



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 17 January 2013

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## Scottish Parliament

Thursday 17 January 2013

[The Deputy Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]

### General Question Time

#### Royal Alexandra Hospital Death Rates

**1. Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab):**

To ask the Scottish Government for what reason reported death rates at the Royal Alexandra hospital are higher at the weekend than on weekdays. (S4O-01699)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil):** I understand that that is not the case. The member is referencing raw data that was released under freedom of information by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. In the release, the mortality rate was expressed as a percentage of the number of discharges. As there are fewer discharges at the weekend, the denominator is small, thus artificially inflating the proportion of deaths. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has undertaken a more robust analysis of the data between 2002 and 2012 and, as a result, has been able to assure me that there is no significant difference in the mortality rates at the Royal Alexandra hospital between weekdays and weekends. I am sure that the NHS board would be happy to write to the member with the details of its analysis.

**Hugh Henry:** I look forward to that information. However, the fact remains that the health board provided information about the mortality rate at the weekend that showed that it was double that during the week. There can be lies, damned lies and statistics, but if what Mr Neil said is the case, why did the health board put out information that showed that the death rate at the weekend was twice that during the week? As well as writing to me, the cabinet secretary should ask the health board to go back and interrogate its statistics. Further, he is the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, so he should undertake his own investigation into those worrying and shocking statistics and give everyone an assurance that, in fact, the health board is not fiddling figures and let us get the real facts.

**Alex Neil:** It is always advisable for members to leave a degree of flexibility for their supplementary question in case the answer to their original question does not fit with what they wanted to hear. I will provide Mr Henry with the accurate figures, through the health board, and he will then be able to see that there has been no fiddling and no problem of the kind that he described.

#### Radioactive Material (Dalgety Bay)

**2. Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its assessment is of the health risks of the radioactive material at the foreshore at Dalgety Bay. I register an interest in that regard. (S4O-01700)

**The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson):** The Scottish ministers take advice on that issue from a number of sources. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency has restricted access to certain parts of the beach and has posted advice notices to the public. In October last year, the Health Protection Agency reported that there was no public health reason for individuals to stop using the area, subject to those restrictions already in place.

As Helen Eadie will be aware, we met last week and I was able to tell her that I had received advice from the committee on medical aspects of radiation in the environment—COMARE—that concluded that increased rates of certain types of cancer that were reported in the media in November are very unlikely to be linked to radioactive contamination.

**Helen Eadie:** I thank the minister for that answer and for the very cordial meeting that we had last week. I am grateful to him for releasing the COMARE report to members of the public in Dalgety Bay. To enhance the message to the public about the outcome of that report, will the minister agree to come to a meeting in Dalgety Bay with members of the public to offer assurance to them about the report's findings?

**Michael Matheson:** At the meeting last week, I gave Helen Eadie an undertaking to try to ensure that there was better co-ordination between the various agencies involved in the matter to ensure that they impart information to the residents of Dalgety Bay in a more planned way. Unfortunately, not all those agencies are within my control—for example, the Ministry of Defence. I have given an undertaking to ensure that the COMARE report is made available to the Dalgety Bay residents forum, which will provide the residents with the assurance that the experts have considered the matter and that, on the basis of the information provided by NHS Fife, they do not believe that there is a link between the radioactive contamination and elevated levels of types of cancer that were identified.

Following the provision of that report and the work that my officials will take forward, I will be more than happy to continue a dialogue with Helen Eadie to see what further measures can be taken to help to ensure that the residents are properly informed of various matters on this issue.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** I will allow a brief supplementary question from Annabelle Ewing.

**Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. Of course, the health and safety of the people of Fife must always come first. As it is the MOD that has failed to deal with the contamination over two decades, including during the Tony Blair and Gordon Brown years, does the minister agree that it should pay for the remediation—and that it should do so as soon as possible—as it has done at Almondbank?

**Michael Matheson:** I agree that the safety of the people of Fife must come first. That is why SEPA is working closely with the Ministry of Defence on investigations into the radioactive contamination at Dalgety Bay. Should SEPA identify the MOD as being wholly or partly responsible for the contamination, we will expect it to fund its portion of the remediation costs as determined by SEPA at that time.

#### **Accountable Policing (Dumfries and Galloway)**

**3. Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how policing in Dumfries and Galloway will be accountable to local people once the single police force becomes operational. (S4O-01701)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** Each local authority area will have a designated local police commander who will work more closely than ever before with locally elected councillors and community planning partnerships to shape local services and prioritise local needs. That includes a statutory requirement to prepare a local police plan for each local authority area.

All 32 local authorities and the eight regional police services are involved in developing and trialling the new local engagement and scrutiny arrangements that will be introduced on day 1 of the new service. In collaboration with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Improvement Service, we have today published national guidance on good practice in the area.

**Elaine Murray:** In Dumfries and Galloway, we were assured that local accountability would be preserved when the single police force took over from Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary. The recent announcement that there is to be one deputy chief constable for the west of Scotland, essentially incorporating Dumfries and Galloway into Strathclyde, has caused concern in the region. Can the cabinet secretary tell me when the detail of the local structure will be released? The local police do not seem to know when that will happen. Can he assure me that, in Dumfries and Galloway in particular, there will be no loss of accountability

and no loss of financial accountability with regard to the role of the council?

**Kenny MacAskill:** The fundamental structure has been passed by the Parliament. As to how the local authority will interact with the police, that is a matter for the local commander. There will be an announcement shortly by the police service of Scotland about the local commander. That is an operational matter for the chief constable. The local commander will be the person who interacts with Dumfries and Galloway Council. I recall from previous discussions with the chief executive of the council that he saw great advantages in bringing matters together to ensure that the co-operation that exists in community planning partnerships continues.

These matters are being worked through. The local commander will be appointed—that is a matter for the chief constable—and he or she will work closely with the local authority in whatever form the local area wishes in setting up its committee.

#### **Social Unavailability Codes**

**4. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the inappropriate use of social unavailability codes by national health service boards to meet waiting time targets. (S4O-01702)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil):** Social unavailability has been replaced by a patient-led system in which the patient's explicit agreement is needed if they want their treatment to be delayed for any reason. That came into effect on 1 October 2012. Guidance on the new system was issued to the service in August 2012 and I expect all boards to ensure that they are fully compliant.

The new system of patient-advised unavailability ensures that the service is more tailored to patients' needs and gives them greater control, as well as providing more detail on the reasons for unavailability. The new arrangement also means that, if an in-patient or day-case patient has advised that they will be unavailable, for example because of holiday or work commitments, the health board must send a letter to the patient to confirm their request and explain the impact on their waiting time.

**Jackie Baillie:** This week it was NHS Grampian in the waiting times scandal; last week it was NHS Forth Valley. In a report compiled by a former NHS manager, NHS Forth Valley was revealed as making the most extensive use of social unavailability codes in Scotland to avoid breaching the waiting time guarantee. Was the cabinet secretary aware of that when he stood up in this chamber and gave NHS Forth Valley a clean bill of

health regarding waiting times? If not, does he believe that the practice in NHS Forth Valley was acceptable?

**Alex Neil:** There is no scandal in relation to NHS Grampian other than in the head of Jackie Baillie. The scans referred to have an annual throughput of about 3,500 patients. Because of a breakdown in a scanner there has been a backlog of 550 patients, but of the 3,500 patients who get these scans in Grampian every year, only about 100 come within the patient waiting time guarantee. The BBC and Jackie Baillie should check their facts before they make allegations about scandals that do not exist.

**Jackie Baillie:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My question was entirely about NHS Forth Valley, aside from one reference to NHS Grampian. The cabinet secretary did not at any point address the question about NHS Forth Valley.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is not a point of order, but you have made your point.

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD):** Does the cabinet secretary recognise that bed blocking, due to a lack of beds and an increase in acute illnesses, has led to pressure on NHS staff to use social unavailability to hide the missing of waiting time targets and that there is emerging evidence that that lack of infrastructure has had the knock-on effect of increasing the number of trolley waits, in which patients who are admitted to accident and emergency have to wait for a free bed?

**Alex Neil:** Jim Hume also needs to get up to date on the rules that govern social unavailability and the new rules that have been operating since 1 October.

In the past 3 or 4 weeks, because of an increase in instances of norovirus and seasonal flu, there have undoubtedly been pressures throughout the NHS in Scotland. Those pressures come from the fact that there are many more patients. The number presenting at A and E across the board has increased by about only 2 or 3 per cent, but admission rates have risen by 15 per cent on average over that period. Inevitably that creates pressures on the system, but to say that there is some great crisis is absolutely absurd.

#### **Smoking (Enclosed Premises)**

**5. Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how many people have been prosecuted in the last year for smoking in enclosed premises or permitting smoking to take place in enclosed premises. (S4O-01703)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** In the year to 31 December 2012, 32 charges of smoking in non-smoking premises

have been reported to the procurator fiscal. Of the 29 cases in which action was taken, court proceedings were raised in six and a further 23 were dealt with by direct measures. One case of permitting smoking to take place in non-smoking premises was reported and no action was taken in that case.

Such offences can also be dealt with by fixed penalties issued by the local authority enforcement officers.

**Stewart Maxwell:** Is the cabinet secretary aware that, in the six years since the legislation came into force in 2006, Highland Council has never issued a fine in connection with the smoking ban and that Dundee City Council has issued 718 fines? Can the cabinet secretary explain the large variation in the number of fines that are issued for breaching the ban on smoking in enclosed premises?

**Kenny MacAskill:** We must get matters in context. The ban on smoking in public places has been a success and the evidence indicates a high level of compliance with the legislation.

However, enforcement is fundamentally a matter for local authorities. We expect all local authorities to ensure that people comply with the legislation and to have suitable enforcement protocols in place to ensure that the effectiveness of the smoking ban is maintained. Why there is that discrepancy I am unable to advise, but I am happy to discuss the matter directly with Stewart Maxwell and, indeed, the Lord Advocate.

**Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Is the cabinet secretary satisfied that all premises that sell tobacco are now registered? Have any prosecutions taken place for the sale of tobacco from unregistered premises?

**Kenny MacAskill:** I do not have particular knowledge of that matter but I am happy to engage with Dr Simpson on it or, indeed, to write to him with the specific answer.

#### **Walking and Cycling Infrastructure (Mid Scotland and Fife)**

**6. Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent support it has given to developing walking and cycling infrastructure in Mid Scotland and Fife. (S4O-01704)

**The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown):** Since 2011, we have invested over £4 million in Mid Scotland and Fife for cycling and walking infrastructure projects, including the cycling, walking and safer streets grant and Sustrans capital funding. I am happy to write to Ms Baxter with further detail on the issue, including

our investment in other measures such as those delivered by Cycling Scotland.

**Jayne Baxter:** I should declare an interest as a Fife councillor. The minister might be interested to know that there is an excellent proposal in Fife to develop a pathway into Dunfermline town centre from Duloch in the eastern expansion, which will not just create a cycle route but improve the surrounding green space and facilities in order to increase use of the area. However, the funding for the scheme is complex. Will the minister join me in supporting the project and will he consider ways of simplifying funding for such active travel projects?

**Keith Brown:** I am happy to look into the matter, but I have to say that we are content with the process. We make direct grants to Cycling Scotland and local authorities can bid for that money. In addition to the moneys that I have already mentioned, we have made available £759,000 that local authorities can bid for as match funding to work in partnership with Sustrans, whose capital budget for the next two years is in the region of £10 million. As I have said, a process has been put in place. I am not aware of any issues in the rest of Scotland with accessing that money, but I am happy to listen to the member's comments.

**Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):** The minister will be aware that north-east Fife is a very scenic area that includes a large part of the Fife coastal path. However, it also contains a number of busy commuter routes. How can the existing infrastructure in north-east Fife be improved to increase the uptake and improve the safety of cycling?

**Keith Brown:** Many movements can be and indeed are being made on the cycling infrastructure in the kingdom of Fife. Fife's cycle path network provides more than 300 miles of signposted cycle routes, with eight different signed routes in the Howe of Fife and north-east Fife that are primarily for leisure but which can also be used for commuting.

More specifically, through working in partnership with Sustrans with Scottish Government funding, Fife Council has already delivered the new community link from Tayport to Newport-on-Tay cycleway and a further project is planned to improve the St Andrews cycle network in the town centre. I have a number of other examples of things that can be and have been done and am happy to provide the member with that detail.

#### **Subsea Power Cables (Western Isles and Orkney)**

**7. Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made on expediting the

proposed new subsea power cables to the Western Isles and Orkney. (S4O-01705)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** The transmission network owner and operator, Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc, estimates for the Western Isles high-voltage direct current link a delay of at least 12 months in the planned completion date of October 2015, with a real potential that it could be later, and estimates that the alternating current link to Orkney will be completed in 2018. As the Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism pointed out when he met the company on Monday, the delays and uncertainty for developers on Orkney and the Western Isles are clearly disappointing, and the Scottish Government will continue to work with industry and the Office of the Gas and Electricity Markets to seek interim solutions to connect more generation, drive forward the necessary grid connection upgrades and ensure a fair transmission charging regime.

**Mike MacKenzie:** Does the cabinet secretary consider that by delaying the provision of these cables, which will lead to significant cost increases and significant delays for generation projects both large and small, Ofgem and the United Kingdom Government have acted in consumers' best interests?

**John Swinney:** As I said in my first answer, the delays in UK electricity market reform and, more important, the uncertainty caused by the process and the surrounding debate within the UK Government have been a significant factor in the delays that are being experienced. The Scottish Government has tried positively and actively to support a positive resolution to the electricity market reform process in the interests of Scotland, consumers and investment and to work with Ofgem to ensure that any solutions that are advanced to realise renewable energy potential as timeously as possible can be achieved. That will remain the Government's approach.

**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I see that the Western Isles may expect its link by 2015. Does the minister agree that it is unacceptable that the Orkney upgrade will not be ready until 2018 at the earliest?

**John Swinney:** I made it clear in my answer to Mr MacKenzie that the Government would prefer those issues to be resolved more speedily. The decision-making processes in this respect lie with Ofgem, the United Kingdom Government and the industry itself. The Government in Scotland will work with all parties to try to advance that agenda.

Mr McGrigor makes a fair point about the significance of renewable energy activity in the Orkney islands, where clear leadership has been



taken in this respect by the local authority and the Government. We will use every endeavour that we can to advance that timescale.

## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

### Engagements

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

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** With permission, Presiding Officer, I should tell the chamber that I spoke to the Prime Minister this morning about the hostage-taking situation in Algeria. As the chamber will know, a terrorist group has seized the BP-Statoil facility in the Algerian Sahara. Citizens of a number of nationalities are involved, including United Kingdom citizens. I can confirm to the chamber that a number of Scots are among the hostages. The UK Government reports that one UK national has been killed in the attack.

I know that the chamber will understand that, in the interests of the safety and security of the hostages, the information that can be given out is necessarily limited. The priority is the safety of the hostages and keeping the families informed. The Scottish police service is fully engaged with the Metropolitan Police on the latter and Scottish Government ministers are in contact with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the former.

This is a hugely serious situation. I know that the whole chamber is united in condemnation of the attack and in hoping for the early and safe release of the hostages.

**Johann Lamont:** We entirely agree with the First Minister on the conclusion that he comes to. Our thoughts are with the families concerned at this very difficult time.

On 22 March 2010, the then health secretary, Nicola Sturgeon, said:

"hidden waiting lists have been abolished."

She added:

"no one ... is on a hidden waiting list."

On 21 March 2012, Nicola Sturgeon told Parliament that there were hidden waiting lists at NHS Lothian but assured us that there were none elsewhere in Scotland. Since then, failures in waiting times have been discovered at NHS Tayside, and questionable activity has been reported at NHS Forth Valley, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and NHS Lanarkshire. Yesterday, we learned of serious problems with NHS Grampian.

In the light of that, was Nicola Sturgeon misleading Parliament and the country, or was she just incompetent and not on top of her job?

**The First Minister:** Let us remember that under the Labour Party, hidden waiting lists in the national health service were endemic. Those endemic practices were abolished by the Scottish National Party. I do not think that any Labour leader is in a position to attack the SNP on waiting lists across the national health service.

As a local MSP, I am well aware of the situation in NHS Grampian; indeed, all local MSPs should be well aware of it because they were given a briefing by NHS Grampian in December. The 18-week treatment time guarantee—from referral to consultant—has not been breached in NHS Grampian. It had a serious difficulty with one of its DEXA—dual energy X-ray absorptiometry—scanners, which went out of operation due to a flood. That has resulted in a backlog of treatment.

The health board prioritised, as it should do, those who were covered by the 18-week guarantee and, of course, cancer patients, who have an even more rigorous guarantee. The reported situation of 3,500 people being in a backlog is quite untrue. The backlog consists of 550 cases, which are being dealt with by the health board. Provision is being made for the Golden Jubilee hospital to help to clear the backlog. I can confirm that the DEXA scanner is now back in operation at NHS Grampian. Both of its scanners in Aberdeen are being moved to the Aberdeen royal infirmary.

Nothing in that justifies the charge that there are hidden waiting lists in NHS Grampian. Hidden waiting lists across the national health service were abolished when the Labour Party was turfed out of office.

**Johann Lamont:** That answer was astonishingly complacent. I did not talk only about Grampian, although the First Minister might want to reflect on the fact that the Auditor General for Scotland said that there is a £1 billion repairs backlog and that £500 million of that might affect patient care. That might be part of the reason why there was a problem with the scanner in the first place.

I talked about other places, too. I understand that the First Minister has a London life coach. It would suit him to make sure he understood what real life is for most people in this country. Simply denying that there is a problem and talking about what happened before he was responsible is not the job of the First Minister.

Before the Scottish National Party's hidden waiting times scandal broke, the figures across Scotland for patients missing appointments for treatment due to social unavailability peaked at almost 21,000, in June 2011. Now, those figures have fallen to just over 9,500. If the figures were not being fiddled before, how does the First

Minister explain the patients who are suddenly available for appointments that they were not available for before?

**The First Minister:** The very fact that Johann Lamont is now able to quote figures indicates the difference between the SNP position and the Labour Party position. In 2006, we knew only after investigation that 35,000 people had been given an availability status code—that was the system by which people were hidden in the NHS so that statistics could never come to light.

Incidentally, the idea that, if the Labour Party was in charge, there would not be flooding in any building across Scotland is one of the most remarkable indications of the difference between our two parties' positions, as even Johann Lamont can see.

I am a north-east of Scotland MSP, and my family and constituents use the health service in Grampian. Therefore, I think that I have more immediate knowledge of the situation than Johann local authoritymont has.

On NHS Grampian's current performance, 90.3 per cent of patients were seen and treated within 18 weeks of referral, against a national standard of 90 per cent. On 30 September 2012, no patient in NHS Grampian had waited more than 12 weeks for a first out-patient consultation or for in-patient or day-case treatment. That compares with waits of six months in March 2007, under the Labour Party.

Members of the Labour Party should be the last people to come to the chamber and pretend that the national health service was safe in their hands. Under Labour, tens of thousands of patients were on hidden waiting lists.

**Johann Lamont:** The First Minister does not seem to understand something very basic. This is not the difference between the SNP's position and Labour's position; this is the difference between the SNP's position and the real world that everybody else is living in.

The First Minister can give us all those figures about Grampian, but I asked him not only about Grampian but about the whole of the country. He should also reflect that his own internal audits tell us that there is insufficient data to tell us what the scale of the scandal is, and he might want to address that problem, too.

We seem to be in a situation in which Nicola Sturgeon was right when she said that waiting lists were abolished, right when she said that the only problem with hidden waiting times was in Lothian and still right when it turns out that there are problems with hidden waiting times the length and breadth of the country.

According to the First Minister, the system that Nicola Sturgeon presided over was working well. Why, then, is her successor, Alex Neil, having to change the system because it is not transparent enough?

**The First Minister:** I point out that it was Nicola Sturgeon, as health secretary, who ordered the investigation into NHS Lothian.

I remember having this conversation last week with Johann Lamont, when I pointed out the praise that was heaped on Nicola Sturgeon as health secretary as she left office. I remember Jackie Baillie looking askance at that point, so I questioned whether I had remembered correctly and looked up what was said last year. On 5 September 2012, Jackie Baillie said:

“Regardless ... of the differences that I have had with the Deputy First Minister, I have always respected her talent and energy and I have always enjoyed working with her ... we are missing you already, Nicola. It is a shame that her talent and energy are being diverted.”—[*Official Report*, 5 September 2012; c 11042.]

Johann Lamont has achieved almost the impossible: she is less optimistic than even Jackie Baillie.

**Johann Lamont:** If I were the First Minister, I would listen back to that. I think that he might find it a little more than embarrassing, because I am asking him about a very serious issue.

The First Minister says that Nicola Sturgeon called the investigation into NHS Lothian. The problem is that she did not then look at what the answers were and she did not look beyond NHS Lothian to find out what was happening in the rest of the country. It would appear that Nicola Sturgeon was the health secretary for the good bits but that the bad bits are nothing to do with this Government whatsoever. The trouble is that it is the bad bits and the difficult bits that patients and staff across Scotland have to face every day of the week, and it is about time the First Minister took responsibility.

