low-income families struggle to afford childcare. Although I did know that the lack of affordable childcare is a major barrier to accessing employment, the fact that 25 per cent of parents living in severe poverty have had to abandon working to stay at home with their children because it costs too much should be a staggering statistic for us all.

Hugh Henry was right to remind us that we have solid foundations on which to build. I am grateful for other members' acknowledgement of the initial work of the Labour Government on improving access to childcare. I remember that the expansion of such access occurred in 1997, when I was the mother of a five-year-old and it was too late for my family to benefit from it. I was most jealous of those who did. However, it was critical then for parents who relied on going out to work. We have positive examples of good practice around Scotland that show what we can achieve in that regard.

I came into Parliament with a mission, as many of us do, which was to tackle poverty. I had worked in disadvantaged communities, where I saw not just poverty of income but the poverty of aspiration that was visited on successive generations. I learned a number of valuable lessons there. First, I learned that a strong economy and a strong society are different sides of the same coin and that one of the best routes

out of poverty is through employment and having a job. I witnessed people not just improving their income but having a sense of achievement and walking taller, with a sense of self-esteem. For many of them, it was the first time that they had seen a sense of their own worth reflected by employers. Having a job mattered; it mattered to income levels and it mattered in all sorts of subtle ways in relation to raising aspirations in the community.

The second lesson that I learned was that, when we try to intervene to break the cycle of poverty, it is necessary to do so early. Appalling though it may be to think about this, a child's life chances are determined by the time that child gets to the age of three. We know that if we intervene early and work intensively with those children and their families, we can begin to turn things round.

The other thing that struck me was that, if we provide childcare to enable parents to work, as we did in many of the communities that I worked in, and at the same time provide a supportive, nurturing environment for those children, we get a win-win. If we truly want to target poverty, that is the kind of approach that we must adopt.

We know that parents in Scotland are struggling to cope with childcare, we know that the biggest barrier to employment, particularly for women, is childcare and we know that the very poorest parents are being priced out of work.

In my remaining time, I will focus on the provision of 15 hours a week of free early childhood education and care for two-year olds, because it brings both those strands together. We know and can identify the children from disadvantaged households and we know where the parents are struggling. If we correlate that with employment, we should be able to identify those families; it is not rocket science.

A cost-benefit analysis would show us that, if we invest now, we will save the public purse in the long term, never mind what we will save some of the poorest families in terms of experience.

I recognise the minister's personal commitment to the issue. I know, because she has told us, that she regularly chases her Cabinet colleague Mike Russell—and more power to her elbow—but I have to say that we need to do more than chase the cabinet secretary. If she does that, she will have the support of MSPs across the Parliament for the kind of action that I know she wants to take.

17:42

The Minister for Children and Young People (Angela Constance): I am very grateful to Jamie Hepburn for securing the debate, on one of my

favourite subjects—or one of my favourite rants—which is the cost of childcare in Scotland.

Last week, I had the pleasure of meeting Save the Children to discuss, among other matters, the survey that led to its report, “Making Work Pay—The Childcare Trap”. I could quibble about some of the methodology, given that it is a UK-wide survey and I am not sure how representative the Scottish samples are, but I will not do that, because by nature I am not a pedant.

More fundamentally, anybody who has ears to listen and eyes to see will know that a significant proportion of families pay more for their childcare than they pay for their rent or mortgage. As all members who have spoken in the debate have demonstrated, there is an obvious connection, which stares us in the face, between the costs of childcare and leaving or staying in employment. I welcome the work that Save the Children has undertaken and will endeavour to respond to its report, as well as to the concerns that have been raised by members during the debate.

In the little time that I have, I will try very hard to demonstrate what the Government has done, what it will do and what it would like to do.

However, before I continue I would like to make one broad point. In doing so, I do not seek to be controversial or to disrupt the consensus that often—and rightly—exists in members’ business debates, so I will choose my language carefully. If there was ever an issue that best crystallised the arguments for this Parliament having more powers, surely it has to be the need to provide for and support better our children and families. Let me be blunt; without control of taxation and the welfare benefits system, there will be no quick fix to ease the burden on, or the hardship that is faced by, hard-working parents or parents who wish to work. Nonetheless, I believe that we can do much more to ease that burden.

I will touch on welfare reform, which was mentioned by Jamie Hepburn and Malcolm Chisholm among others. The UK Government’s Welfare Reform Bill is substantial and will bring about—if I quote Jackie Baillie correctly from yesterday—“a seismic shift”. The Scottish Government supports benefits simplification and is considering the UK Government’s proposition as to what the universal credit will achieve, but we do not support welfare reform that will impact most greatly on the most vulnerable people. We do not yet know the full extent of the impact of the changes or the effect that there will be on devolved services. Nonetheless, we will continue to engage proactively on the subject with our colleagues at Westminster. Members will also wish to consider the part that they can play in that work. Bob Doris exercised his right to do that tonight.

For the moment we must work within our constraints. Liz Smith touched on an important point in referring to what we have managed to achieve collectively as a Parliament. In essence, we have achieved consensus on the need strategically to prioritise the early years.

I could have run up the back of the chamber and hugged Hugh Henry when—

Jackie Baillie: Go on! [*Laughter.*]

Angela Constance: I will resist—to save his blushes, never mind mine.

It was music to my ears as a mother and as the Minister for Children and Young People to hear that we have excellent practice here in Scotland and that we do not necessarily need to go on study trips to Scandinavia—to Norway or Sweden, for example—or elsewhere. Malcolm Chisholm mentioned the North Edinburgh Childcare family centre. I have visited it twice and have been very impressed by the work that it does. Hugh Henry mentioned Cathkin nursery, which blew me away when I visited it to see the work that it does.

Many areas in Glasgow, Dundee and North Ayrshire are doing interesting work with vulnerable two-year-olds. I am aware of a pilot that was commissioned by the previous Scottish Executive that, interestingly enough, showed that extended provision did not have a huge impact on two-year-olds, but did have an impact on supporting parents and helping people to be better parents. That is a significant bit of evidence.

I am pleased that over the past four years the Government has increased entitlement of free pre-school education to 475 hours per annum. That amounts to 8 million more hours.

More to the point, what are we now going to do? To answer Hugh Henry more substantively, I think that this Government is committed to making the decisive shift to preventative spending. We have an opportunity to be bold. We have created an early years change fund to lead the way on preventative spending, and we will take the work forward jointly with local authorities, the national health service and the third sector. We know that the investment in zero to eight-year-olds, and zero to three-year-olds in particular, pays back countless dividends. I personally will chair the early years task force, which will oversee early years activity, picking up on our priorities of childcare, family centres, play, early learning experiences and supporting parents.

I hope that members will be reassured that we are committed to expanding the capacity, range and flexibility of early learning and childcare. We will develop the steps that are needed to make early learning and childcare accessible and affordable to all—obviously within the constraints

that I have outlined. I am committed to the fact that there are positives to be achieved, but the bigger prize to be gained for our children is for our Parliament to evolve into full adulthood and to exercise all the rights and responsibilities that go with it.

I will quickly say something about our third sector partners. Third sector organisations are crucial partners in delivery, and I am delighted at the allocation of £6.8 million to the early years action fund, which was announced today. That will support the expansion of innovative and exciting models of integrated learning, childcare and family support.

My final point is the one that Kenny Gibson raised about child poverty. Although I am pleased that, over the past 10 years, the level of child poverty has dropped from 28 per cent to 20 per cent, I must say that 20 per cent is still far too high. The Government is absolutely committed to doing everything in its powers to eradicate child poverty.

Meeting closed at 17:50.

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