The First Minister has this week been talking about the rights that Scots could have under a written constitution in a separate Scotland. Let me tell him some rights that all Scots should have now—and he might need to write this down: the right to a Government that tells the truth; the right to a First Minister who will be straight with them; the right to be treated by the NHS within 18 weeks; and the right to be told the truth when the Government cannot deliver.

Is it not the case that whether it is the First Minister on Europe, John Swinney on the Bank of England, Mike Russell on colleges or Nicola Sturgeon on NHS waiting lists—[*Interruption.*]—the people of Scotland cannot trust a word this Government says?

**The First Minister:** Just in case Johann Lamont missed it in her peroration, the phrase from behind me was “Tony Blair on Iraq”.

It was Nicola Sturgeon who ordered the investigation. We have already had the account from the health boards across Scotland. The reason why Johann Lamont moved off NHS Grampian is that the charges that she made in her first question do not stand up to any examination.

I will tell members the reason why we doubt Labour’s bona fides on the issue. As it was Eleanor Bradford who did the reports on NHS Grampian for BBC Scotland, this is relevant. Last month, she reported a story on health inequalities, and this is what she said:

“I put this report to the main political parties yesterday. The SNP said it has shifted more to preventative spending ... The Labour and the Liberal Democrat parties have both called it respectively ‘a disgrace’ and ‘disturbing’, until I pointed out to them that they were also in government for this period and also therefore must share part of the responsibility, and they said they would get back to me with an amended statement, but I am still waiting for that.”

Even when it is totally clear, as in health inequalities, that the Labour Party shares responsibility across the chamber, its reflex action is to call something a disgrace and disaster, followed by an embarrassed silence. It is rather like Jackie Baillie on hospital-acquired infections last year, when Labour found out that part of the statistics covered the period that it was in office. That is why people doubt whether the Labour Party has a genuine concern for the national health service: it is unwilling to face the failures in performance in its time in office, which I am delighted to say Nicola Sturgeon amended and heavily improved in her excellent term of office as health secretary.

Of course, the bitterness extends because this is a question of dispossession. The Labour Party cannot get used, after all these years, to the fact that it is not in government in Scotland. That is why, I presume, Johann Lamont’s deputy just the day before yesterday—days after calling for a rise in the quality of debate in Scotland—suggested that this Parliament

“is not a democratic place in the conventional sense”.—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 15 January 2013; Vol 556, c 798.]

This is a proportional Parliament, elected by the people of Scotland—unlike at Westminster, where someone is foisted on the people with no mandate whatsoever.

### **Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)**

**2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con):** I, too, associate myself with the comments made by the First Minister regarding the very serious situation in Algeria.

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S4F-01109)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** I have no plans to do so in the near future.

**Ruth Davidson:** In the week before Christmas, I asked the First Minister why he promised the people of Scotland that he would spend up to £500 million on non-profit-distributing model big building projects between 2011 and 2013 but will actually spend just £20 million. He blamed legal delays on the Aberdeen bypass. Is that still his reasoning?

**The First Minister:** I gave the Aberdeen bypass or peripheral route as an indication that, in a project-based financial system such as an NPD trust, obviously the project has to come forward in order for the money to be spent. If I remember correctly, the budget for the Aberdeen bypass or peripheral route is some £600 million, so it is a substantial part of the NPD programme.

I remember the exchange as well, because that is a perfectly reasonable explanation given the delays, which are no part of this Government's choice, that took place on that project. The chamber has of course welcomed the fact that the legal challenges have been fought off and the project is now going ahead.

I remember the looks on the faces of Ruth Davidson's North East Scotland colleagues when she pursued that line of questioning. Is it the position of the Conservative Party that, for example, we should have spent the money on another NPD and then not had it available for the peripheral route in the north-east of Scotland? I do not think that we should have done so. It is a perfectly reasonable situation, and I think that folk in Scotland—particularly in the north-east of Scotland—are delighted that, under this Government, that badly needed peripheral route is going ahead.

**Ruth Davidson:** I am no Sarah Montague, but I too was there for that exchange. If he looks back at the transcript, the First Minister may wish to make his weekly trip to the official report this afternoon.

The First Minister is broadly sticking to his story that the Aberdeen western peripheral route was an issue to do with NPD spend. Yesterday, we heard something different from the man in charge of the organisation that the First Minister personally set up to build new schools and hospitals. The head of the Scottish Futures Trust, Barry White, said that the unspent millions were very little to do with the Aberdeen bypass, which was "more for 2013-14 and onwards".

After European Union advice that did not exist and college funding that was going down instead

of up, we now have yet another example of the First Minister telling the people of Scotland something that is simply untrue. The real tragedy here is that our construction industry and our communities were promised nearly £0.5 billion of NPD big building projects, which this First Minister has failed to deliver. Even his placemen on the Finance Committee, John Mason and Kenny Gibson, have said that the whole NPD scheme is "overoptimistic".

Will the First Minister now hold up his hands and admit that he is not spending the NPD money, that his excuses do not stack up and that barely a brick has been laid?

**The First Minister:** Ruth Davidson has just made the statement that we are not spending the NPD money. All of the NPD programme and more is going ahead. It is simply untrue that we are not spending the non-profit-distributing money. By any estimation, the NPD programme of the Scottish Futures Trust has been an extraordinary success. How do we know that? Because even George Osborne is turning away from the private finance initiative and trying to set up a non-profit system similar to the NPD programme in Scotland.

The Scottish Government faced a 30 per cent and more cut in the capital budget. The great advantage of direct capital spending by Government is that it can be processed quickly, as John Swinney has amply demonstrated time after time in the capital budget. The NPD programme is a fantastic improvement on the discredited private finance initiative. Far from being cut back in any way, all of the NPD programme is being spent.

Given the remarkable savings that the Scottish Futures Trust has brought about as a result of being established by this Government, although it was criticised by the Conservative Party, Ms Davidson should hang her head in shame at suggesting that we should either not spend the money—not have the programme, not have the schools, not have the peripheral route and not have the capital spending—or, alternatively, move back to the discredited wasteful private finance initiative that has been abandoned even by her colleagues in London.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** We have a constituency supplementary question from Dennis Robertson.

**Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP):** The First Minister welcomed this morning's news that it is deemed safe for the oil to start flowing again from Cormorant Alpha. What action can the Scottish Government take in relation to leaks such as the one just experienced at Cormorant Alpha?

**The First Minister:** Through Marine Scotland, the Scottish Government has responsibility for

environmental concerns. During major leaks in the past, our officials have been embedded into the incident room, which is an excellent approach to pursue. Initial responsibility for the security of oil supply lies, of course, with the Westminster Government.

Members will wish to note that the precautionary shutdown of the Cormorant Alpha platform, with the effects that that had on the other platforms in the Brent system, was exactly the right thing to do. The problem was identified remarkably quickly, it has been dealt with, and production is resuming across the Brent system.

Dennis Robertson brings a legitimate issue to the chamber, but the practice at Cormorant Alpha—there will, of course, be an official incident report that examines this in detail—would seem at first sight to be an excellent example of how a company and its procedures should respond to such an oil leak incident.

The incident is a reminder that the recovery of oil and gas and hydrocarbons from the waters around Scotland is an inherently difficult process, and the procedures to safeguard the environment must be first class.

### Cabinet (Meetings)

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

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S4F-01118)

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

**Willie Rennie:** Tomorrow, the new Scottish Police Authority is set to strip the chief constable of significant powers and impose three new powerful group directors over whom the chief constable will have no control. Last time, the First Minister laughed that off as “creative tension”. Since then, the chief constable has called for fresh legislation and both sides have spent thousands of pounds hiring lawyers to fight each other. Is the First Minister still laughing?

**The First Minister:** I dispute the premise of Willie Rennie’s question: I have never regarded this as anything other than a serious matter. I have said in the chamber that I believe that the matter is capable of resolution—I hope that every member looks upon it with that attitude.

I do not agree with the detail—never mind the premise—of Willie Rennie’s question, but perhaps it is better to allow the meeting to take place tomorrow and, if he wants to question me next week, no doubt he will have the opportunity.

On how the structures were set up, I point out to members that it is not for the First Minister to determine such matters but—make no mistake—

the Government is well aware of its responsibilities and it will discharge them.

**Willie Rennie:** If the First Minister will forgive me, I will ask him the questions this week, when it matters, before the decisions are taken; he is responsible to Parliament and he should answer the questions. He should not be so complacent. Despite what he says, the chief constable is being stripped of his independence. It gets worse: how can the chief constable be held to account by the Scottish Police Authority when that authority will control many of the services? It will be a jumble and lead to a blame game.

Her Majesty’s chief inspector of constabulary for Scotland said that the authority will not be able to hold itself to account. Does the First Minister accept that the legislation is not fit for purpose and must be changed?

**The First Minister:** I do not accept that the legislation that was passed by an overwhelming majority in the Parliament is not fit for purpose. I am quite certain that those on the Labour benches, if they had felt that it was not fit for purpose, would have realised that and not voted for it when it came to decision time.

It is not a question of the legislation; rather, it is a policy question. I dispute Willie Rennie’s premise in two ways. First, I regard this as a situation that needs to be resolved. I regard it seriously and the Government takes its responsibilities extremely seriously in this matter. Secondly, if Willie Rennie waits to see the decisions that are made, I think that it will turn out that the premise of his question was inaccurate. That is why I sometimes think that it is better—*[Interruption.]* I could use a range of figures, for example Willie Rennie’s forecasts on college waiting lists, which may or may not turn out to be true.

Given that the meeting is tomorrow, I think that it would be better to wait and see what happens; Willie Rennie can then come back. That would be better than my answering a question that I assure him is based on an aspect of false premise.

### Pension Reforms

**4. Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what assessment the Scottish Government has made of the impact of United Kingdom pension reforms in Scotland. (S4F-01120)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** Obviously, the precise implications require further study by the Scottish Government, which is being done. However, it is already pretty clear that the initial claims that the majority would be better off are not, in fact, true. It now appears, particularly from the analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, that

most of those who were supposed to be the big winners from the change—including women—will end up with a lower pension.

**Jim Eadie:** What action can the Scottish Government take to protect the people of Scotland from UK pension reforms that will consign many of our older citizens to poverty in old age through a miserly state pension? Does the First Minister agree that the reforms are further evidence that we are neither in this together nor better together?

**The First Minister:** Across the range of social security measures and reserved areas, the Scottish Government has taken the action that it can—that is, limited action, as powers lie elsewhere—to try to mitigate some of the effects, for example, on council tax benefits or the emergency loan fund. However, let us not pretend that, without power and authority over those areas, the Scottish Government can do anything other than ameliorate some of the worst effects of changes that are made at Westminster.

I saw the Conservative members look somewhat askance when I said that the vast majority of people would be worse off. I will quote exactly from the Institute for Fiscal Studies:

“as is often the case with pension reforms ... the overall effects will be more complex”

and

“in the long run will be to reduce pensions for the vast majority of people”.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies analysis suggests that the initial presentation of the changes earlier this week by the UK Government gilded the lily somewhat. The UK Government's attitude across a range of things will hugely strengthen the yes case in the upcoming referendum campaign.

#### Online Material (Convicted Criminals)

**5. Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government allows convicted criminals to post online material purporting to cast doubt on their conviction. (S4F-01119)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** Those who are serving sentences in prison are not allowed access to the internet. The Parliament passed the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010, which makes it illegal for prisoners to have in their possession any device that allows them to post material online.

**Lewis Macdonald:** Will the First Minister confirm that rule 73 of the Prisons and Young Offenders Institutions (Scotland) Rules 2011 forbids the use of

“films or recordings”

obtained in prison

“for ... transmission ... by any form of electronic medium”

without

“the prior written consent of the Governor and subject to ... such conditions as the Governor may impose”?

Will he confirm whether the Scottish Prison Service gave such written consent in the case relating to the murder of Jodi Jones, whether it imposed conditions to prevent the film being posted online and what action will be taken in the case if conditions attached to written consent have been breached?

**The First Minister:** I will see whether I can be helpful to Lewis Macdonald, because I know that everyone will deeply regret the hurt and upset that irresponsible use of the footage will have inflicted on the family and friends of Jodi Jones.

On Tuesday 15 January, Brigadier Hugh Monro, Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons, visited the prison concerned. Following that meeting, he issued a report to the Scottish Prison Service. I will quote it exactly. It says that he

“has investigated the matter and it is clear that the Governor followed Rule 63 which entitles a prisoner to an extraordinary visit, provided it is in the sight and hearing of a prison officer. He therefore allowed the prisoner to go ahead with the visit by the British Polygraph Association. The test was carried out in the Agents' Area and it was agreed it could be filmed by the testers. All of this was set out in letter from the Governor to the prisoner. All of this appears to have been carried out correctly and within Prison Rules. My view would be that the SPS have acted correctly and in good faith.

At no stage has the SPS at any level authorised or encouraged the film to be uploaded on to You Tube”.

However, in light of the full circumstances surrounding the case, the SPS intends to review the processes for considering any future requests and to consider ways in which safeguards can be put in place to ensure that the feelings of victims and their families are given full consideration and are appropriately acknowledged.

In our judicial system, we have a huge range of checks and balances. If the appeals process is exhausted and people still maintain that there could have been a breach of justice, the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission is the final stop. That is the correct process for people in that position to use, because it follows the integrity and processes of Scots law.

#### Appointment Procedures (NHS Boards)

**6. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what recent discussions the Scottish Government has had with national health service boards about appointment procedures for senior health managers. (S4F-01111)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** The Government discusses a wide range of issues with the boards, not least our aim of reducing the number of NHS senior management posts by 25 per cent. Between March 2010—the year that we announced the initiative—and 2012, the number of such posts was reduced by 16.1 per cent.

However, Liz Smith will be aware that the appointment of individual senior managers is the responsibility of individual NHS health boards, in accordance with their locally agreed recruitment policies and procedures.

**Liz Smith:** When Nicola Sturgeon was the health minister, she rightly put in place procedures to ensure that the appointment process for senior doctors and consultants in health boards was based on full transparency and public accountability. Does the First Minister agree with his colleague John Wilson, who at the weekend made clear his concerns that the process that one Scottish health board adopted recently for the appointment of a senior manager lacked that transparency and accountability? Does he agree that the Scottish Government has a responsibility to address that?

**The First Minister:** That is an entirely legitimate question to raise. It is legitimate for any member to comment on such a situation. As a result of the reports in the *Sunday Herald*, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing requested clarity and assurances from NHS Tayside on the appointment concerned.

NHS Tayside is clear that the appointment was consistent with its organisational change policies. As part of its consideration of the change, NHS Tayside sought independent advice from the national evaluation committee on any potential impact of moving the associate director to the role of director. It was the NEC's view that a change in grade would not arise simply on the basis of a change in title from associate director to director. In essence, the role was neither diminished nor substantially grown, so there was no requirement to re-evaluate the grading.

Crucially, it now transpires—this was not in the press report concerned—that there was no change in salary involved in that process. I would have thought that that tends to support the view of the NEC, which NHS Tayside sought. As the member will know, the health secretary responded to the press report. Members of this Parliament are perfectly entitled to raise such matters; that is quite proper. However, I think that the member will agree that the health secretary has fulfilled his function in ensuring that matters were handled properly in NHS Tayside.

## Day Centre Reform (Glasgow)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):** The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-05188, in the name of Bob Doris, on day centre reform in Glasgow. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes with concern the current proposals by Glasgow City Council to close three of the city's seven day centres for adults with learning disabilities; believes that this is a straightforward cut to services for vulnerable people, leaving no adequate alternative service on offer, that there is evidence that many of the people affected by previous day centre closures in Glasgow are still not receiving an appropriate alternative and that a new round of closures would not bring any improvement; further believes that learning disability day services in Glasgow will not continue to meet people's needs into the future; recognises calls to halt the present process and instigate a full and comprehensive consultation exercise involving the active participation of service users and carers in any proposed service redesign, thus conforming to the general principles of self-directed support, which has choice as a fundamental principle, and believes that the proposals undermine this principle.

12:33

**Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP):** In opening the debate, I welcome to the public gallery a number of family members of service users from the Summerston day centre for adults with learning difficulties. I also welcome former service users—and their family members—of the Accord Centre in Glasgow's east end, which was one of the three centres that Glasgow City Council previously closed.

In Glasgow, there are seven day centres for adults with learning difficulties. The Summerston, Hinshaw Street and Berryknowes centres have all been targeted for closure. Each of those centres is cherished by the users and those who care for them, as it provides a sense of community, fosters friendship and underpins peer support. The centres also provide vital support to families and carers, many of whom—if they do not mind my saying so—are entering old age.

The closure of the centres means that roughly 320 learning-disabled people will move to alternative day services. The problem is that no one has any idea what that will involve, as no details have been given. The council's proposal paper says:

"The capacity to use community venues throughout the city is currently severely constrained by the availability of appropriate toileting and changing facilities."

Members can see our concern about whether, even if other facilities were used, they would be appropriate. The situation will come as no surprise

to some of the people who relied on the Accord centre before its closure. The people who are here today tell me that they are still waiting for adequate provision to be offered following that closure.

The Learning Disability Alliance Scotland reports that one Glasgow mother whose daughter used one of the now-closed day centres said:

"Now I take Megan to a church hall, where for £5 we can sit from 11 to 3. For lunch she gets a sliced ham and white bread sandwich and a chocolate biscuit but at least it's warm and dry. There's pens and colouring books to keep her occupied."

If that is the level of ambition for some of Glasgow's most vulnerable adults, I urge the city council urgently to reconsider its position.

The proposals will also affect the 200 adults with the most profound learning difficulties who will be left using the four remaining centres. They are part of a wider community in the day centre network. They have friends with a range of learning difficulties; they thrive in one another's company and there is a clear benefit to all. That will be lost, and the danger is that we will marginalise and isolate the most vulnerable in society. I do not believe that that is the council's intention, but the plans could well achieve that.

I will look briefly at the council's financial position. The council has recently published plans to cut £70 million from its budget over two years, but I clarify that it does not have a £70 million cash shortfall in its coffers and that it has a £2.3 billion budget. The city has the money to retain the centres, so the closures are a political choice. As things stand, the current administration has made the wrong choice, which I very much hope that it will reconsider.

**Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab):** Will Mr Doris explain why SNP councillors in Glasgow originally wanted to cut £220,000 from the social care budget in the budget proposals last year? That would have meant £220,000 less in that budget than Labour proposed. After the SNP conferred with the other groups on the council, a joint opposition budget was presented, which would have cut £330,000 from the social care budget.

**Bob Doris:** All that I will say to Mr Smith is that I am disappointed that he seeks to make party-political capital from the issue. As far as I am concerned, I am representing my constituents and the centres should stay open.

The council also proposes to save up to £3 million on transport costs for the most vulnerable people. The council questions whether it will provide transport even for the 200 adults with the most profound learning difficulties who will continue to use centres. That transport is under threat, which is unacceptable.

The council says:

"If ... needs were being assessed for the first time today ... in most cases service users would not be assessed as needing full time day centre services."

However, few users have been through the council's personalisation assessment in the past 18 months, so no robust evidence underpins the basis of the decision. More important, the decision fails to consider our learning disabled adults as a community in which individual choice is important but the group's needs are also respected.

The Parliament will be aware that choice is a fundamental principle that is inherent in self-directed support, which empowers service users to extend, terminate or retain services as appropriate. However, the council's proposed actions will restrict choice dramatically. Personalisation can involve retaining an existing service, but the plans will not provide for that.

I do not oppose reform and the families to whom I have spoken do not object to it. However, they have not been included in any meaningful discussions about what a future service might or might not look like. Families and service users feel that the council has frozen them out. Surely any service redesign proposals should place current users and carers at the heart of the consultation process.

Unfortunately, Glasgow City Council has a dreadful track record in that area, whether in respect of the school estate, the plans for George Square or the most vulnerable people in our society. The short, six-question consultation that the council issued was produced after firm proposals to close three centres were published, and it has been widely criticised as being completely biased in favour of the council proposals and completely lacking in respect of providing families with the opportunity to suggest any alternatives whatsoever.

Glasgow City Council's leader, Gordon Matheson, should listen to his own carers champion, Dr Chris Mason, who believes that the proposals are not fit for purpose. I agree.

I urge the council to shelve the plans to close the three day centres, to open meaningful discussions with service users and families and, when appropriate, to consult on any new proposals that may emerge. I know that my SNP colleagues in Glasgow City Council agree with that position. I would welcome such a change of heart; more important, it would reassure families, service users and carers, who are terrified that the support that is vital to them will be withdrawn and that there will be no suitable alternative provision.

Glasgow City Council can change all that. It just takes political will to do so.



**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** A number of members wish to speak in the debate. Speeches should be a tight four minutes.

12:41

**Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab):** Obviously, I am aware of the concerns about the proposals to restructure Glasgow's learning disability day services. Bob Doris is right to say that service users, their families and those who work in the service will be most affected, and perhaps it is they who are most concerned. Their voices should therefore be heard in the debate.

For a range of reasons, the level of need that we face in the city of Glasgow is enormous. As parliamentarians, we need to take responsibility for the decisions that we make that impact on the choices that are available to local representatives on the services that they can deliver.

Last year, the Health and Sport Committee undertook scrutiny of the Scottish Government's Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Bill, which the Parliament then passed. Self-directed support and the personalisation agenda that Glasgow City Council is pursuing are closely related. As a committee, we took evidence in Glasgow from representatives of service users and carers, and heard their concerns about personalisation. That evidence reflected an experience that I had shortly after I was elected in shadowing an older carer who looked after her adult daughter. The lesson that I learned from both was that change must be communicated sensitively and must be underpinned by genuine assessment of need and an understanding of the impact that change has on individuals.

The other evidence that we heard in Glasgow was from Glasgow City Council's social work department. The scale of the challenge was made clear. Despite Glasgow prioritising resources for social work services, it has a system that has not provided equity of support and has not always provided the right support for every individual.

I mentioned the prioritisation of the budget, which is important. Glasgow does not have a fair funding settlement and it has very challenging savings to make as a consequence. The prioritisation of social work therefore means deeper cuts in other budgets. That is not easy, so let us not pretend that it is.

I welcome in particular the fact that savings that might be made by the proposed changes will accrue back to social work services. The £11 million for day centres will therefore remain £11 million that is spent on those services. It is about individual budgets and how specific money is spent, so there is not a cut in that respect.

The challenge of personalisation and SDS—which all members in the chamber support and voted for last year—is that, as needs are assessed or reassessed, or as individuals opt to receive support in different ways, the demand for day centres will decrease. The challenge that the Glasgow situation poses for the Parliament is not just in highlighting dissatisfaction with a particular proposal or in respect of supporting the idea that the old way is necessarily the best way; the challenge is to consider the reality of undertaking greater personalisation and SDS. That move will require the reassessment of need at a time of budget pressure and that will be the case across the country.

**Bob Doris:** Does the member agree that self-directed support does not change the need for assessments, which have happened over the years, but have failed to happen in Glasgow? Does he agree that existing services are one valid choice within self-directed support?

**Drew Smith:** Absolutely. The Health and Sport Committee discussed that at length when we considered the bill. I absolutely agree that day services will remain vital for those who need them and that we need proper and genuine assessment. We all agreed about that when we considered SDS.

There are clear lessons to be learned from the Glasgow experience. Mr Doris's motion raises issues that Glasgow City Council should consider further before a decision is taken. Some of those issues are contained in the Health and Sport Committee's report and were reflected in Chris Mason's comments, which Bob Doris mentioned. A genuine case can be made for considering whether we need a change fund for local councils so that they can better support those who are affected by change.

I want to mention the role of service staff. The Health and Sport Committee listened to service users and those who manage services, but we did not spend a lot of time listening directly to those who deliver them. I have discussed the Glasgow proposals with, for example, Unite members who transport service users to the existing centres, and it was clear that they, too, have concerns. Councils need to listen carefully to service users and their families, but I remind the managers of any service that the staff on the ground often have the key knowledge about how to improve their work and that their co-operation in any redesign is often vital to whether it succeeds.

12:46

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** I thank my colleague Bob Doris for bringing forward this debate on an important issue that

unfortunately continues to raise its head in the city of Glasgow. We all recognise that, because of the financial situation, hard decisions need to be made and that we need to modernise care services where appropriate. However, we must also recognise that, as elected representatives, we along with our council colleagues have a responsibility and a duty of care to those who are most in need of assistance and that we must ensure that the service that is delivered is fit for purpose.

I have no doubt that there is a lot of good in Glasgow City Council's proposals. Anything that can widen options and opportunities for those with learning disabilities must be welcomed, including the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013, which we have talked about. If the council was starting from scratch and designing a new service for new users, there would be almost universal support for its proposals as part of that. However, that is not the case. We are being asked to support a scheme in which people with learning disabilities are not asked, but told that they have to give up the centres that have been an important part of their lives, in some cases for 40 years.

Recently, I was asked to visit a number of carers of centre users. It came out loud and clear that the centres give users a sense of purpose and belonging. Many lifelong friendships have been created and, for many, waiting for the bus to pick them up in the morning is the start of the excitement of the day. The carers told me that, during a recent industrial action when their brothers, sisters, sons or daughters could not attend the centre, their health deteriorated. The carers say that the threat of closure of the centres is having the same effect on those individuals. I know that that is not Glasgow City Council's aim, but it is one consequence of its actions.

In my view, there are two main things wrong with the proposals. One is that, as I have described, no account appears to have been taken of the impact that the closures will have on individuals and their wellbeing, self-respect and relationships. The other issue is the risible consultation process. Many users and carers did not receive the consultation document until mid to late November when the deadline was 7 January, which, coincidentally, was the first day back for many council offices after the Christmas and new year holidays. No account of the holidays was taken in the consultation period.

After my meeting, I contacted the then head of social work in Glasgow to ask him to put back the deadline, even just for two weeks, to allow people to respond. His response included the phrase,

"Whilst I acknowledge that the timescales for the consultation are a challenge".

You know what? If even the head of social work concedes that the timescales are "a challenge", why were they not pushed back? My suspicion—it is more a belief—which is backed up by the executive papers, is that the council has already taken a decision and wants the closures to be pushed through on its timetable. I am not the only one who thinks that. When discussing the consultation timescale, the Learning Disability Alliance Scotland concluded that

"it is as if Glasgow has started with the answer first—close 3 centres—when they should have started with an assessment of people's needs."

Moreover, the consultation document is inherently flawed. One question that was asked was:

"Do you understand why a new model of day care services is required?"

That is just not acceptable. There should not be leading questions in such consultations.

I accept, of course, that change is needed and that we need to consider a cost-effective system. However, I do not accept that we should, to all intents and purposes, give some of the most vulnerable in our society, to whom we have a duty of care, a deadline to pack up their stuff and go.

I suggest to Glasgow City Council that it postpones the process and talks to members of all parties, users, carers, support groups, third-sector organisations and others about how best to move forward in a meaningful way. By way of assistance, I suggest that the council consider a twin-track approach. It should think about introducing alternatives to the existing model over a longer period, perhaps giving users different options, introducing them to new models and not offering day care unless that is appropriate.

I hope that the social work department, under new management, will delay the decision so that it can find a fairer way to support people with learning disabilities and give them the choice that is an integral part of self-directed support. I hope that it will put care, not cost, at the heart of the decision-making process.

12:50

**Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con):** I congratulate Bob Doris on securing the debate. The future of the day centres in Glasgow is of great importance to the people who use and work in the centres and he has spoken passionately about the work that is done and the services that are offered in them. He has set out his concern about the potential impact on services of a reduction in their number.

Like Mr Doris, I have been contacted by constituents who are concerned about Glasgow

City Council's proposals. At the outset, it is worth reflecting on the centres' importance for the individuals who use them and their families. As well as delivering educational and leisure opportunities, the day centres provide users with a place where they can develop social interaction and build friendships with other users and staff. For many vulnerable adults, a safe and secure environment in which to build such relationships is invaluable and significant trust is built up with staff over not just weeks and months, but years. For parents, families and carers of adults with learning difficulties, the centres provide a comfortable and secure environment, where they know that users will be supported while they are at work.

The structure that the centres provide in the lives of the vulnerable adults who benefit from them should not be underestimated. Often, the programme of activities, the supportive environment and the provision of regular, nutritious meals makes a real difference in the lives of users, as Mr Doris said. One of the carers who wrote to me about their concern said that the centres that have been earmarked for closure are

"central to the health and wellbeing of hundreds of learning disabled adults in the city".

It is important to pay tribute to the hard work of staff at the centres. Mr Smith made a good point in that regard, although he was running out of time in his speech at that point. In many cases, it is the relationships that have been built up between staff and users that demonstrate the day centres' benefit and impact on users' lives. Given the value of the centres, it is difficult to see how the proposal to reduce their number from seven to four could have anything other than a negative impact on the service that is available to users.

There are specific concerns about the services. Some carers are worried about the impact of changes to the way in which the council allocates resources to vulnerable adults. Members discussed self-directed support at length in the Parliament and the approach received broad support, but many vulnerable individuals would not cope with the responsibility of managing their own budgets.

There is also concern about plans to cut transport for learning-disabled people, who are being pushed towards public transport and other alternatives. Sometimes that might be appropriate, but in many cases it is likely that the transport that is currently provided is the only suitable means by which an individual can get to a day centre. I share some of those concerns. It is important that changes are managed as sensitively as is humanly possible.

As members know, Glasgow City Council's social work services sought views on the changes.

Many people contributed to the consultation, including some of the 520 adults with learning disabilities who currently attend the day centres. I hope that people's views will be taken on board as the council takes forward service reform.

Given the pressure on local authority budgets, it is clear that councils, including Glasgow City Council, must make difficult decisions about the services that they provide. They must balance their responsibility to provide effective services with their duty to deliver value for money for council tax payers. I hope that, in the situation that we are considering, the right balance can be found, which minimises the impact on the vulnerable adults who have benefited from the centres.

12:54

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I, too, congratulate Bob Doris on securing the debate. As the convener of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on learning disability, I very much welcome the opportunity to debate the nature and provision of services for people with learning disability not just in Glasgow but more widely.

I recall well the massive change in the late 1990s to how we supported people with learning disabilities and the move away from long-stay institutions such as Lennox Castle and Woodilee hospitals. That change was transformational for the quality of life of people with learning disabilities and for their families' experience, and it was the right thing to do.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jackie Baillie:** Give me a minute.

We should not keep things the way they are just because it was ever thus. The challenge for us as policymakers is to ensure that we do better and that we increasingly do what is right for the individual.

We have not stood still since the late 1990s, because the trend in policy is towards independent living. As members have said, just a matter of weeks ago this Parliament passed a bill to give legislative underpinning to self-directed support, which at its heart is about ensuring that people who require care and support can be in control of how and when that care and support are delivered.

Whether or not we like it, that has implications for services. If, in effect, we take money from a service to use it differently, as self-directed support would have us do, that has consequences for what is left behind. Nowhere is that more evident than in the case of day centres. It is not

about cuts but about changes to how services are provided. My understanding is that not one penny of a cut will be made as a result of the day centre proposals, because the money will be spent instead on individual care packages.

**Bob Doris:** I agree with much of what Jackie Baillie has said, but she mentioned user choice. Does she not think that it was wrong that service users were not asked for their view of what a new service should look like before proposals were presented?

**Jackie Baillie:** I will come on to the issue of the process in a minute.

As convener of the cross-party group, I note that of the people who use learning disability services in Glasgow and elsewhere, only around one in 10 use day centres. That does not mean that the centres are not important, but experience suggests that the majority of people prefer to be involved in a variety of activities in their local area rather than go to a day centre. However, for others, the day centre will be their first choice. Any proposal for service change should ensure that service users are listened to, that assessments are carried out and that alternative services, which are sometimes better, are put in place before there is any decision about change. That is good practice. Change is difficult, unless there is a tangible alternative. I make it clear that I would always want any service, whether council or voluntary sector, to take the time to get things right.

However, the reality is that the proposal in Glasgow is where self-directed support takes us. Personalised services often mean a reduction in centrally provided group services, because people make different choices. People cannot support SDS but then misunderstand some of the consequences that may arise from its implementation. Further, I gently point out that Glasgow's share of the local government settlement has declined each year for the past four years. Had that not happened, Glasgow would have an extra £75 million to spend this year.

I come back to the point that this is not about cuts. The discussion should be about the nature of support for people with learning disabilities. It is not about cuts, because the issue is not confined to Glasgow. I know that it has been an issue of some difficulty for the SNP-controlled Dundee City Council, which recognises that it, too, needs to close a day centre. The difficulty with service changes is how to unlock the money to run alternative services at the same time. The issue is how we deal with transition and maintain day centres for those who still need them.

I invite Bob Doris and his colleagues to join me in asking the minister to look again at the issue of

transition and to smooth the implementation of self-directed support. Glasgow is to be awarded £0.5 million for that, in comparison with the £5 million that Birmingham, which has similar needs and similar levels of self-directed support, will get to manage the same transition. If we provided that kind of support, we would make a real difference for people with learning disabilities and not only improve their ability to choose but continue to improve their quality of life.

12:59

**Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** Most of what has been said has been excellent. It has been a good debate. However, I am glad that Jackie Baillie raised a particular point at the end of her speech, because I was going to upset the apple cart, perhaps, with my speech. I just think that I need to put this on the record. I would like to lay to rest the false claims by Gordon Matheson, the Labour leader of Glasgow City Council, Labour councillors, Labour MSPs such as Jackie Baillie and some people in the media with regard to how hard the council has it. Glasgow City Council has the largest budget of any mainland council, and it has choices to make about how it spends that money.

I will give just two examples—I could probably give hundreds more—of the choices that it has made. It gave half a million pounds to the chief executive of Glasgow's Regeneration Agency—a decision that the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator not only criticised but described as misconduct. It has given £15 million to regenerate George Square, but there has been no consultation with the general public in Glasgow. Only 42 people have been asked out of the whole population of Glasgow. That decision has been greatly and widely criticised by Glaswegians.

**Jackie Baillie:** Speaking as a regular visitor to George Square, my understanding is that the money is actually coming direct from the Scottish Government by way of tax increment financing.

**Sandra White:** It may be coming from the Scottish Government and from tax increment financing, which Glasgow City Council welcomed, but the council has choices to make, and it made that choice without asking the people of Glasgow.

**Drew Smith:** Will the member give way?

**Sandra White:** I am sorry. I have only two and a half minutes left.

I want to lay to rest the false claims that continually come from Labour Party spokespeople and councillors.

I congratulate Bob Doris on raising the issue and on his excellent motion. He quoted the mother of a user of a day centre that Glasgow City

Council closed down under what was described as modernisation. The person now sits in a heated room and gets a sandwich, but I would not describe that as a day centre.

Day centres are popular, not just in Glasgow but throughout the country, because they meet a range of needs. Many are integrated with community leisure facilities and linked to work opportunities, with people enjoying a wide range of activities that are personalised to their needs and wishes. Some day centres do not draw a line between the community and centre activities, but see them as linked together. That is the type of day centre that we want, and that is why people go to day centres. As I have only a short time, I stress that we should look at keeping day centres open and integrating them with community services.

In closing, I reiterate something that Bob Doris states in his motion. It mentions instigating

“a full and comprehensive consultation exercise involving the active participation of service users and carers in any proposed service redesign”.

That is the way forward. Jackie Baillie said so, as did others, including Drew Smith, and I would like the minister to address that point. That is the way forward for redesigns and for the people of Glasgow who use day centres and do not want them to close. They know that perhaps something has to be done, but they want to be consulted.

The people who attend the day centre in my constituency, in Hinshaw Street in Queen's Park, deserve nothing less than to be asked for their views by Glasgow City Council. Given what has happened with the George Square redesign, which I have mentioned, and other consultation processes, I do not hold my breath that that will be forthcoming, but I am certainly one of the people, along with MSPs of all parties, who will push the council to consult the users of day care services.

13:03

**Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab):** I congratulate Bob Doris on securing the debate.

The services and support that we provide to the most vulnerable in our society should always be the very best that they can be, and we should always be prepared to review and, if need be, change that provision to ensure that it is robust and fit for purpose. We must also be prepared to reflect changing methods of care and brave enough to make hard decisions when they are justified. That is why we, in this part of the chamber, backed the Scottish Government's policy on self-directed care and the legislation that will enshrine it in law.

We believe that people should be able to make decisions about their own care and that of their family members. We also believe that they must be adequately resourced to do so and that they should be able to choose from a menu of services, drawn up in consultation with them, that meets their needs and over which they have real control. That is the standard by which I judge the proposed reforms in Glasgow, under which day centres, including that in Summerston in my constituency, would close. I welcome the representatives from Summerston day care centre who are here today, and others from other centres throughout the city.

I am not content that the process thus far has been entirely appropriate. The timescale for the consultation has been too short—although I note that the leader of the SNP group welcomed the timescale when it was announced. However, I welcome the extension to the timescale that has been agreed and I hope that it will give users and carers much more opportunity to participate.

I also believe that the amount of information available to users and carers has not been adequate, and I have to say that the actions of the chair of the learning disabilities day services sub-committee, in abandoning one meeting and unilaterally cancelling another, have not been helpful.

**James Dornan:** Will the member give way on that point?

**Patricia Ferguson:** I am happy to give way.

**James Dornan:** As far as I am aware, the councillor Patricia Ferguson is talking about decided that the meeting could not take place because the information was not laid before them until just prior to the meeting. Therefore, had it taken place, the meeting would have been held under a false premise.

**Patricia Ferguson:** That may have been the situation with the first meeting, but it does not explain why a meeting two months later was also cancelled. I am glad that those meetings are back on track and are taking place, because people need to have the information.

Users and carers have raised with me a number of legitimate concerns. I do not, in a four-minute speech, have time to do them justice, so I will highlight those that concern me most.

First, it would be better to put in place the proposed alternatives first so that users could see what they were and have time to consider how the new system would operate before the existing centres were closed. I suspect that James Dornan and I would agree about that. Secondly, an additional burden might be placed on carers who fear that they will be left to organise activities for their family members as well as cope with the

caring responsibilities that they already have—responsibilities that I take very seriously indeed. Thirdly, the cost of travel and the time that users spend travelling are cited as arguments for change. There is a legitimate point there, but by reducing the number of day centres the distances that people will have to travel and the cost of travel will increase. As it is proposed that, in future, only those with the greatest physical need will have a place in a day centre, that seems to be an argument against change rather than for it.

I understand that Glasgow City Council has to comply with Government legislation, but I suggest that a six-month moratorium, during which the council would work with carers and users to come up with a workable solution—one that is planned with the needs and views of the users and carers to the fore—would be welcome. I know that that would be an expensive option, because it would mean running day centres and individual budget processes at the same time. I know, too, that Glasgow has had its budget radically cut by the Scottish Government. Indeed, if Glasgow had the same share of the local government budget as it had in 2008 it would have an additional £153 million pounds to spend over the next two years. Sandra White, I am afraid, cannot gainsay that.

**Sandra White:** Will the member give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is concluding.

**Patricia Ferguson:** I ask the minister—as constructively as possible in such a sensitive debate—whether the Scottish Government would consider establishing a transition fund that might allow Glasgow to continue to run its day centres while it carries out a proper and meaningful discussion with users and carers about the services that they need and want and the way in which those can best be provided.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I must ask you to close.

**Patricia Ferguson:** That is probably just as well, Presiding Officer, as the minister is not listening.

Glasgow is doing its very best to protect its social work budget from the effects of Scottish Government cuts, but there is a limit to how well it can do that. It is fair to say that the current transition fund is not enough to allow my proposal on what should happen over the next six months to take place.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am afraid that you must close now.

**Patricia Ferguson:** We all have a responsibility to make sure that these services are as robust and appropriate as possible for these vulnerable

people, but we have to take that responsibility seriously.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms Ferguson, you must close.

**Patricia Ferguson:** I hope that the Government will consider some assistance.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call the minister to respond to the debate. If you could do so in around seven minutes, minister, I would be very obliged.

13:09

**The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson):** I will attempt to do so, Presiding Officer.

Like others, I congratulate Bob Doris on securing this important debate. I have listened to the views expressed across the chamber and am aware of the concerns that have been expressed by different bodies representing those with a learning disability, their families and their carers about Glasgow City Council's approach. The issue has also received considerable media coverage.

Like Patricia Ferguson, I have some concerns about the way in which Glasgow City Council has gone about the consultation exercise. It strikes me that, given the nature of the proposed changes, the written consultation period has been extremely short. Indeed, I hope that the council will reflect on that point because, as I am sure all members recognise, meaningful consultation must be more than a simple paper exercise; it has to be accessible to all those who might be affected by any change.

Glasgow's written consultation asked whether people understood why a new model of day services was needed and whether there should be age-appropriate services for people over 65. It also asked about the type of community services that people would like to see for adults with learning disabilities. In my view, the proposals seem to be more specific than the rationale for reform suggested in those questions and actually set out what the envisaged service would look like. I am not clear what involvement people in the community have had in shaping those proposals. I understand that in a tight economic climate Glasgow City Council needs to make best use of its existing resources, but service development needs to maximise the opportunity for people with learning disabilities to take part in their community.

There remains a question about how firm Glasgow City Council's proposals are. If the people of Glasgow support a direction of travel in which better use is made of available resources, that raises the question whether they will be involved in deciding which services are to be

closed. Will people with a learning disability and their carers have a say in the day services that will be available in future?

I understand that Glasgow City Council intends to make a decision on the proposals next week. I have seen no analysis of the consultation's findings, but I will watch the proceedings with particular interest and hope that the council will listen to the concerns that have been expressed and will give the people who will be most affected by the changes a chance to influence the way forward.

I also take this opportunity to inform the chamber that the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 secured royal assent last week. I reaffirm that national self-directed support policy and the new act are nothing to do with delivering savings but are about giving citizens meaningful and informed choice. I am sure that all members who have had an interest in the personalisation agenda for many years will recognise that it is not a recent development; indeed, the process has been taking place for more than a decade now. Informed choice is crucial in making it work.

Glasgow City Council has made a particular decision on how it wishes to take forward self-directed support in advance of the new duties in the 2013 act coming into force. Of course, those duties go beyond personalised budgets, but I note that Glasgow's route has not been taken by other Scottish local authorities. Like all councils, Glasgow will have to commission services differently. There is no doubt that hard choices will have to be made but when services become unsustainable the replacement has to deliver better outcomes. If commissioning is informed by real understanding of what communities want as a result of the proper involvement of the people in them, they will be more likely to accept that services cannot be sustained and need to change.

Members may be interested to know that in many ways, the learning disability strategy in 2000 led the way in demands for personalised social care and support. Development and delivery of that policy shifted our focus from service structures to people and what people want from service providers.

Following the review of the achievements of the strategy, we held a public consultation asking what should be included in the new learning disability strategy. The consultation responses are being analysed, but early indications show that people want a variety of opportunities and options during the day, including traditional day centres.

We are taking forward our work through a number of different national strategy groups, and

working with people with learning disabilities, parents and carers.

I am acutely aware, as I am sure all members are, of the significant contribution that unpaid carers make. We owe our carers a debt of gratitude and we need to take action to support them. That action must include listening to carers and hearing about what works for them as well as what works for the family members and friends that they support. The 2013 act introduces powers to support carers in their own right and ensures that they have a choice about how support services are provided.

I believe that Glasgow is the first council to identify a carers' champion. That should be welcomed. Dr Christopher Mason has taken on that important role and I hope that the concerns that he has expressed on behalf of Glasgow carers on the proposed changes will be taken seriously and considered in detail by the council.

Day centre redesign is not easy or straightforward. The centres provide a valuable resource for many people. Even discussion about changes to existing services can be unsettling for those concerned. I encourage Glasgow City Council to engage with communities in a way that allows them to shape the development of services in future, and I ask it to reflect on the concerns that have been expressed in the chamber and elsewhere before it makes a final decision on the future of those facilities.

13:17

*Meeting suspended.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## Biodiversity

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):**

Good afternoon. The first item of business is a debate on motion S4M-05320, in the name of Rob Gibson, on biodiversity. I call Rob Gibson to speak to and move the motion on the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's behalf.

**Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** I am grateful—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Could we have Mr Gibson's microphone on, please? [*Interruption.*] Is your card in the console, Mr Gibson?

**Rob Gibson:** Okay—this is biodiversity, part 2. I am delighted to speak in the biodiversity debate on the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's behalf, because we wish to set up a discussion ahead of the Government's response to the recent consultation.

The term "biodiversity" describes the variety of all life on earth and all the places where it is found. It was coined in 1985, but it became more widely used when the United Kingdom Government signed up to the Convention on Biological Diversity at the earth summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. That kick-started the biodiversity process that led to Scottish Government plans and local plans such as those from Highland Council, which covers the area that I represent and whose biodiversity action plan has been developed since 2002.

In its 2010 biodiversity check-up, Scottish Natural Heritage reported that biodiversity

"is the variety of life. The spectacular and varied wildlife within our iconic landscapes, coastal areas and seas is fundamental to the livelihood and quality of life of people in Scotland ... A resilient and diverse natural environment is the essential foundation for a greener, more robust, healthier, wealthier Scotland."

The Scottish Government's response to its consultation on the 2020 challenge for Scotland's biodiversity is about to be published. It is set against a backdrop of worldwide failure to stem biodiversity decline. In 2010, SNH said:

"Scotland has played an active part in stemming biodiversity loss, both with the rest of the UK and in its own right. A 25-year framework for action commenced in 2004 with the publication of Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy. It recognises both the urgency of the task"

and many other issues.

What do we say to those who claim that we are failing to meet our targets? Are we worse or better

than our neighbours? Is Scotland doing the best that it can? Do we have examples that we can offer other nations in our response? Can a small nation make a big difference?

Reviews show that, between 2005 and 2008, the percentage of priority habitats that were declining was unchanged at 34 per cent, while the percentage of habitats that were stable or increasing rose from 36 to 45 per cent. That means that we have a balance of problems to discuss.

Between 1998 and 2007, in lowland agricultural systems, which cover 28 per cent of Scotland, the amount of arable and horticultural land declined by 13 per cent, improved grass areas expanded by 9 per cent and the length of hedges, walls and fences decreased by 8 per cent. In our uplands and moors, which cover 55 per cent of Scotland, acid grassland expanded by 8 per cent.

The European Union—and us as part of it—undertook to stem the decline in biodiversity by 2010 but has failed to do that because of far worse figures than some of those that I have given. A more realistic target for 2020 has now been set.

I will discuss large-scale approaches to link land managers and local bodies in strengthening biodiversity. The Coigach and Assynt living landscape project, which was launched in 2011, is setting out to measure and improve biodiversity and human involvement to make that area far more sustainable in this climate change era. Twenty years ago, local ecologist Bernard Planterose recognised that reafforestation, beyond conservation, embraced wildlife conservation and the various present-day land uses, as well as future resettlement of the land and expansion of the productive natural resource base. As such, he said that it would exhibit ecological, economic and political strands.

As I said when the Coigach and Assynt living landscape project was launched:

"Today, we value trees and people, jobs and peatland rewetting, local energy production and biodiversity even more"

than we did 20 years ago. I continued:

"I am delighted that a measurable project with a 50-year time span has been set up in Coigach and Assynt",

which are in my constituency,

"so as to set an example across the country. It fits the thrust of Scottish Government policy and is a practical way to link the environment and the people who live there ... to plan a brighter future.—[*Official Report*, 22 June 2011; c 916.]

Biological outcomes will be measured, clearly defined roles and objectives will be developed, and responsibilities will be taken.



A similar approach is in hand for our peatlands, which are of huge importance. Scotland is the world stronghold for the Atlantic blanket bogs, and our lowland raised bogs are a European priority. From the flows in Caithness and Sutherland right down to Galloway and the central belt, we have a wealth of peatland habitats, and Scotland has several showcase peatland restoration projects, such as those at Forsinard in Sutherland. Conservation management involves wildlife charities such as RSPB Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, the University of the Highlands and Islands's Thurso-based environmental research institute, as well as the Forestry Commission and the wind farm industry.

Scotland's deepest peats store around 10 times the amount of carbon that is stored in the whole of the UK's forest biomass—they are that important. A loss of only 1 per cent of Scotland's peat would equal the annual greenhouse gas emissions of around 57 megatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent. Conversely, restoring damaged peatlands has great potential to help to reduce emissions and contribute to reaching Scotland's climate change targets. We can already see various Government and non-governmental organisation partners working together on such projects.

To highlight the importance of that work, I have applied to be a wildlife champion for rusty bog-moss, or *Sphagnum fuscum*, which is found in the north-west Highlands. The loss of habitat there is due to the drainage of peat bogs. The Scottish Wildlife Trust is encouraging all members to become wildlife champions, and the national parks have a major role in that action. Other members will talk about that.

The common agricultural policy elements of high nature value farming have been under close scrutiny. In 2011, Scotland became the first country in the United Kingdom to assess the extent and broad distribution of high nature value farming, as required by the European Commission for its rural development programmes. According to the Scottish Agricultural College—which is now Scotland's Rural University College—in 2009, 40 per cent of Scotland's utilised agricultural area was estimated to be under high nature value farming systems and, in 2010, 41 per cent of woodland areas in Scotland were considered to be under high nature value forestry systems. Any decline that has taken place since that period is likely to be associated with the retreat of livestock farming from Scotland's hills. A more detailed commitment to high nature value farming and crofting must be built into the new common agricultural policy.

To turn to the sea, Marine Scotland's efforts are an important new step. The Europe-authored marine protection areas initiatives, such as the

marine protected area network, can be considered as positives for biodiversity in Scotland, but they fall short of being effective mechanisms for biodiversity conservation. In a recent debate on new designations, a headline in the *Press and Journal* said that scientific data could be used to restrict catches in conservation areas. Science is indeed attempting to ensure that there are sustainable fish stocks and habitats around Scotland. We must go with good science.

A frustrated constituent of mine has suggested much more draconian measures for fishing practices in our inshore waters, such as allowing zero discards—we agree with that; closing off inshore waters to dredging or trawling; fallowing fishing grounds in the same way as farmers fallow their fields; introducing compulsory square-top panels prior to the cod end in order to allow smaller species to escape; introducing 24/7 monitoring by global positioning systems and closed-circuit television for all vessels; and implementing severe penalties, including the destruction of vessels for persistent offenders.

The suggestions deserve serious consideration, but they are just one person's ideas. When we make public policy, we must find a way to improve biodiversity in our seas and look at the issues seriously.

The removal of alien species, which is an on-going exercise, needs measurement and targeting. Do SNH and the Government have measures for the removal of the likes of Himalayan balsam? The Scottish Government, and the Executive before it, have been proactive.

With regard to bees, we have to look at the science, as I said earlier. The Green Party asked the committee to carry out an inquiry into neonicotinoids. We expect to deal with that issue in the biodiversity questioning that will follow the Government's announcement of its conclusions. We will definitely have to consider the link between the loss of pollinators and the chemical treatment of crops. Just this week, European Food Safety Authority scientists identified a number of risks that are posed to bees by three neonicotinoid insecticides. The Scottish Government has to adopt the precautionary principle on the issue. It must study the transcripts of what the scientists have said; ensure that the industry's risk assessment processes are more transparent; move towards the smarter use of insecticides; and look for ways to increase the number of insect pollinators and predators of pests across the agricultural landscape.

Everyone is trying in different ways to do good by the environment. I mentioned the Highland biodiversity strategy. A recent discussion in Highland Council identified that, although stopping cutting the grass close to the verges of some

Highland roads is a way of increasing wildlife, it encourages birds to nest closer to roads, with the unintended consequence that their young are squashed. The council has had to rethink that. That is the kind of issue that crops up.

In the history of biodiversity, there are champions throughout this country and in many other countries. I went back to Frank Fraser Darling, who in 1946 wrote the book "Natural History in the Highlands and Islands", which identified some of the things that we are trying to do today. For example, he said:

"We are apt to view with pleasure a rugged Highland landscape and think that we are here away from the works of the mind and hand of man, that here is wild nature. But more often than not we are looking at a man-made desert".

He sees man as

"an indigenous animal in the countryside",

along with the rest of nature. He goes on to say:

"Forestry, national parks and crofting agriculture have been mentioned as important factors in the existence of wild life in the Highlands. Hydro-electric power schemes might well be added. At the moment all these interests are separate, going their own way in their own way".

He continues:

"National parks alone will not preserve wild life, nor even the plain establishment of special nature reserves for particular species and habitats. Some co-ordination is needed as well."

Those words from 1946 are absolutely pertinent today.

The lessons for us are that, to achieve biodiversity targets, we need a quantified, detailed and joined-up biodiversity strategy and not just the existing work of NGOs, but work that is led by Government. Especially in this year of natural Scotland, it is vital that everyone in Scotland, particularly the younger generation—such as the children who are in the public gallery—are made aware of and experience at first hand the outstanding natural wealth of the country and its value in a climate change era.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee will be examining the analysis of the responses to the Scottish Government's consultation on the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity as the government looks to update its current biodiversity strategy against a backdrop of a global failure to meet biodiversity targets set for 2010, the revised target to halt biodiversity loss by 2020 and the related Aichi targets.

14:44

**The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse):** I apologise for my late arrival for the debate, Presiding Officer. I

mean no disrespect to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee.

I am particularly grateful to the committee for the opportunity to debate our progress on the Scottish biodiversity strategy. If the committee had not called the debate, I would have been strongly tempted to do so. My first official duty after being appointed as Minister for Environment and Climate Change was to chair the British-Irish Council environment ministers meeting on biodiversity and to take part in a bioblitz at Vogrie country park.

Scotland is blessed with a rich and diverse natural environment, and the people of Scotland treasure our native animal and plant species and enjoy our stunning and varied landscapes, diverse geology and many special places and sites of interest, all of which have their own complex webs of life. Biodiversity sustains our lives. Our natural environment helps to define not only our national identity but our quality of life.

The Scottish biodiversity strategy, which was set out in the 2004 document, "Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in Your Hands", remains a strong document, which is why we decided to supplement and reinforce it rather than replace it.

As it says in the motion, international biodiversity targets for 2010 were missed around the globe. In Scotland, SNH made a detailed assessment and we can be proud that we have made good progress towards the United Nations target to significantly slow biodiversity loss. However, everyone agrees that there is much more to be done. In particular, there is agreement across the EU and at UN level on two key points. First, we need to address the pressures on biodiversity, rather than simply try to reverse damage. Secondly, we need to be more explicit about the need to protect nature, so that it can continue to support and enrich our lives and underpin our economy.

We have always known that we are part of the natural world, for obvious reasons, and that we need to protect nature if we are to secure a healthy and prosperous future for our country. Now we have increased understanding of how nature sustains us and the connection between biodiversity, healthy functioning of the natural environment and benefits to individuals and society. The 2011 national ecosystem assessment represents a key challenge to ensure that we sustain nature in a condition that, in turn, can sustain our lives.

New international targets at UN and EU levels accord equal status to the prevention of the loss of species and the preservation of the benefits from nature, which are referred to as "ecosystem services". Consideration of ecosystem services must be part of how we plan all policies that

impact on the natural environment. The natural environment is a treasure in its own right, with tremendous intrinsic value, and it underpins our welfare and our economy.

Biodiversity plays an essential role in achieving the Government's vision of a smart, sustainable Scotland and lies at the heart of our economic strategy. Our natural environment plays a vital role in Scotland's prosperity and national identity. It supports our tourism, distilling, farming, forestry and fishing industries. It adds variety to our urban green spaces and contributes hugely to our health and wellbeing.

I know how important the environment is to the region in which I live. Few people have expressed the relationship better than John Muir, who was in many ways the founder of the modern conservation movement. He said:

"Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul alike".

John Muir was a Scot, who left these shores and whose influence is spread across the world.

Protecting nature has always been a global issue. In response to new international targets and our increased understanding of the links between the natural environment and prosperity, the Scottish Government published a consultation paper last summer, to provide renewed focus and impetus for the Scottish biodiversity strategy up to 2020. The paper covered a lot of ground, but six main chapters presented proposals, which I will broadly describe.

First, we must ensure joined-up prioritisation and co-ordination of action at catchment level, protect biodiversity and enhance services to communities, such as flood prevention. Communities and land managers should be fully involved in the planning process and planning exercises. Secondly, we must ensure that the value of our natural capital is sustained and enhanced, by recognising that value across the Scottish Government and its agencies. Thirdly, we must build on the existing good work in the health and education sectors and make greater use of the natural environment to achieve effective outcomes. Fourthly, we must continue to make progress on protected areas and priority habitats and species. Fifthly, we must reflect on continued progress in the freshwater environment and the land use strategy and promote integrated land and water use, planning across whole catchments. Sixthly, we must reflect on the substantial progress in the marine environment as a result of the marine conservation strategy for Scotland and consider particular issues of coastal and island ecosystems.

There were 76 responses to the consultation paper and I am grateful to the organisations and the smaller number of individuals who responded. Overall, there was a positive response to the broad direction of the strategy. I am sure that members will pick up on points that respondents made. I will quickly mention two common areas of concern.

First, many respondents thought that the consultation paper had gone too far in the direction of a functional view of nature. I think that that partly reflects the nature of the paper, which is, in the main, a guide to decision makers at various levels of government and is not a work of poetry. However, we should state more clearly the intrinsic value of biodiversity.

Secondly, many respondents were concerned that there was not enough detail about specific delivery targets and actions. It is the nature of the biodiversity strategy that delivery relies on a huge range of actions, decisions, policies and strategies that have an impact on species, diversity and natural capital. The plans, decisions and actions are carried out by many delivery partners, and the strategy is designed to be reasonably high level, thus it cannot and should not reflect all that complexity.

I agree, however, that we need to say more about delivery alongside the publication of the strategy. We shall develop a delivery agreement whereby delivery partners will sign up to their roles and responsibilities for delivering the strategy. We need a broad range of actors to achieve progress in the delivery of the strategy, so we shall also create a biodiversity monitoring committee that will sit under the established Scottish biodiversity committee, which I chair. It will be the responsibility of the monitoring group to agree a set of key targets and performance indicators, building on such initiatives as the natural capital index, and to discuss how to ensure that progress is made. We need to drive forward action to deliver the strategy and protect our precious diversity.

I recognise, however, that there is much that the Scottish Government can still do to improve Scotland's response to the biodiversity challenge. We need to move further in aligning policy in a wide range of areas to the biodiversity agenda and in ensuring adequate protection. We must take opportunities to achieve other goals in an effective and low-cost way through improvements to the natural environment. Much can also be achieved by local government agencies and other public bodies. I urge those bodies to look for improved ways in which to work together and to step up their response to the biodiversity duty.

As with other policy areas, however, the Government cannot and should not be expected to

achieve alone the desired outcomes for biodiversity. We look forward to continued valuable contributions from the wildlife and nature charities through their campaigning work and their many actions on their own land, because many have significant landholdings, much of which helps innovation and land-management practices in respect of biodiversity. We want local biodiversity action partnerships to provide a model for effective encouragement and co-ordination of local action. We urge local communities to seize opportunities to manage and improve their local environment. Businesses are rising to the challenge, but they could do more as part of their wider civic responsibilities. We need landowners and managers to work with us in the knowledge that protecting nature is part of their role and their future, and they need to appreciate the many ways in which conservation can aid economic development.

It will take a huge effort jointly to achieve our 2020 challenge, and I am keen to hear in the debate from members across the chamber about the points that they want to see addressed in our biodiversity strategy.

14:52

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I am pleased to open the debate for Labour. First, I thank the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee for securing the debate and using its time to bring this important issue to the chamber. The debate gives us the opportunity to reflect on the submissions that have been received for the Scottish Government's consultation on the 2020 challenge for Scotland's biodiversity and to add to them. However, we will have to wait for the opportunity to debate the Government's response, although I welcome the minister's announcement on the delivery agreement and the monitoring committee.

The consultation is welcome. Biodiversity has been on the political and global agenda since the Rio earth summit in 1992. A commitment was made in April 2002

"to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth."

In addition, the Aichi targets set by the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity called for a step change in efforts to halt the loss of biodiversity and to restore the essential services that a healthy, natural environment provides.

Scotland's response to that was the 2004 "Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in Your Hands" strategy. It is hugely disappointing that Scotland failed to meet the 2010 target but, as Rob Gibson

explained, it was a global failure. The call to action in 1992 has not resulted in a halt to the loss of biodiversity. There is a need to redouble efforts at home and abroad if we are to meet the important 2020 targets.

We should take the time to consider why the targets are important. Biodiversity can seem removed from people's everyday lives and irrelevant in a modern and technological age. It may be seen as something to enjoy recreationally rather than something that impacts on our lives. However, the problems that we faced in 1992 are as relevant today as they were then. The "Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and the Aichi Targets" recognises that a functioning ecosystem is essential to human wellbeing because it

"provides for food security, human health, the provision of clean air and water; it contributes to local livelihoods, and economic development, and is essential for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, including poverty reduction."

Biodiversity is about human wellbeing as much as it is about anything else. If we consider the challenges that communities in Scotland face today, such as flooding, healthy ecosystems can mitigate the impact and be part of the solution.

In the rest of the short time that I have available this afternoon, I will comment on some of the key issues that arise from the consultation and the briefings for the debate. Although there is widespread disappointment about our failure, there are positive developments in some areas. It is important that we recognise where we have had successes as well as where we have had failures in order to learn lessons as we go forward with the new strategy.

RSPB Scotland's briefing makes the important point that, by missing targets, along with other European partners, Scotland is now playing catch-up in efforts to meet the 2020 targets. It recognises the importance of continuing initiatives but makes it clear that, if we are to make the necessary progress, the biodiversity strategy must provide additional effort and add significant new value over and above what is already delivered by existing initiatives.

The consultation highlighted the interesting debate about how to resolve conflicts of interest. As the minister who has inherited the decision on whether to designate the Sound of Barra, Paul Wheelhouse will be aware of the difficulties that are involved in balancing competing interests. The consultation also raised the debate about the economic importance of biodiversity. Even respondents who support an approach that integrates the economic contribution raised concerns about having a solely economic valuation of biodiversity, as that would diminish the

intrinsic value of biodiversity, could be accused of being short-sighted and would risk marginalising important but perhaps less economically valuable biodiversity.

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I recognise the concern that was raised in the consultation. I emphasise that, in the discussions that have taken place at the biodiversity committee, we have tried to explain why it was necessary to use that terminology. In many areas, we are reliant on behavioural changes by businesses and individuals, as they affect climate change as well. By having a message that resonates with all audiences regardless of whether they see the intrinsic and altruistic value of biodiversity, and by appealing to people in terms of the bottom line, we can encourage businesses and individuals to change their behaviours.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will compensate Claire Baker for the intervention.

**Claire Baker:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I welcome the minister's comments on that. I thought that it was important to highlight the debate about how we measure the importance of biodiversity.

Plantlife talks about prioritising actions and makes the case for plants and fungi, which underpin the majority of ecosystems. It might be easier for us to sell the importance of saving the red squirrel or the capercaillie, but without robust ecosystems, habitats and food sources, we will fail in our efforts.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust highlights the importance of marine biodiversity, which is suffering from declines in habitat and species. We all recognise the importance of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, but also the frustration about the lack of a network of marine protected areas and the delay to publication of a marine plan. That is particularly frustrating, as we all accept the need for a plan but, as we wait for one, marine developments are moving ahead and pre-empting it. As a result, the plan will have to fit around developments rather than setting the strategic direction.

The consultation also highlighted the need for sufficient funding. There was some concern about the statement that

"relatively little investment is needed to restore ... natural systems back to full capacity."

There must be investment. It can be a combination of public, private and social sector investment, but it needs to be attractive and accessible and have outcomes that are relevant and meaningful.

Scottish Environment LINK makes the good point that efforts to conserve and enhance

biodiversity outside mainstream conservation action are weak and underresourced despite the fact that, in the long run, it is easier and cheaper to achieve biodiversity conservation through, for example, improved agriculture, flood management, planning and forestry policy. Scottish Environment LINK emphasises the need for a champion in Government to promote the broader gains to all Government departments and agencies. Although outside groups have been consulted, there is perhaps a need for greater promotion within Government. That is a challenge for the minister.

When we talk about funding in this context, the Scotland rural development programme is always highlighted. With the review continuing, there are certainly opportunities there, but we also need to recognise the limitations of the SRDP, which is constantly proposed as the possible future funding mechanism for many demands.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I must ask you to begin to conclude.

**Claire Baker:** I am sure that members will highlight many other areas in their speeches. I look forward to the rest of the debate.

14:59

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** Of the many definitions of biodiversity that I have come across, the most accurate is this:

"the degree of variation of life forms within a given species, ecosystem or planet."

In other words, I think it is what used to be called quite simply the balance of nature. Scottish Environment LINK put it rather more dramatically, though, in a manner that certainly focuses the mind on the importance of this debate on this subject, when it termed biodiversity as

"the foundation of all life on earth".

Until very recently in our planet's evolution, nature made a pretty good job of balancing herself. Since time immemorial, species have become extinct through natural evolutionary processes, but the overall balance of nature has generally been maintained and the sustainability of the planet was never in doubt.

However, evolutionary development and the demands of one species in particular—mankind—have now accelerated that natural process to such a degree that, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, by 2010 60 per cent of the world's ecosystems were either degraded or being used unsustainably; 75 per cent of fish stocks were being overexploited or significantly depleted; and 75 per cent—three quarters—of the world's genetic diversity of

agricultural crops had been lost, worldwide, in only 20 years. More than 100,000km<sup>2</sup> of the world's tropical forests are still cleared every year.

When one puts all those figures together and looks at others—many of which have been mentioned today—one would be entirely forgiven for echoing the words of Private Frazer in “Dad’s Army” in forecasting that “We’re a’ doomed.”

Among all that potential doom and gloom there is, however, surely positive news. It has to be positive that there is broad agreement across the world that we simply cannot go on like this and that something has to be done. Indeed, in this decade of biodiversity and through the Aichi targets, there is now broad agreement not only that something has to be done, but on what has to be done.

The question is how we in Scotland play our part in reversing the worldwide trend of biodiversity loss. We can do so only by focusing on our own efforts. To do that we must begin by recognising that those efforts have, to date, failed to meet the targets that we have set. As has been pointed out, we are by no means alone in that failure, and it would have been entirely wrong to have set unambitious targets in order to avoid possible failure—that would have been the wrong way to look at the situation. However, it is important to start with a recognition that our 2010 targets were not met, as we turn our attention to meeting new targets for 2020, which is now only 7 years away.

If we are to meet the latest targets, we must first understand why we did not meet the previous ones. I was struck by the number of representations that were made to us prior to the debate that called for the biodiversity strategy to be rolled out across all Government departments—as Claire Baker mentioned—and for all Government policy to conform to it. That has to make sense if there is to be any degree of joined-up thinking on how we tackle the issue. I found the minister’s opening remarks to be encouraging in that regard.

Sadly, there are too many current examples of absence of joined-up thinking. I looked at the Government’s proposals on marine protected areas with some interest, and specifically on what might be done to protect our seabird population—a population for which Scotland is widely renowned, despite many species being in steep decline. Although I happily acknowledge that within the Scottish Government’s proposals protection is given to seabird breeding areas, that seems to be virtually meaningless unless protection is also given to the feeding areas that those species rely on to sustain them. What is the point of protecting the area where a species

breeds if you do not simultaneously protect the areas in which it feeds?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I appreciate the points that Alex Fergusson makes about feeding grounds for birds and I highlight that we propose to protect the sand eel population, which is obviously a main food source for seabirds.

**Alex Fergusson:** I am happy to acknowledge that, but there are wider issues on which we will be able to focus as discussions proceed. I accept what the minister says.

I find that some of the lack of joined-up thinking tends to fly in the face of the Scottish Government’s correctly stated intention in its biodiversity consultation on the 2020 challenge to “support healthy, well-functioning ecosystems.”

That is an antisocial behaviour absolutely correct aim that we must all work towards.

One of the EU’s six targets is to ensure tighter controls on invasive alien species—which Rob Gibson mentioned—and we have a lot of ground to make up on that front. I look out on to Loch Ken in Galloway from my home. That is a loch whose biodiversity has been almost completely destroyed by the frighteningly rapid and completely uncontrolled expansion of North American signal crayfish. Ironically, an ecosystem has been virtually wiped out in the Galloway and southern Ayrshire biosphere, which is now recognised by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization as a

“new way to demonstrate good nature conservation”.

I have to say that that is a slightly odd way of demonstrating it.

Of course, the problem is not just about crayfish; grey squirrels, Japanese knotweed and the imported trees and shrubs from which so many diseases come—the latest being ash dieback—have all impacted on our biodiversity. All those examples and many more suggest that our record is not terribly impressive and can be only improved—as it must be. I greatly look forward to the committee’s work on a huge issue that goes far beyond party politics and which is, in fact, about the future of our country and our planet, and the sort of country that we will bequeath to our children, our grandchildren and future generations.

I am very struck by a quotation from the Senegalese conservationist, Baba Dioum, who said:

“In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, we will understand only what we are taught”.

I suggest that we still have quite a lot of teaching to do. So far, we have made a bit of a mess of

things. Let us hope that we do much better this time around.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to open debate. We have very little time in hand to compensate for interventions. Speeches should be of six minutes.

15:06

**Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP):** I am very pleased to contribute to the debate. Biodiversity should be at the top of the agenda for each and every one of us.

Hailing from a farming background in the Hebrides, I began to have an interest in this major issue when at an early age I became aware of the plight of the humble corncrake. However, as the member for Falkirk East, I have had my attention drawn to the biodiversity in my constituency from bacteria to bluebells, and from badgers to bats. To many people, Falkirk is just an inconvenient train station stop between Glasgow and Edinburgh—

**Members:** No it's not!

**Angus MacDonald:** It is definitely not that.

People also think of the area as the glow-in-the-dark place where they make petrol. However, there is a lot more to Falkirk district than meets the eye, particularly when it comes to biodiversity.

My constituency is varied and ranges from prime agricultural land next to the River Forth to hill farms and moors in the south. We have a wide range of habitats, from saline lagoons, mudflats and salt marsh to lowland raised and intermediate bog, fen, marsh and swamp, canals, rivers and streams and heath—not to mention coal bings.

The local biodiversity action plan that has been developed by Falkirk Council and its partners has identified 20 priority habitats and 112 priority species that are of particular national and local ecological value and as such should be conserved locally. As far as mammals are concerned, we have the European otter, badgers, the brown hare and pipistrelle bats to name just four, and there is a myriad of bird species, invertebrates, flowering plants, ferns and lower plants. Of course, we should not forget the great crested newts, which have caused planners in Falkirk such a headache that on more than one occasion the animals have had to be rehomed in areas away from proposed developments.

Clearly biodiversity should be at the heart of our aim of having a more sustainable future. After all, a healthy and diverse natural environment is vital to our economic, social and spiritual wellbeing, both now and in the future. Sadly, with human activity placing ever-increasing demands on our natural resources, there has been a considerable

decline in the numbers and health of many of our wild plants, animals and habitats over the past 100 years, so we have a shared responsibility to conserve and enhance our local biodiversity for the good of current and future generations.

Much work has been done in Falkirk district for that very reason. Indeed, a hidden gem in Grangemouth is the Jupiter urban wildlife centre, which celebrated its 20th anniversary last year. I thank members who signed my motion welcoming that milestone. The centre has come a long way since it opened and has, through the hard work and dedication of volunteers and staff, been transformed from a disused industrial wasteland into a green wildlife oasis with a great variety of wild flowers, woodland birds, fungi, insects and amphibians around the specially created ponds.

The reserve is a valuable educational and community resource and an inspirational place for children and adults from the local community to visit. It is also one of Scotland's finest examples of the reclamation of disused industrial land for wildlife and people, and it attracts visitors from far and wide. That is no mean feat when we consider that its boundary fence is just yards from Grangemouth's agrichemical industry. With that in mind, I invite the minister to visit that tremendous community resource at some point in the spring or summer, when the weather will, I hope, have improved.

In addition to the good work that is going on at Jupiter, significant grants have been awarded by Falkirk Environment Trust to local organisations in Falkirk district for projects to protect the environment, which are being delivered in partnership with a range of local agencies and communities. The projects have been particularly successful in securing funding from the landfill communities fund, which was discussed at an event that I sponsored in Parliament on Tuesday evening on making the most of the landfill tax. I thank MSPs who attended, including the minister. Their attendance was appreciated by the organisers, which were Scottish Environment LINK and the Scottish landfill communities fund forum.

Since 1998, Falkirk Environment Trust has secured and allocated about £3.5 million for local environmental projects. In the past year, grants have been awarded to various initiatives, including for the Dunmore Pineapple's great crested newts, Westquarter glen environmental improvements, the River Avon restoration, River Carron invasive species action and the River Carron clean-up, to name but a few. I hope that those will continue. However, as the landfill tax does its job and reduces the amount of waste that is going to landfill, payments arising via the landfill tax will reduce considerably.

The good work in my constituency also includes the inner Forth landscape initiative, which has secured significant funding through the Heritage Lottery Fund's landscape partnership programme. The programme is the result of the hard work and dedication of the partnership of RSPB Scotland, SNH, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Historic Scotland, the three Forth valley local authorities, Central Scotland Forest Trust, TCV—The Conservation Volunteers Scotland—and Sustrans. It is an excellent example of joint working and the joined-up thinking to which Alex Fergusson referred earlier. The intention of the partnership is to reveal the hidden cultural, historical and natural wealth of the upper reaches of the Firth of Forth, to restore and conserve important features, to open up access and, ultimately, to leave a legacy of a richer landscape and new facilities for all.

As members have heard, a great deal is going on in Falkirk district, when it comes to biodiversity.

I acknowledge that the 2010 targets were not met at EU, global and—of course—Scotland levels. It is clear that more must be done to stop the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services from Scotland and the EU by 2020. I am sure that we are all up for the challenge, so let us work together to ensure that we meet the 2020 targets.

15:12

**Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):**

As a very new member of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. Maintaining the biodiversity of the environment around us is important not only from an ecological perspective; it also plays a key role in economic, health and cultural outcomes. The Scottish Government's aspiration to be a biodiversity leader presents a challenge, which is why I am pleased that the Scottish Government is seeking to update its biodiversity strategy.

Last night, I attended the Nordic horizons event in Parliament and heard about work that is being done at community level in Denmark and Shetland to achieve carbon-neutral economies. It was suggested that culture, legislation and approach are all major influences on the progress that is being made—or not made. However, whether and how local people are connected to the work also make a difference. The concept of local ownership and involvement is seen as changing local attitudes to what can otherwise seem to be rather remote and academic concepts. The idea that we derive benefit at local level can increase the engagement of local communities.

The key steps in the response analysis to the consultation on the 2020 challenge refer to

providing opportunities for everyone in Scotland to engage with nature. Without that engagement, the legacy of achieving the targets may be short-lived. I wish to highlight three projects that show the opportunities and challenges of such an ambition.

Lochore Meadows country park is located in what was once called the central Fife coalfield, and is encircled by former mining towns and villages. The park was created as a result of an ambitious industrial landscape restoration project in the 1960s and 1970s, which transformed the Mary pit and its pit bings into a place where today we can fish, play, get active or just enjoy the tranquillity. Lochore Meadows is a thriving success story, drawing in more than half a million visitors a year, yet its reputation is little known to many people in the east of Scotland. Given that Lochore Meadows is located near Blairadam forest and Loch Leven, it offers obvious potential for economic development and regeneration in an area where those are much needed.

I mention the park because it is a brilliant example of partnership and community involvement. In the context of today's debate, the diversity of the area is astounding. Members will be pleased to hear that I am not going to list the 982 species, many of which are protected, that have been recorded in the park over the past year. Pleasingly, the diversity of the area continues to grow, and the first badger sett in the area for 40 years has been reported in the park. Such success does not happen on its own, so I pay tribute to the dedication and commitment of the park's staff and volunteers.

Educational projects are central to the work of the park, as are the partnerships between outdoor education staff and high schools in the area. Local people, too, are crucial to the park's management, and volunteers undertake a range of biological monitoring, including bird counts and bumblebee surveys, as well as doing some hard toil in the park's woodlands, where they have planted and maintain an entire orchard of traditional fruit varieties. It has been estimated that the park's volunteers put in around 419 days' work last year, which is a huge amount when we consider that a member of staff's working year is estimated to amount to about 223 days.

The Ecology Centre in Kinghorn is another excellent place where local people come together. Through the efforts of some 60 volunteers, supported by 10 staff, the centre attracts an estimated 30,000 visitors a year. Some 6,000 people participate in the centre's education programme each year, and it offers training opportunities for young people, through community jobs Scotland and ProjectScotland.

The centre is managed for local people and for wildlife. Its staff use the direct experience of the



natural environment to improve people's quality of life. An evaluation of the benefits to volunteers indicates that they include improved physical and mental health, increased social interaction and a better understanding of other generations. The centre has created and manages a wide range of habitats including marsh, woodlands, wildflower meadows and a pond. There are even a number of beehives on the site.

In the Scottish Government's consultation document, the minister notes that he

"would like to see local communities seizing opportunities to manage and improve their local environment."

That is a laudable aim, but although we have some great examples of that, we clearly need to do more to encourage communities to develop their own diversity projects and to empower them to identify biodiversity projects and translate them into funded schemes.

The Fife Environment Trust exists to distribute to environmental and community projects funds that are generated locally from landfill taxes. The grants that are available to community groups under the biodiversity category are widely advertised, but the majority of applications are for smaller capital expenditure projects, such as play parks or improvements to buildings. Those are great projects to support, but it is slightly disappointing that communities do not seem to have the knowledge or the confidence to take forward biodiversity projects on their own, despite a willingness on the part of the trust to fund such work. I hope that we will see a change in that regard.

I am pleased that the committee is taking the opportunity to consider the analysis of the responses to the Scottish Government's consultation, and I welcome any steps that the country can take to meet the global challenge of meeting biodiversity targets.

15:18

**Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP):** I, too, congratulate the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee for its motion on biodiversity. It is particularly appropriate that we are discussing biodiversity at the start of this year of natural Scotland.

As other members have said, biodiversity is crucial. We face a challenge—not just internationally and nationally, but locally—in protecting biodiversity and reversing the continuing degradation of our ecosystems. Scotland has led from the front on climate change legislation and we have, too—in my opinion—an opportunity to take a lead in halting biodiversity loss.

Globally, the UN is making renewed efforts to protect and restore biodiversity by 2020 through a 10-year plan, at the centre of which sit the so-called Aichi targets. The EU's commitment in that regard is underlined by the EU 2020 biodiversity strategy, which sets six very clear targets and a framework for concrete action that is designed to reduce greatly by 2020 the threats to biodiversity in the EU.

Of course, the work on an international scale will only be as good as the work on the local level, where more needs to be done. I would like to highlight just two things from the richly biodiverse region of Dumfries and Galloway in South Scotland, with which I am most familiar. I want to focus, in particular, on the Galloway and southern Ayrshire biosphere, which is now a UNESCO site and part of its man and the biosphere programme. It is the first in Scotland; it is the only site of its kind. As well as being huge—covering an area of 52,000km, or 7 per cent of the total land area of Scotland—it has a population of 95,000 people, an estimated 30,000 jobs within its area and more than 1 million visitors every year.

In my view, the strength of the biosphere approach is in how it brings together all sorts of organisations—27 at the moment—to work collaboratively, and how it is laid out and designated. The biosphere has three zones: its central core, which is the area of prime conservation interest; a wider buffer zone, much of which falls within the Galloway forest park; and the outer transition zone, where most of the population live and work. That is crucial: it is not one big exclusion zone but a place where people co-exist with their environment and where people and nature both benefit from integrated land use.

That is not just a concept. It is backed up with the meaningful involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, from local fisheries trusts and SNH to the University of Glasgow and the Crichton carbon centre in Dumfries, with a vigorous emphasis on the importance of engagement and activity coming from the ground up rather than from the top down.

The biosphere also connects with the apparently distant international drives towards protecting our biodiversity and relates them to work at local level—whether it be investigating carbon offsetting through woodland creation with the Crichton carbon centre or looking at sustainable approaches to drinking-water catchment management with Scottish Water.

Although the biosphere received UNESCO recognition only a few months ago, its holistic approach to biodiversity is worthy of further consideration by the Government, particularly in terms of its potential to facilitate and encourage community-led, local sustainable development and

conservation. I am also aware that the biosphere is seeking inclusion in national planning framework 3 as a national project. I ask the Government to look favourably upon its proposal.

In addition to our red squirrels, which I am always keen to champion, Dumfries and Galloway has another great natural asset in the Solway Firth area, which is home to two European marine sites and a wide variety of diverse habitats, landscape and conservation designations. More than 130 fish species have been recorded in the Solway. There are commercially important king and queen scallop fisheries, and about 10 species of marine mammals, including bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoises, have also been recorded.

The Solway Firth Partnership works with fishing and conservation interests and in this, as with the biosphere, balance is everything. In keeping with the spirit of the biosphere is the view that the Solway Firth Partnership accepts the importance of biodiversity. That view is best expressed, in my opinion, by the partnership's Pam Taylor, who said that to address biodiversity conservation successfully requires an understanding that everyone has something to gain from adequately protecting the environment. That statement gets to the heart of the matter.

I have had time to highlight only two initiatives from a region that is packed full of energy and interest in protecting the natural environment—enough, indeed, for a debate in its own right. However, I hope that I have highlighted two approaches that I believe have great potential; that work should happen from the bottom up and come from as broad a base as possible; and that everyone has something to gain from protecting the environment.

I welcome the committee's focus on the issue and I look forward to the Government updating its current biodiversity strategy, which will help this country to play its part in halting biodiversity loss by 2020, working together with our European and international partners.

15:23

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank Rob Gibson, as convener of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, for his wide-ranging remarks at the start of the debate.

The continued loss of biodiversity has been called Europe's "silent crisis". However, members will be all too aware of the importance of sustaining a viable level of biodiversity—not only in Scottish ecosystems but globally. Ensuring that our ecosystems remain as diverse as possible is essential, not only for environmental reasons but to sustain the Scottish economy, a great deal of

which is built on the foundations of our natural environment.

As the minister stressed, there is also the intrinsic value of biodiversity. This morning, I heard a nightingale singing on my way to the bus and anyone standing among bluebells in the RSPB reserve at Creetown or beside the Falls of Clyde, near Lanark, or picking fruit from a tree that they have planted, knows that feeling—the pleasure that the natural landscape can bring. In all those contexts, I welcome the publication of the Scottish Government's consultation on biodiversity, in which respondents raised a number of very important points.

As Rob Gibson highlighted, the formation of the Convention on Biological Diversity was based on scientific research that produced "unequivocal evidence" that a fall in species numbers has a profoundly negative effect on ecosystem efficiency. The most striking conclusion found in that body of evidence is:

"The impacts of diversity loss on ecological processes might be sufficiently large to rival the impacts of many other global drivers of environmental change."

Climate change caused by unsustainable levels of carbon emission is not the only man-made impact on the environment that we must address. Scottish Environment LINK has urged the Scottish Government to prioritise biodiversity conservation, and I add my voice to that call, as other members have done today. Indeed, the scientific evidence suggests that a high level of biodiversity may help to offset the effects of climate change. In 2010, Parliament took the decision to commit to ambitious targets for reducing carbon emissions. I recognise that biodiversity does not attract the same level of public attention as climate change might, but I argue that a similar commitment must be shown if we are to meet our targets, as other members have also stressed.

Ecosystem services also have a great importance to the Scottish economy. According to statistics provided by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, the natural environment contributes roughly £21 billion per annum to Scottish economic output and supports 242,000 jobs. That is by no means a paltry amount, and its significance should not be disregarded.

Like Jayne Baxter and Angus MacDonald, I want to encourage more individual and community engagement on biodiversity, which could yield results that are perhaps more immediately recognisable than efforts to reduce climate change. To give a personal example, our Lawson cypress hedge did not survive the bitter cold of two winters past. It was a challenge to dig it out and prepare the ground for the native species hedge—mostly done by my partner, I have to admit—but last weekend we planted blackthorn, hawthorn,

wild rose and holly. We look forward, in winters ahead, to seeing birds feasting on the range of colourful berries, not to mention a quick sip of sloe gin.

I believe that individual action, when put together, has a major significance, but for that to happen widely we need a national awareness-raising campaign on how we can do that. Biodiversity is one of the 10 topics in the eco-schools programme. In my own school at Braehead, where I worked previously, we investigated the raised peat bog of Braehead Moss that was behind the school. With the input of a local artist, the children made a large tapestry, claiming an animal or plant as their own to depict. Through that, they understood the urgency of protecting the moss.

Such experiences feed into collective action, and there are already many community-based projects, as other members have highlighted. I want to highlight a Scottish Wildlife Trust project that has been very proactive in this area in the Nethan Gorge reserve in South Lanarkshire, where the trust works predominantly with unemployed people to give them practical training in conservation work.

Access to land for community biodiversity projects, which no member has mentioned specifically so far, is certainly an issue for local communities. However, lateral thinking can often prove its worth. On Monday, I saw that on a visit to Fintry, where the development trust showed me its community orchard, which is planted on a strip of land between the rugby pitch and the road.

As highlighted in the consultation, the need for funding is a frequently recurring and utterly vital theme. Members may recall my interest—shared by other members—in preserving bee populations, my motion on which received cross-party support. As Rob Gibson highlighted, as part of our committee's deliberations we will look at the concerns about neonicotinoids that have been highlighted by the European Union this week.

Scottish Environment LINK states:

"in order to protect, and where appropriate enhance, the health of the Scottish Marine environment (a Ministerial duty under the Marine Act) we highlight the need for a three pillared approach to marine nature conservation: species conservation, site conservation and wider seas policies and measures".

I am, indeed, a sea trout champion—I must admit shamefacedly that that is not my first choice, but it is an important role for species support that I am pleased to do, and I encourage other members to do the same.

It is essential that we develop the theme from the debate and the committee's inquiry. As the consultation states, we need to define the

"roles and responsibilities and timescales for key steps and actions",

so that our EU targets can be met in the future.

15:30

**Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):** I must confess that, when I first heard that I would be speaking in the debate, I thought that I would get close to discussing life, the universe and at least half of everything. On reflection, it occurred to me, as the MSP for Angus North and Mearns, that I could talk about the Montrose Basin, the North and South Esk, the Glen Esk estates and, of course, the prime farming land of the Mearns, but I am not going to, because I want to pick up on some general principles that we might otherwise miss.

The consultation sets out the three overarching aims, which are to

"increase the general level of biodiversity on land and in our seas, and support healthy, well-functioning ecosystems; ... engage people with the natural world, for the health and well-being benefits that this brings, and empower them to have a say in decisions about their environment;"

and

"maximise the benefits for Scotland of a diverse natural environment and the services it provides, contributing to sustainable economic growth."

My problem is that, although I think that members know what the biodiversity debate is about, most of our fellow citizens do not. To quote Douglas Adams in "Life, the Universe and Everything":

"The Somebody Else's Problem field is much simpler and more effective, and what's more can be run for over a hundred years on a single torch battery. This is because it relies on people's natural disposition not to see anything they don't want to, weren't expecting, or can't explain."

There is a warning to us in there. Somewhere in the various pieces of paper that members have been given, I think that it has been suggested that there are 90,000 species in this country. Most of those are not big. We cannot conceivably do enough research to get past the grouse, the deer, the sheep and the red squirrel; we are simply never going to understand in any significant detail the bugs, the beetles and the algae. We must therefore recognise that there is one thing above all other that we must do: preserve the diversity of habitats, because we will never know quite what is in them. If we take habitats away, we will lose the things that specifically belong to them.

We must involve people, because it is the people whom we represent who empower us to do the work that needs to be done. If members will forgive me, I have picked an example that has nothing to do with Scotland. It comes from a blog and it relates to England—there is no political

purpose in that, but it is convenient that it does not say anything about the relevant local authority in Scotland. It refers—probably for the second time in the debate—to nightingales.

In his blog, George Monbiot—I hope that I have pronounced his name properly—refers to a place called Lodge Hill, in Gillingham, in Kent, where the local council is proposing to take over an area, remove a wood and build 5,000 houses. It just so happens that there are a significant number of nightingales in that wood. It would appear that the UK Government believes in a thing called biodiversity offsetting, which means that it is allowable to build such a housing estate as long as one generates what is, apparently, a similar environment close by where the same quantity of nightingales could, perhaps, be established. The blog states:

“Offsetting could work in principle for nightingales in Kent—it is technically feasible but it is neither straightforward nor guaranteed.

If a site of around 500 hectares were found ... a similar number of nightingales might be established itself there.”

Do we feel that that is a good way to go? Lots of people do not. How on earth are they getting themselves into that mess? The blog has, helpfully, had a contribution from a planner. He is not, I think, from the local authority concerned but, nonetheless, he makes the following points, which I make to show the problems that we might get into. He says:

“The local authority is required to allocate a certain number of housing sites, and they have to pick the least worst option in a crowded part of England ... Despite giving priority to the allocation of housing sites within the urban area, it is also necessary to identify greenfield sites outside the urban boundary in order to meet the housing requirements in Policy H1 of the Kent Structure Plan.”

There follows a substantial paragraph that includes terms such as “Green Belt”, “Natural Beauty” and “Strategic Gaps”, as well as all kinds of policy decisions.

Unless the people we represent recognise the priorities of the environment, there is a serious risk that we and the councils will come up with strategies that look wonderful on paper but enable us to make the kind of horrific mistake that that council in England might be prepared to make in saying that a wood can be taken away for houses because we believe that we can put a similar wood somewhere else. It is obvious nonsense when we describe it like that.

That takes me straight back to my central point: we must, above all else, protect the diversity of habitats because, by and large, we do not know much about what is going on in them.

15:36

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD):** It is not possible to separate Scotland’s economy and environment. Scotland’s biodiversity is what sells the country, and not only for the obvious industries, such as tourism and golf. It is the most important marketing tool for promoting our successful whisky industry and fine textiles, which rightly sell at a premium throughout the world.

It is therefore of concern that Scotland failed to meet the 2010 biodiversity targets. It is more concerning that Scotland is not alone in failing to meet those targets, but the Parliament is about holding the Scottish Government to account, so we are concerned about how seriously the Government takes the situation, especially as there have been year-on-year reductions in projects such as agri-environment schemes, which are a useful tool to aid biodiversity.

Although we have missed the 2010 target, new targets for 2020 are on the horizon. There is little doubt that a step change is needed for those to be achieved.

One of my concerns is that we have a minister who is responsible for the environment but—I mean no criticism of him—biodiversity and climate change should be the responsibility not of a single minister but of all Government departments and, for that matter, broader society.

Scottish Environment LINK noted in its briefing paper that we should reverse decline in the quality of heathland. I am sure that we all agree with that. However, there are threats on the horizon. Heathland and its wide biodiversity exist due to careful grazing of the land. We are a farmed nation and have been for centuries—I remind members of my entry in the register of members’ interests—but there are recent cases in which a cessation of farming has led to a loss of biodiversity.

In a rush to aid biodiversity, and with the impending changes to, and greening of, the common agricultural policy, we must be careful to remember that heathland needs grazing to prevent vigorous plant life from overtaking some of our precious indigenous plants. Without grazing, Darwinism would come into play: the strong would survive and outgrow our precious smaller plants such as butterwort, grass of Parnassus and sundew.

In the committee, we discussed the fact that ash dieback, which Alex Fergusson has briefly mentioned today, is now a reality in Scotland. I mentioned that the full extent of the disease’s spread may be unknown until next June or July due to the lateness of ash coming into leaf. The lateness of leaf and the light shade provide an ideal situation for many of our woodland ground

plants to flourish underneath the ash canopy, and it would be difficult to replicate that with another arboreal plant.

Ash is one of our most common trees. It is a vigorous grower in wet or dry soils. Because of its extensive and fast-growing roots, it is often used for flood prevention—it is used to naturally bind riverbanks, preventing erosion. That is important, given the ever-increasing flooding that we are experiencing, and the fact that we have just had the wettest year on record.

Ash is also a tree of historic and spiritual significance, as many in the chamber will know. It was held in respect by the Norse religion, which held it to be the tree of life, or Yggdrasil. The Norse believed that the first humans sprang from that tree. Now, of course, that tree of life faces death, as 90 per cent of ash trees in Denmark have died from dieback. It is a real threat.

Ash is not only of historic and spiritual significance, it is also one of the few hardwoods that are of any commercial use. It is used in the production of the classic British car, the Morgan; bows, hurleys and traditional shinty sticks; and even some Fender Stratocaster guitars, believe it or not. Further, as anyone who uses firewood knows, ash is the best wood for burning, whether freshly cut or stored for some time—in fact, there is an old saying that goes, “Green or old, ash should be bought and never sold.”

There is a looming threat to our biodiversity. Recently, there have been a plethora of outbreaks of tree diseases, such as sudden oak death and Dutch elm disease. Of course, the danger comes not only from tree diseases but from developments such as the arrival of the New Zealand flatworm. We therefore have to ask whether policy has in any way been responsible. I think that, unfortunately, it perhaps has. We can all trace the pest introductions to imports and, with the surge in planting due to the schemes that have been introduced by various Governments, much of our plant stock is coming in from the continent. Have we tried to expand forest cover too quickly? Has the full potential of this opportunity been realised in Scotland? Have we encouraged the supply industry to get to a situation in which it does not have to import planting stock? There is an issue of simple biosecurity.

I support calls from the likes of the Scottish Wildlife Trust for an action plan for tree health. From that, there could be an opportunity for a larger home-grown tree nursery industry.

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Will the member give way?

**Jim Hume:** Of course.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):**

The member is in his last minute, so I ask you to be brief.

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I support the member's call for action on ash dieback, and I will refer to that later. However, could he remind me who has responsibility for import controls in this country?

**Jim Hume:** I was not criticising any Government. I am trying to say that, if Scotland could build up its home-grown tree nursery industry, we would not have to import so many trees. The oil industry grew to the point at which we could not produce our own steel pipes, so we had to import them from Japan. We are perhaps in a similar situation with our tree industry. If we could build up our home-grown tree industry, we could perhaps address the biodiversity problem.

15:43

**Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I would like to concentrate on peatlands. The minister and Rob Gibson, the convener of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, have already spoken about the importance of peatlands and biodiversity. The convener gave us a lot of figures on peatlands, and members should expect me to add to them, because the importance of peatlands must be recognised.

It is said that a third of the world's entire terrestrial carbon deposits are held in peat bogs. Each peat bog can contain 5,000 tonnes of carbon per hectare, and each peat bog absorbs 0.7 tonnes of carbon per hectare per year. That shows just how important peatlands and peat bogs are in our fight against global climate change.

Of course, Scotland has a globally unique and important position in that regard. Four per cent of Europe's total peat carbon is in Scotland, along with 15 per cent of the world's blanket peat bogs. Of the 175 peatland nations across the world, Scotland is 12th. Those figures and facts further demonstrate how important our peatlands are to the world, not only to Scotland.

Of course, I cannot mention the subject without talking about my constituency—Strathkelvin and Bearsden. Across East Dunbartonshire, we have seven lowland peat bogs, and Strathkelvin and Bearsden has four of them. We have Lenzie Moss, which is a site of importance for nature conservation, or SINC—someone might have to help me on whether that is the correct term. In Bishopbriggs, we have Low Moss, High Moss and the smaller Cadder Yard.

I spend a lot of time walking on the mosses. People start to get affectionately close to their local peat bog, and then they learn about the

threats to it. In the past, the threats included the extraction of peat for commercial use in our gardens. I learned about that 20 years ago and, as a keen gardener, I gave up using peat and used alternatives.

I have been involved in dealing with the encroachment of birch trees on Lenzie Moss. Our peatlands are not just natural and to be left to get on with it; we must manage them to ensure that they can do their job. Birch trees encroach incredibly rapidly on peat. I have been there and done that—I have tried hacking down birch trees and digging them up. That is a terrible job, but it must be done.

The threat in my constituency increasingly involves building on our peatlands, about which we have heard from others. We must ask why we are doing that. The issue in my area involves building housing. Nigel Don gave an example from down in England, but my problem is that somebody wants to build houses on Lenzie Moss.

When we look at such threats and problems, I always look at our priorities. What is the worth of the peatland or bog? Does it have worth for commercial profit or as part of global health? Increasingly, we should not look at commercial profit from such pieces of land, because they are worth more than they can ever make for housing. Their worth is in what they can deliver to help us to combat climate change across the planet. I recognise Scotland's significant position in that regard.

To realise the worth of peatlands as carbon sinks, I have a suggestion, which I must tell the minister comes from my love of the bogs rather than my knowledge of how any such proposal would work. I will take the opportunity to make the suggestion and see whether it is possible.

Nigel Don gave an example of offsetting that sounded ludicrous, but I wonder about using our peat bogs for carbon offsetting and giving them a financial worth, so that they can become part of carbon trading. Those who wanted to preserve, say, Lenzie Moss could say to the folk who want to sell it for house building, "Okay—you'd make £X million from selling the land for housing, but you could use it to allow the house builder to offset carbon emissions, which could make money to preserve the bog." I do not know whether that idea is possible, but it sounds like a win-win situation.

I would like to make our aims happen, because peatlands and peat bogs are important for the planet and are good for local flood defences. They are a living natural archive of everything that has gone on for hundreds of thousands of years in our areas. I cannot finish without reminding us all that peat gives whisky its distinctive taste, and we do not want to lose that, do we?

15:48

**Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's debate on biodiversity. Biodiversity measures the health of ecosystems, which are in effect the foundations for all life on earth. It is therefore extremely important to maintain and vary our biodiversity to promote growth in ecosystems and maintain stability.

According to Scottish Environment LINK's briefing, the

"continued loss"

of biodiversity

"has been called 'Europe's silent crisis'",

and it certainly is a crisis. The International Union for Conservation of Nature, for example, has estimated that one out of eight bird species could face extinction, as could one out of four mammals; that 75 per cent of the genetic diversity of agricultural crops has been lost; and that more than 350 million people suffer from severe water scarcity. Those effects are not, of course, all the effects of losing biodiversity; they are just a few varied examples to highlight the type of problems that we will face if we allow the situation to continue.

The Scottish biodiversity list, which was published in October 2012, lists 160 species that are at risk of extinction. Those species range from plants, mammals, insects and fish to birds. Further, the progress report for the period 2008 to 2010 on "Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in Your Hands" identified 15 targets in respect of which there is room for improvement or which have been missed, out a total of 37 targets that are based on the European biodiversity action plan framework. The report also notes that, although progress has been made on certain key indicators,

"progress towards meeting Scotland's biodiversity targets demonstrate that biodiversity loss has not yet been halted and will require renewed and sustained effort over a longer period."

That said, the United Kingdom Government is also failing to meet its biodiversity targets. Therefore, we all need to do more to ensure that we protect and promote our natural environment both on land and in the sea. That is one reason why we need to ensure that the marine station at Millport stays open.

I welcome the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's examination of the analysis of the responses to the Scottish Government's consultation on the 2020 challenge for Scotland's biodiversity and its consideration of how we will ensure that we meet the Aichi biodiversity targets and highlight the issue of

biodiversity while providing practical initiatives so that people at home can play their part and work towards a more sustainable Scotland. However, we need to lead from the front and ensure that protecting, maintaining and raising the awareness of biodiversity get the policy platform that they deserve. I hope that the Government can rise to that challenge against a backdrop of global inaction.

It has already been said that we need to promote partnership to protect biodiversity. North Ayrshire Council, South Ayrshire Council and East Ayrshire Council, for example, have developed an Ayrshire local biodiversity action plan, which serves to ensure that those three local authorities will work towards the same goals while tackling issues that would be impossible for any one local authority to deal with.

There is no quick fix, but through education, partnership and strong leadership, we can start to reverse the destruction of our ecosystems. North Ayrshire Council and many other local authorities now have eco-schools, and have incorporated into the curriculum teaching about the importance of the environment. I hope that, in time, that will provide the necessary step change that is needed to raise awareness of the issue.

Eglinton park in North Ayrshire is an invaluable resource to have on our doorstep. A number of biodiversity projects operate in the park area, and the rangers and the countryside liaison officer also have considerable input into the eco-schools, grounds for learning and John Muir awards projects. That educational remit is also carried into the local community. There is work with youth and community groups, and guided walks and illustrated talks are used to strengthen the message.

Such practical examples reveal that work is being done to protect and show the importance of biodiversity. They also get local communities involved, which gives them the sense of responsibility that we need to instil in the public. Where possible, the same approach should be adopted in other areas, and there should be work with those responsible for local parks and green areas so that they engage with the local community and help to increase awareness.

It seems that no one is fully pulling their weight on biodiversity issues so far. I would like to see stronger leadership from the Government on the issue. Crucially, we also need to work with local authorities to develop programmes at the grass-roots level so that people do not feel disconnected from the issue. Our environment is all around us, and we all have a part to play in protecting and maintaining it.

15:55

**Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP):** As has been noted in the debate, Scotland missed its biodiversity target for 2010, although we were not alone, as the target was missed at global and EU levels. However, that does not mean that we cannot go on to be a world leader by 2020, as is our stated goal.

**Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab):** I thank the member for taking an intervention so early in his speech. Does he agree that, rather than have an annual check to monitor progress, we should perhaps have six-monthly checks, which would focus us and, I hope, help us to regain lost ground?

**Richard Lyle:** I am sure that the minister will cover that in his summing-up speech, but I do not disagree with the point.

The missed target of 2010 should act as the motivation for the Government and the country as a whole to reach our goals for 2020. As always, our goals are ambitious and will not be easy to achieve but, with Government departments and public bodies working together with renewed vigour, the targets should be met, and Scotland will be a world leader in biodiversity.

Biodiversity is particularly important to Scotland. As has been said, about 90,000 species live within our borders. Just as important as the sheer number of species are the habitats and scenery that help to make up our world-renowned landscape. Let us be clear that our unique landscape is an asset that we must maintain. The European habitats directive lists 160 conservation priority habitats, of which Scotland is home to 65. Because of Scotland's climate and landform, many species are at the extreme of their range or are living in atypical habitats, which in turn has led to many of them adapting and becoming local varieties.

As a member of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, I welcome the debate. I have seen for myself the wide range of environments that Scotland offers, ranging from its heather moorland, upland blanket bog and lowland raised bog to its freshwater and seawater lochs. All those must be protected, as I am led to believe that the natural environment is worth £21 billion to £23 billion per year to the Scottish economy. That figure might seem high to some people, but the loss of any significant part of our biodiversity is incalculable and would have a devastating knock-on effect on a number of industries that rely on our biodiversity to survive, such as our booming tourist industry, which employs more than 9 per cent of the workforce in Scotland. Further, the figure does not take into

account the advantages that contact with outdoor places has for our physical and mental wellbeing.

Because of past failings, some of our biodiversity has been lost; unfortunately, biodiversity continues to be lost, although thankfully at a slower rate because of better management of the various threats. It is important that we find a balance between our social, economic and environmental needs to protect Scotland's biodiversity. It is important that we conserve what we have and do what we can to stop the continual erosion of our biodiversity, because it is far cheaper to maintain nature's capacity to provide vital services that contribute to our economy than it would be to have to replace that at some point in future.

To improve on our current biodiversity, we cannot focus only on one aspect of our diverse wildlife or an individual habitat, as most wildlife depends on a complex environment. Therefore, we need to look at the bigger picture and to enhance our entire biodiversity, which in turn will enhance our economic and social wellbeing. As has been said, that will require Government departments to work closely with outside organisations such as the RSPB, Plantlife and Scottish Land & Estates.

To reach our targets for 2020, we will need to engage more people with biodiversity, so that they can enjoy—and encourage others to enjoy—Scotland's unique environment and reap the economic benefits that it provides, and so that that can continue for generations to come.

Biodiversity must be brought into the mainstream of public interest; it must no longer be regarded as a specialist issue that the majority of people cannot enjoy or influence. It is important that we do everything possible to maintain and enhance Scotland's biodiversity, so that we can not only meet the targets for 2020 but ensure that one of Scotland's most important resources is not wasted, depriving Scotland's future generations of the economic and health advantages of our rich biodiversity.

In the early 1970s I saw a film that brought home to me what could happen in the next 100 years. I recommend that members purchase the film—I do not know whether Blockbuster will sell it before it closes. The futuristic film, "Soylent Green", shows what will happen to the world if we do not preserve our environment. I recommend it, and I support the motion.

16:00

**Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab):** I am pleased to take part in a debate that gives me the opportunity to be parochial, because Dumfries and Galloway is fortunate in having rich and, in some

cases, unique biodiversity, which brings benefits to environmental services, leisure and tourism, landscape, health and wellbeing, and business and agriculture.

I am aware that the Scottish Government has undertaken a consultation in light of the national and international failure to meet biodiversity targets and that many organisations have made recommendations. However, preservation of species diversity is not solely the responsibility of national Governments; actions at local authority and individual level play an important part. That was recognised in Dumfries and Galloway back in 1999, when Dumfries and Galloway Council, with partners, published its first local biodiversity action plan. It was one of the first such plans to be published in Scotland and it went on to win a couple of prestigious awards. Since then, more than 80 organisations have joined the biodiversity partnership, and a revised and updated biodiversity action plan was published in 2009.

The native red squirrel is perhaps one of the most iconic rare species in my constituency. It is a great privilege to see the animals in their natural environment and this is a particularly good time of year for spotting them, as the foliage is less dense and the animals are more inclined to venture near human populations to look for food. I was therefore disturbed to receive a letter this week from my former colleague John Home Robertson, advising that the population of red squirrels round his home, Paxton, has succumbed to squirrel pox. Members who knew John when he was a member of the Parliament will recall how passionate he is about the red squirrels who regularly come into his garden to feed.

Squirrel pox virus appears to be spreading quickly through the south of Scotland and has already been detected in parts of Dumfriesshire. I am worried that the delightful spectacle of a Dumfriesshire red squirrel dashing up the side of a pine tree will become a mere recollection. John Home Robertson is asking us to consider a vaccination programme. He points out that the Moredun Research Institute has undertaken research on a vaccine but requires further funding to make a vaccine a possibility. I hope that the minister, who is a member for South Scotland, will be able to take the suggestion forward. I would be happy to meet him, John Home Robertson and interested members to discuss the matter.

Scottish Environment LINK recently asked MSPs to sign its wildlife proclamation and, as Rob Gibson said, SWT asked us to volunteer as species champions. The debate gives me the opportunity to champion my chosen species, the natterjack toad, which I chose because the inner Solway is an important habitat for it. Although as a child I was keen on all the animals that little girls



were expected to like, I was also very attracted to animals that had a bad press. Wee girls were not expected to like snakes, rats, frogs and toads. My mum did not fancy having snakes or rats as pets—she did not share my enthusiasm for them—and my frog and toad tadpoles that made it to maturity always hopped off to find another pool once their hind legs had developed. Perhaps in championing the natterjack toad I can do something to help.

The natterjack toad, *bufo calamita*, requires a high density of pools in which to mature and breed. It has a long breeding season but it requires unshaded, shallow pools, which dry out easily. It also requires low vegetation on surrounding land, so that it can hunt, because it runs rather than hops. It needs sand to burrow into, to avoid predators and extreme temperatures—not that extreme temperatures are a problem in the inner Solway.

The merse—or upper saltmarsh—pools of the inner Solway provide a habitat in which the natterjack toad can thrive. The salt water is sufficiently dilute to enable the tadpoles to survive and the area is grazed by agricultural animals and the flocks of barnacle geese that overwinter on the Solway. However, a variety of conservation measures must be taken to preserve the correct habitat for the natterjack, including creating new pools, maintaining existing breeding sites, encouraging the maintenance of traditional grazing and, where feasible, introducing spawn to new sites in suitable locations. Those conservation actions are undertaken by a variety of individuals and organisations, including the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, SNH, RSPB and local landowners.

Natterjacks, in common with other amphibians, are particularly prone to mortality on roads. Warm roads are attractive to cold-blooded creatures on cold nights; also, natterjacks attempt to access pools on the other side of a road. The natterjack knows why it crossed the road, and it was not just to get to the other side. Road mortality can be addressed, however, by the creation of new pools on the same side of a road, by deploying temporary fences or traps to collect the animals and by creating wildlife tunnels under roads. Volunteer toad patrols can be deployed during mass migrations in spring and autumn to assist the animals to reach their breeding pools safely. The measures that can be deployed to conserve that one species illustrate how complex conservation measures can be and how reliant they are on partnership working and shared understanding and education.

It is, of course, disappointing that targets for halting the loss of biodiversity have not been met. We all need to redouble our efforts nationally, locally and individually to stem the decline. We

need to understand and address how the loss of habitat and man-made obstacles stand in the way of the survival of so many precious land and marine-based species.

16:06

**Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** I, too, am pleased to have been called to speak in this debate on biodiversity. As we have heard, it is indeed a most timely debate in light of the fact that the Scottish Government is in the process of updating the biodiversity strategy, further to the recent consultation that it engaged in, to which members have referred. I am also pleased that the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee will play a key role in examining the updated biodiversity policy. I believe that that is entirely appropriate and, having until recently had the pleasure of being the deputy convener of the committee, I know that the committee members will discharge their duties impeccably.

The debate is also timely because, as a few speakers in the debate have said, we have already seen the launch in 2013 of the year of natural Scotland. It is a Scottish Government initiative, with SNH as lead partner working with VisitScotland, EventScotland and various partner organisations on the ground; its aim is of course to promote Scotland's stunning natural beauty and biodiversity and to promote opportunities for visitors to enjoy Scotland's fantastic landscapes, wildlife and heritage. It is therefore entirely fitting that we are exploring issues of biodiversity, focusing on how we can seek to meet the various challenges ahead, which speakers in the debate have discussed in some detail.

I stress that, as much as the natural world is, as we have heard, a significant contributor to Scotland's economic growth, it is in and of itself a key part of life and it adds to our quality of life. The importance of the natural world has long been recognised in Scotland. For example, we have heard the words of the naturalist Frank Fraser Darling, as quoted by Rob Gibson, the convener of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee; we have heard the words of John Muir, the conservation pioneer, as quoted by the minister; and, to give an international outlook, we have heard the words of a famous Senegalese conservationist, as quoted by Alex Fergusson. As we are coming into the Burns season, it might be appropriate to quote the bard himself, who wrote in his world famous poem "To a Mouse":

"I'm truly sorry man's dominion,  
Has broken Nature's social union".

Robert Burns revered nature. I suppose it is debatable whether he revered nature as much as

he revered the lassies, but perhaps that is a debate for another day.

However, the need that Robert Burns expressed so well for living in harmony with the natural world is one that I believe is shared by most people. It is important to say that it is certainly the case that, down through the centuries, our farmers and crofters have acted as stewards of the land and that they continue to do so. They have always sought to secure a balance between our ecological systems and land management. Indeed, if it had not been for their stewardship, we would not see today the wide diversity of our natural world, which is there for all to enjoy. Jim Hume mentioned the discussions on greening the CAP, and it is important to stress that, as far as Scotland is concerned, the measures are unworkable. Surely that flags up the dangers to biodiversity that the implementation of the greening measures as they stand would cause for our landscape in Scotland and the promotion of greater biodiversity. I believe that we should resist them forcibly.

It has been recognised this afternoon that we have not met targets—along with just about everybody else in the world, but that does not make it right—so we have to strive to do better. Many speakers have recognised that that is an issue for each of us as well as for our local authorities and our Governments. That means that we need to listen carefully to the views that are expressed by all those who have knowledge and experience and therefore have something to contribute to the debate on how we can do more to preserve and maintain Scotland's biodiversity.

An example of good practice can be seen in the biodiversity work that is undertaken by the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority, which launched its first biodiversity action plan for 2008 to 2011 and refreshed the plan more recently in its "National Park Partnership Plan 2012-2017". In that work, there is recognition that the valued biodiversity of the park has been greatly shaped by the traditional land uses of food production and, indeed, field sports. With that underlying recognition, the stated goal is—I quote from the foreword to the 2008 to 2011 plan by the chief executive of the park authority—

"to combine the benefits from that long history of land management with the more recent concept of biodiversity."

The chief executive went on to state:

"If we get it right, we can maintain a living, working landscape while also producing more robust and more self-sustaining ecosystems on a large scale that have a greater capacity to remain viable in the long-term in the face of climate change and other pressures."

That is the goal that we should all be striving for.

I end with a point that most members have mentioned in their speeches. More education is needed for us all—for our children in schools, but also through less traditional channels in order to reach as wide an audience as possible—on the crucial need to change behaviour to promote and secure greater biodiversity.

16:12

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** In 2009, a team of 29 distinguished environmental and earth systems scientists sat down to work out how far human activity is stretching our planet's ability to sustain life. They identified nine ways in which human activity has stressed and undermined what they call the "planetary life-support systems" that are vital to the healthy functioning of the planet and central to supporting the stable environment that has allowed humanity to flourish. For two of the stressors that were identified—chemical pollution and atmospheric aerosols—there is not enough data or understanding to assess how serious they are. For the rest, estimates could be made.

Our use of fresh water and land is approaching the planetary limit. In some oceans, acidification is already too high. On climate change, scientists estimate that we have pushed ourselves just over the limit. Until a few years ago, the same was true of ozone, but we have successfully turned the tide on that problem and the ozone layer is slowly recovering. However, the news on biodiversity is not good, with the estimates being off the scale on the group's graph.

It is in that context that our aims for biodiversity mention halting the decline. The Government's national performance framework uses the abundance of terrestrial breeding birds as an indicator of biodiversity. Unfortunately, progress has not been good, with abundance in 2010 being 4 per cent lower than in 2009 and 2 per cent lower than in 2006. As others have noted, as with the recent climate change target, we and others did not achieve the 2010 biodiversity target, so I welcome the opportunity to debate the refresh of the strategy and the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's planned work on the topic.

What needs to change to help to halt the loss of Scottish species and maintain our reputation for beautiful wild places, plants and animals? As Rob Gibson noted, 2013 is the year of natural Scotland. What better way to mark it than with a step change in our efforts?

It is important that people can feel a connection with the natural environment—if that is lost there will be no public desire to protect our biodiversity. TV programmes such as David Attenborough's

“Africa” are stunning, but they are not sufficient to create that connection. Children need to experience outdoor play in wild environments and outdoor education through our schools. Not everyone will love the outdoors and not everyone will wear through a pair of hiking boots in their lifetime, but that is not the point. Understanding what biodiversity actually feels like, as a young person, is important. Initiatives such as forest schools, which offer children the chance to learn in a natural environment, should be well supported and embedded in the curriculum with eco-schools.

I have become a Scottish Environment LINK species champion and I know that many others have, too. My species is the rare brown hare and a few of them can be found on Arthur's Seat, just outside the Parliament. I encourage MSPs to sign up soon, to get the species that they want, although rusty bog moss has already been taken. Rusty bog moss is vital to healthy peatland, although it may not be very photogenic—but perhaps Rob Gibson would disagree with that.

On a serious note, the restoration of at least 100,000 hectares of peatland and the phasing out of its use by public bodies completely by 2015 must form part of our all-Government biodiversity strategy, as called for by LINK members.

Pesticides and insecticides are another threat to biodiversity, on which the Scottish Government can and must be bolder. Pollination is an ecosystem service that is estimated by the national ecosystem assessment to be worth £43 million to the Scottish economy in cash terms. However, increasing evidence shows that neonicotinoid insecticides are harmful to honey bees and bumblebees, whereas the impact on wild pollinators is as yet completely unknown. France and other countries have banned the chemicals and I urge the Government to listen to the evidence from Scottish universities that neonicotinoids are a threat to biodiversity. I support the Scottish Wildlife Trust's call for a moratorium and I welcome the fact that the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee will focus attention on the issue in the near future.

The way in which we develop our land and the importance that we place on biodiversity in our land-use planning system must also change. I have recently responded to an application for housing on Craighouse campus, which is a green city space in my region. It is designated as a local nature conservation site and a local nature reserve because it is so important to biodiversity. I believe that local people do understand and care. I have been informed that there may be more than 1,000 objections to the proposal to build on the site. If we are serious about halting biodiversity loss, green pockets in urban areas must be preserved for

nature and for people to learn about and appreciate nature. Allotments, too, have multiple benefits and local gardens in our streets are all-important islands of urban biodiversity that we cannot afford to continue to lose to new driveways.

Finally, I will mention food and its connections with biodiversity. Food security relies in part on diversity: interbreeding and pollination of species give an ecosystem resilience against shocks such as disease or climate change. There are hundreds of apple species in Scotland, but only four or five of them are available in shops. Our farms tend to grow monoculture crops. We are missing out on wonderful diversity and we are increasing the risk that one disease will wipe out a whole part of the food chain. Biodiversity in our food production gives us the genetic diversity and resilience that are essential to a secure food supply.

As Claire Baker and others mentioned, in our politics we increasingly try to put a financial price on everything, which is tempting because it makes things easy to compare, but tends to miss out the intrinsic value of things. That was one of the most common concerns from respondents to the strategy and one that I share, and I welcome the minister's response to those concerns. Ecosystem valuation helps us grasp its importance and hammers home the message that many economists have ignored for too long: that our economy is based within our ecosystem.

We must also make sure that we place emphasis on promoting biodiversity as an end in itself. We need no more justification than the intrinsic value of the natural world.

16:19

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** Let me add my congratulations to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee on securing time for this timely debate.

Among the briefings that are available to us as MSPs is the “UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework”, published for the four countries biodiversity group—a group that represents Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales. The introduction to the framework talks about moving

“away from a piecemeal approach dealing with different aspects of biodiversity and the environment separately, towards a new focus on managing the environment as a whole, with the true economic and societal value of nature properly acknowledged and taken into account in decision-making”.

That is a pretty good starting place.

We also have probably the most comprehensive land use strategy anywhere in the world. It was

published in 2011 and is called “Getting the best from our land”—which is what it is about.

Of course, strategies are all very well, but they are not worth a great deal until they move into becoming plans, which are lists of actions to take place, and plans in their own way are of no value until they devolve into actual work on the ground.

National plans are important—they set the context—but at the end of the day it is individuals and local groups that can pick up and respond to the challenges right now. They do not need to wait. Such groups do not need to try to solve every problem. Perhaps at national level we can look at the gaps that local activity is leaving and seek to fill them, but we should encourage individuals and local groups to take action.

We can look around and see need, and we can see opportunity and advantage in addressing the issues on a micro scale. The macro-scale strategy is something else altogether, but it will succeed if a sufficient amount of local, micro action takes place.

A range of members have spoken about specific opportunities and challenges. In particular, Jayne Baxter spoke of the importance of local ownership of action, and I absolutely agree.

When I get up in the morning, I do so in a rural area. There are probably about seven houses within a mile. The weather can travel seasonally from the -21°C that it was in winter 2009 to the nearly 40°C that it was in high summer last year. That is a range of nearly 60°C, which is quite unexpected in Scotland, which is generally thought of as having a relatively mild climate.

Where I stay, I am surrounded on three sides by a monoculture of poorly and densely planted firs—I am not an arborist, but I think that I can say that without much challenge. That forest has a significant negative influence on local biodiversity. We have roe deer, badgers, foxes and weasels that live in and off the environment that is created, but if we look at the ground beneath the trees we see that the forest canopy has left it all but sterile. Nothing grows there, not even an effective mulch that returns what comes off the trees to the ground.

With that forest perhaps overdue for felling and therefore likely soon to leave us open to the elements in our hilltop location, over the past 10 years my wife and I have looked at a mitigation plan that is relevant to us. We have planted a hedge and about 50 trees, and in doing that we have focused on supporting biodiversity and bug life in particular.

I am absolutely delighted that the diversity in our new hedge, the blossom on our trees and our garden plants have clearly increased local insect

biodiversity. I am especially pleased to see and hear a substantial increase in bumblebees in particular. I am not very good at identifying different species—I have managed to track down a decent book that has photographs, although I still find it very difficult—but I am quite certain that I have two species and may have three. There is nothing better than going out to look at the bees feeding on the flowers, covered in pollen and moving to other plants.

We are fortunate that we are not in an area where there is a great degree of agriculture; it is mostly beasts and sheep near us, so we are not particularly exposed to the adverse effects of neonicotinoids and other things that might be used.

Insects are at the bottom of the food chain, but they therefore make a very important contribution to a wide range of other species. I do not know whether the appearance in the past four years, for the first time since we have been there, of golden eagles for a few weeks each year is part of that evolving local ecosystem, but I very much welcome and enjoy it. The next thing that I am going to have a look at is the Reidside Moss that is visibly drying out, which is 1,000m away.

I had a wildlife camera given to me as my Christmas present. My wife is getting a bit peed off that I have not yet managed to get it working or to try it out in the forest. I very much look forward to doing that. If we all get engaged with the wildlife around us, we can all identify ways in which we can help.

There was an engineer in the 1930s who said that if we had to measure an improvement, we probably had not made one. We are now in a position in which incremental change ain't gonna be good enough. We need step change that we can see, which we do not have to measure.

16:26

**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands (Con):** I am pleased to close for the Scottish Conservatives, and I thank all those organisations that provided briefings for the debate.

There are a number of issues that I want to pick up on. Many members have rightly highlighted the importance of Scotland's biodiversity to tourism and, in particular, wildlife tourism. As a Highlands and Islands MSP, I strongly concur with them. Scotland's landscape and history are key attractions for visitors from within the UK and abroad, but our biodiversity enriches the visitor experience in numerous leisure activities and attracts additional income from bird watching—my colleague Alex Fergusson mentioned seabirds—and natural history study. I add that the sustainable management of our biodiversity

maintains the many jobs in remote rural areas that are associated with sea fisheries, freshwater fishing, sea trout, sea angling and country sports, all of which are very important to my region.

That is the theme on which developed nations such as Scotland and the UK must lead. They must lead by example in setting and meeting biodiversity targets. That thread has run through the debate, as has concern that the 2010 targets have not been met internationally and that renewed policy effort across the globe will be required to meet the revised 2020 targets and the Aichi targets. As with tackling climate change, if developed nations such as ours are to persuade less developed nations of the necessity of preventing the loss of biodiversity in their countries, we must be seen to be meeting our own targets and protecting our own biodiversity. As Scottish Environment LINK suggests in its briefing,

“Continuing to lose biodiversity is not an option in a sustainable Scotland.”

We must ensure that our habitats, particularly those in our protected sites, are in a good condition. Biodiversity means making the most of what is around us without spoiling it for future generations, but it is worth bearing in mind that much of the biodiversity, especially in my area of the Highlands and Islands, exists because of the people who have made their livings there for centuries. They have produced it, and they must be allowed to continue to use the same crofting, fishing and farming methods that they have employed for centuries; if those methods are not working properly, they must be allowed to change them.

Crofting, fishing and farming have delivered biodiversity in many areas. The trick is to use measures that improve that biodiversity at the same time as improving the lot of the people who live around it, and we should strive for sensible use to be made of European and Government funding to promote agri-environmental schemes that work in favour of biodiversity and the farmer or crofter. A prosperous rural economy will deliver far greater biodiversity than one that is hanging on by its fingernails.

I totally agree with Stewart Stevenson's encouragement of the use of land management options that are relevant. For example, planting crops such as oats can do wonders in sustaining wild bird populations.

Rob Gibson talked about fisheries and the debate is all the more pertinent for me because I have just left committee room 5, where the chairman of the Clyde Fishermen's Association, Kenny McNab, gave a fascinating and formidable presentation on the Firth of Clyde fisheries history for the past 50 years. I am glad that the fisheries

minister, cabinet secretary Richard Lochhead, was there to hear that presentation, as well as many of the chief officers of Marine Scotland. The presentation gave an enormous insight into the practical reasons for rises and declines, which do not entirely concur with scientific reports or explanations.

As a layman, I say only that those who write the reports on fisheries or on biodiversity should, by all means, use the best science available, but they should also talk to those who have gained practical knowledge during their working lives, because what becomes evident is the need for adaptability and flexibility—moving, for example, from harvesting one fish stock species to harvesting another. However, it seems that the present quota system inhibits that. We want any regulations to help, rather than inhibit, biodiversity. If the rules are not working, let us change them. I applaud Claudia Beamish for highlighting the sea trout in her speech. A revival of sea trout on Scotland's west coast would indeed be welcome to a great many people.

As a Highlands and Islands MSP, I was encouraged that Scotland's peatlands were given more emphasis by Fiona McLeod and in chapter 2 of the Scottish Government's consultation. As I have argued many times, Scotland's peatlands are a world-class resource that act as a significant carbon sink. They store 10 times more carbon than all the trees in the UK. We are positive about moves that would enable peatland restoration to be promoted within carbon markets and we will continue to encourage ministers to look at all options that can assist farmers, crofters and other land managers to preserve the peatlands that are in their charge—possibly as an agri-environmental option.

Some years ago, I raised concerns in this Parliament about the possible spread in Scotland of sudden oak death, which kills a range of trees—strangely, not the oak tree—as well as shrubs. I urge ministers to remain aware of the threat. Since then, we have faced additional new threats to our forestry resource, such as ash dieback and other diseases, and parasites such as the green spruce aphid, which can cause much damage to Sitka spruce plantations.

Tackling the scourge of non-native invasive species is extremely important, as is the debate about raptors, including reintroduced species that may in fact impact on key species of songbirds and ground-nesting birds as well as livestock. It is important that such issues should be taken into consideration and impact studies should be done before reintroductions are made.

I agree with other members' comments about efforts to preserve some of Scotland's iconic native species such as the Scottish wildcat, which

I am lucky enough to have seen two or three times in my life, and the red squirrel, which I am happy to say is on the increase in my part of Argyll. However, the disappearance of the green plover from many areas should be investigated and it is a shame that in many places, we have lost the magic sound of the peewit—in some cases, the curlew and the golden plover as well. Scientists should be able to tell us what has gone wrong so that it can be put right.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I would be grateful if the member could come to a conclusion.

**Jamie McGrigor:** I was just going to say that Alison Johnstone mentioned brown hares and I like mountain hares as well as brown hares.

The Scottish Conservatives are supportive of practical measures that will protect Scotland's biodiversity.

16:33

**Claire Baker:** The debate has been wide ranging and interesting, full of good examples of local projects, reflecting the breadth of activity—from Falkirk district to Dumfries and Galloway, and from Loch Lomond and the Trossachs even as far as Kent. We have heard about bats, badgers and bluebells and the other 982 species that reside at Lochore Meadows. Aileen McLeod spoke well about the biosphere site in her region, which was an excellent example of partnership working. A lot of its strength lies in the fact that it is community led.

We heard about the contribution of Stewart Stevenson's hedge and it is good to see his continuing interest in this policy area. Alison Johnstone made an important point about green pockets in urban areas. Although many members focused on more rural environments, it is important that there was recognition that there is also a role for our cities to play in achieving a greater biodiversity.

Jim Hume spoke about ash dieback and the interconnectedness of our environment. He raised important questions about biosecurity and tree health and how we can work to secure a healthier future.

Members talked about their roles as wildlife champions of various species—from sea trout to natterjack toads and from rare brown hares to rusty bog moss—with varying degrees of enthusiasm. I hope that other members will take the time to sign up to the campaign.

The importance of public support and community involvement was highlighted. Alison Johnstone talked about the need to engage young people, and a few members referred to the role

that eco-schools can play in increasing the interest and commitment of future generations.

Claudia Beamish highlighted marine issues. We need to get on the front foot with marine planning. We all recognise the importance of the marine environment, so we must make swift progress on bringing in the necessary protections. There will be developments—there is great potential in our seas—but it is crucial that we have in place the proper framework to accommodate fisheries, renewables and aquaculture without further eroding our marine biodiversity.

On marine issues, I want to raise the proposed closure of the Millport marine station. I understand that the closure has been proposed by the University of London in response to capital demands and a cut to its teaching grant, but the facility is used by Scottish universities and students working in marine and biodiversity fields. The marine station is in a unique location and makes a big contribution to marine science in Scotland. Therefore, I was disappointed to hear that, after receiving a petition of 9,000 names of people who

“ask the Scottish Government to work with others in education, industry and statutory bodies to ensure that the Millport Marine Station remains open”,

the cabinet secretary promptly passed the petition to the University of London. I hope that that does not indicate a lack of interest from the Government about working to retain the facility.

The consultation responses, and many members, talked about funding and the importance of recognising economic as well as societal benefit—a point that was made by Stewart Stevenson. In a seminar in the Parliament last year on thinking about the environment differently, Scotland's Futures Forum highlighted how putting an economic value on nature may diminish its importance in the eyes of the public. That may be something to consider when we think about how we might increase public engagement and support, if that is part of how we are to achieve our targets.

There has been a strong focus on local authorities and their role as partners in delivering on the targets. Jayne Baxter talked about projects in Fife, which I am happy to re-emphasise. One of my first experiences of representing Fifers was as the Kelty community council representative on the liaison committee of the Lochore Meadows country park, which is a great facility that provides a good example of what can be achieved from reclaimed land and rescued from our industrial heritage. That theme was also reflected in the speech by Angus MacDonald, who spoke about the Jupiter wildlife centre. Jayne Baxter also talked about Kinghorn's Ecology Centre, which is a fantastic project that, as well as supporting a

diverse ecosystem, is a great educational facility showcasing renewable energy and employability projects and providing lots of family events.

I am pleased that Angus MacDonald raised the issue of biodiversity grant funding for communities. I was at the “Making the Most of Landfill Tax” event in Parliament this week. From memory, I think that 5 per cent of the fund will go to biodiversity projects and almost half of the fund will go to community assets. There is a need to capacity build and to improve community understanding of the opportunities that exist for people to take part in biodiversity projects, which could play a greater role in helping Scotland to achieve its targets.

Fiona McLeod and Rob Gibson talked about the crucial importance of peatlands. Peatland restoration offers multiple benefits—including wildlife, water services, carbon sequestration and forestry—but there is a need for buy-in from a greater number of partners. As Fiona McLeod highlighted, representation has been made for the use of a range of funding mechanisms, including from the water sector and from business carbon payments where appropriate. The minister may want to respond to those points in his closing speech.

Margaret McDougall talked about local authorities working together in her region to share resources and expertise. Public bodies have a biodiversity duty under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. Although members were able to point to examples of local projects, there may be a need to reflect on where and how those plans could be more mainstreamed and strategic. A couple of years ago, the Scottish Wildlife Trust published “Guidance for planning authorities on implementing the Biodiversity Duty”, which suggests five first steps that authorities might take in trying to think about how they can fulfil their duty properly. There may be a need to better monitor the delivery of that duty, at both local and national level.

Perhaps the refreshed strategy needs to be a bit more responsive. If we introduce a strategy, it needs to be monitored regularly to see whether we are making progress and, if progress is not being made in areas, the strategy must be flexible enough to respond to that.

Biodiversity needs championing. We can make gains from across all sectors, from the simplest approach that adapts the immediate environment of, for example, a workplace or a public place—I know that the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body is engaged in increasing the biodiversity surroundings of the Parliament—to more complex drivers that offer incentives to support biodiversity activity. We all have a role to play, from MSPs promoting the importance of our environment to

the important role that the minister must play in Government. I look forward to the publication of the refreshed strategy, which will provide a clear path to success.

16:40

**Paul Wheelhouse:** First, I am grateful to members for their speeches, which I and my officials will consider in great detail when we respond to the committee inquiry. A general observation is that it has been inspiring to hear the wide range of projects that members have described, of which I will pick out a number.

This is the first time that I have heard Jayne Baxter make a speech. I want to pay her a compliment—if that is the standard that we can expect from her, she will be a valuable addition to the chamber. I thank her for a considered speech.

We heard great examples from Aileen McLeod about Dumfries and Galloway’s biosphere approach. Angus MacDonald made a particularly interesting speech in which he highlighted that biodiversity is extremely important in urban areas or, at least, in authorities with rural areas that we would not normally identify with having an important role in relation to a national approach to protecting our biodiversity. There is clearly a richness of activity that points to the enthusiasm of so many people for our nature; it also points to the complexity of delivery and, indeed, the need for and importance of localism in order to deliver.

I will take time to respond to some members’ detailed points before I make my concluding remarks. A number of members, including Rob Gibson, Alison Johnstone and Claudia Beamish—I apologise if I have missed anyone out—made various references to bee health and the presence of neonicotinoids in our environment. We are awaiting advice from the UK Advisory Committee on Pesticides, and we will look at its report and its advice to ministers to see what approach we will take in Scotland. I recognise the seriousness of the issue, and I hope to report back once we have formed a view about how to proceed.

I am more than happy to visit Angus MacDonald’s constituency to see the Jupiter project. Unfortunately, I missed the start of the project presentation at his event, so I would be glad to find out more about it—it certainly sounds interesting.

Claire Baker’s point about the landfill communities fund is fair. I heard reference to the fact that there are difficulties in capacity building among communities in order to make them aware not only of what is available but of how to go about applying for funds and to give them support in that process. With the climate challenge fund, we are trying to help spread the range of projects to more

deprived communities and to give them support, and we will perhaps need to take a similar approach in other areas.

Nigel Don made reference to the approach taken in Kent. We would not want to shut down the options for developers to make contributions in the form of additional enhancement to local biodiversity, but we certainly would not be looking at the mechanistic approach that seemed to be taken in the case that he referred to—I would be concerned about that if we did.

It is sad that Elaine Murray has had to leave, but I am happy to meet her and Mr Home Robertson to hear their concerns about the health of the red squirrel population and to discuss the issues she raised on vaccination.

I may have appeared prickly about Jim Hume's point about nursery capacity, but it was fair and I identify with it. I hope that we will progress that in the on-going work of the stakeholder group that we are forming to look at tree and plant health issues, and I would welcome his views on that.

Annabelle Ewing, Alison Johnstone, Claudia Beamish and others made references to education, which is an important aspect. Forest schools were specifically mentioned, which I know are successful—that is an example of the progress being made through bilateral meetings. I am considering how we can promote biodiversity and climate action through education and the curriculum for excellence, and I am happy to keep Parliament informed about that.

Alison Johnstone made a point about intrinsic value versus the ecosystem services approach. That was a common theme in the responses to the consultation. We strongly believe that there is a balance to be struck. I agree that we have a responsibility to protect biodiversity for its intrinsic value, but we must also recognise and highlight the benefits that it brings to wider society, as I said in my opening remarks and in response to a point that Claudia Beamish made.

As a number of members, including Richard Lyle, mentioned, the natural environment is worth more than £20 billion to the Scottish economy annually. It is easy to see how that figure can be arrived at when we consider the fact that we had £4.2 billion-worth of whisky exports in 2011. That is only one example of a product that is dependent on the quality of our environment and the value of our ecosystem to generate wealth for the country. We will try to do what we can in the strategy to identify the intrinsic value of biodiversity, but it is important to take a twin-track approach.

Fiona McLeod made a valuable comment. I welcome her and other members' comments about the value of peatlands. We are making a decisive investment in peatlands to evaluate the

impact that they can have on our carbon emissions.

Scottish Natural Heritage and other public and private bodies will develop and implement a plan for the management of peatlands, which will include restoration. We recognise the importance of restoring peatlands in ways that will give value for money. That reflects the multiple benefits that peatlands in good condition can provide. They relate to flood management, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and, critically in the context of the debate, biodiversity. The Scottish Government is providing a total of £1.7 million of initial funding for that. *[Interruption.]* Excuse me, I am struggling with my throat.

**Alex Fergusson:** Will the minister give way?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Gratefully.

**Alex Fergusson:** I thought that he might be grateful.

I referred to seabirds in my speech. I hope that I did not mislead the chamber by saying that they were given some measure of protection in the Government's proposals on marine protected areas because, of course, they will largely be covered by special protection areas rather than MPAs. However, my understanding is that, even when the special protection areas are designated, it is unlikely that we will fulfil the obligations under the birds directive to protect the feeding hotspots on which those species rely. Do the Government's proposals to protect seabirds go far enough?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** We are consulting on our proposals. Alex Fergusson will also be aware that we have been encouraged to consider mobile species. That is another area in which we have to take account of the science to understand exactly what is required. We must bear in mind the fact that, if areas are designated, the designation may have to be defended based on the science. Therefore, it is critical that we get the decision right rather than rush it. Alex Fergusson raises important matters. We are taking them into account, but the consultation will be a useful vehicle for people to raise them.

I am conscious of time, so I will rush on.

On specific targets for particular habitats or features, I set out in my opening comments the role that the biodiversity monitoring committee will play in specifying performance indicators and targets. We are considering a natural capital index as one possible measurement.

**Hanzala Malik:** Will the minister give way?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I am sorry, Mr Malik, but I am in my last minute.



The monitoring committee's role will ensure that, following the publication of the strategy, there is momentum to drive delivery.

I turn to international targets. They are absolute targets that demand the halting of loss of biodiversity and that we ensure that no ecosystem service is lost. That is the only way in which those targets could be framed: no one would be willing to give up any part of biodiversity. However, they are stretching targets, particularly as some pressures—such as climate change—are outwith the control of any one country.

I will give a sense of where we currently sit. About 15.45 per cent of Scotland's land area is designated as a Natura 2000 site. I would like to improve that figure, but it compares favourably with other areas within the UK and many other countries throughout Europe that we would normally identify as exemplars of best practice, so we should not be too negative.

We should all be more positive about the successes and the progress that we have made and not return too often to the question of the failure, by some measures, to meet the 2010 targets. Looking ahead, we should see the 2020 targets as an inspiration to positive partnership and action. I invite people to join me in ensuring that our collective efforts go as far as possible towards meeting that target.

16:50

**Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):** There is a challenge facing anyone who sums up a committee debate that does not emanate from an inquiry or a report that has been produced by that committee. As the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee has not held face-to-face meetings with stakeholders or had a full opportunity to question the minister, no collective conclusions have been drawn on this extremely important issue. However, the past two and a half hours have, with the consultation responses, given us a flavour of the themes that are likely to emerge when the committee examines the 2020 challenge consultation results and considers how it will reinforce the Scottish biodiversity strategy. The debate has certainly whetted my appetite for that process. It has also left me feeling guilty for not yet being a species champion.

I would like to consider some of the themes that have emerged, starting with the need to learn from the past. As the RSPB says,

"Failure to meet 2010 target should be viewed as a 'wake-up' call".

However, when considering how and why we have failed, we should, as Claire Baker said, also examine what successes have been achieved. There is an obvious need to consider the degree

of conflict that exists between economic growth and the maintenance of environmental integrity and biodiversity, and to determine how we should address that. Joined-up thinking and working between Government departments and bodies are required.

There are concerns—particularly among local authorities and third sector organisations—about how we will resource the strategy. The Scottish rural development programme has been highlighted as an obvious source of funding, but a number of respondents have pointed to the well-known problems with the programme and have appealed for it to be reformed. I know that that comes as no news to members of the committee or to the minister.

Biodiversity offsetting was raised in the consultation, and has been raised again today. It may well have potential in the eyes of some people, but should it be anything other than a last resort? Nigel Don answered that question in his speech.

Awareness of the importance of biodiversity and of the need to improve public understanding of biodiversity if we are to hit our targets and to educate our children on the subject from a young age is absolutely paramount. Teaching five-year-olds about biodiversity when we have only seven years in which to hit our targets will not pay the kind of immediate dividends that we need.

However, we need to consider the long term as well as the short term. As we have seen in facing up to climate change, kids have a powerful influence over parents and we very much need to improve adult understanding of the subject. It is claimed that nearly 75 per cent of people are unaware of biodiversity or what it means. Perhaps we need to send them to Lochore Meadows country park, with its community involvement programmes and 982 species, as was highlighted by Jayne Baxter. We should certainly unleash Alex Fergusson on them. His definition of biodiversity as "the balance of nature" certainly lifts the veil of ignorance surrounding the subject.

Peatlands is a favourite subject of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee—rightly so, given the carbon storage potential of peatland restoration. However, rightly or wrongly, some landowners are concerned that the scientific knowledge about rewetting and the effects of burning grouse moors is limited and insufficiently Scotland-focused. We will need to take those landowners with us on the climate change and biodiversity journey that we are undertaking.

I am as excited as anyone—except, perhaps, Rob Gibson and Fiona McLeod—by the carbon capture potential of peatlands. However, those

who express concerns might have a point, for it seems that only one meaningful study that has produced a full carbon budget of a burned, managed upland area has been done in these islands, and it suggested that the overall impact of managed burning on biodiversity is mixed. To muddy the waters more, that study was carried out in the north Pennines, and doubts were raised subsequently about the transferability of the findings to other parts of the UK.

There is a view that shallow peat soils, primarily in areas such as Angus, might benefit from sensitive management to maintain existing stocks, rather than an active rewetting programme, with the above-ground biodiversity gains being greater than the limited carbon storage capabilities of those shallow peat soils. I am not a scientist, but it strikes me as being a valid point that a one-size-fits-all policy on peatlands, rather than a balanced approach based on sound science, would potentially run contrary to the delivery of multiple ecosystem services.

Concerns have been raised, particularly by local authorities, over the anticipated leaning of the strategy and the suggestion that it might not adequately address land management for biodiversity in urban settings, and the suggestion that there is an imbalance in focus in favour of rural areas when there are also unique circumstances in and around our cities.

I will address other points that members raised. Alex Fergusson and Rob Gibson highlighted invasive alien and non-native species. Rob Gibson talked about unintended consequences and gave us a vivid—perhaps too vivid—illustration of them.

Elaine Murray, Aileen McLeod, Margaret McDougall and Angus MacDonald reminded us of the good work that is being done locally. Nigel Don was right to stress the importance of habitat protection, and Claudia Beamish revealed an apparent love of nightingales.

Jim Hume made the link between our threatened ash trees, Morgan cars and the Stratocaster guitar, which reminds us just how far biodiversity reaches out. Alison Johnstone raised the important issue of the impact of neonicotinoids and reminded us of the role of allotments. Stewart Stevenson talked about the need for local action on a micro scale and revealed that he is walking the walk and not just talking the talk by planting a hedge and 50 trees. The debate has reminded us how diverse biodiversity is.

One part of the overall discussion of biodiversity that has attracted widespread agreement is the importance of having in place effective measuring processes that allow us to quantify progress towards targets.

**Hanzala Malik:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Graeme Dey:** If Hanzala Malik does not mind, I want to get on with making a point that has not been made. I am sorry.

SNH developed a set of 17 indicators that related to the 2010 targets. The most recent assessment was conducted in 2009 and showed that, of the 197 species that were covered, only 5 per cent had increased or probably increased, 33 per cent had been stable or probably stable and 22 per cent had decreased or been lost since 1994, while no trend could be determined for 39 per cent. Of 39 priority habitats, 15 per cent increased and 28 per cent were stable, but 33 per cent decreased.

Those indicators will continue to be used up to 2020, along with the new indicators that are being developed to measure progress against the targets, as the minister said. We certainly need means of determining the progress that we make, which will need to be as accurate as possible if the monitoring committee that the minister announced is to have the information that it requires.

I will make a plea for plants. Shortly before Christmas, a rather attractive-looking publication landed on my desk in Parliament. Sadly, the content did not match the façade. It was a report from the charity Plantlife that painted a concerning picture about the state of wildflowers across the UK. It identified that, in the past 60 years, Scotland has lost 97 species, including 28 mosses and liverworts. [*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Graeme Dey:** That has happened in a country whose Atlantic and Western Isles coasts are reckoned to be a European stronghold for some mosses and liverworts.

As members will have realised, I never miss an opportunity to extol in Parliament the virtues of the area that I represent, but biodiversity is one sphere about which Angus has nothing to boast. Plantlife's report highlights that

"25 archaeophytes haven't been seen in Angus since 1980."

That situation is concerning from aesthetic and biodiversity standpoints.

A depressing paragraph in the report says:

"We are witnessing a gradient of decline in which widespread species become scarce and scarce ones become rare, while some rare ones eventually tip over the brink into the abyss of extinction."

The report poses the question:

"What might our flora look like in 2050 ... Will we ... defy the seemingly inevitable and hang on to today's flora and its diversity?"

I suggest that we need to take the issue very seriously in Scotland and that we need wherever possible to

“conserve plants in their place: in the spaces that nature has chosen”,

as Plantlife says.

The debate has been very good and has been graced by some tremendous speeches. At the risk of offending people, I will highlight the speeches by Alex Fergusson, Angus MacDonald, Annabelle Ewing and especially Jayne Baxter who is, as we all know, a new member but who made a very good speech.

Given the people who are involved, I know that the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee will do further justice to the subject when it comes before us for deliberation in a couple of months. I am sure that the committee will play its part in ensuring that challenge 2020 provides not just a vision but the guidance and leadership that are required to alter the present trajectory, which involves a reduced rate of decline. I hope that that will get Scotland on course to reach the 20 Aichi targets.

## Point of Order

16:59

**Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

This morning, before a meeting for stakeholders about the possible closure of the marine biological station at Millport, petitioners presented to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Mike Russell, a 10,000-strong petition. That petition was for the Scottish Government—it was addressed to Alex Salmond and presented to Mike Russell—and highlights the importance of the marine biological station to students across the United Kingdom. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):** Mrs McDougall, please stop for a moment.

I remind members that I have to listen to the member to judge whether her point is a point of order. Members have up to three minutes in which to make a point of order.

Mrs McDougall, under which standing order are you making your point?

**Margaret McDougall:** I am merely asking for advice, Presiding Officer. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Will you finish quickly, please?

**Margaret McDougall:** The petition asked the Scottish Government to work with others in education and industry, and with statutory bodies to ensure that the Millport marine station remains open. I met afterwards some of the stakeholders who were in attendance at the meeting, and they were, quite frankly, shocked that Mike Russell handed the petition to the University of London representative at the meeting. The petition was addressed to—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please make the point of order.

**Margaret McDougall:** The petition was addressed to the First Minister, Alex Salmond, but Mike Russell passed it to an outside body. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please come to the point of order.

**Margaret McDougall:** I ask the Presiding Officer to confirm whether Mike Russell's action was acceptable parliamentary conduct. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Margaret McDougall:** If it was not acceptable parliamentary conduct, what does the Presiding Officer advise should be done? *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

The member gave me notice of her intention to raise a point of order, but no detail of it was provided to me. Therefore, I will reflect on the matter.

## **Parliamentary Bureau Motion**

17:01

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):**

The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-05391, on committee membership.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that Alex Johnstone be appointed to replace Annabel Goldie as a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):**

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

The first question is, that motion S4M-05320, in the name of Rob Gibson, on biodiversity, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes that the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee will be examining the analysis of the responses to the Scottish Government's consultation on the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity as the government looks to update its current biodiversity strategy against a backdrop of a global failure to meet biodiversity targets set for 2010, the revised target to halt biodiversity loss by 2020 and the related Aichi targets.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-05391, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on committee membership, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that Alex Johnstone be appointed to replace Annabel Goldie as a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.

*Meeting closed at 17:02.*



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