



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 21 April 2015

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 21 April 2015

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 14:00]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Welcome back. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our leader today is the Right Rev Dr Robert Gillies, bishop of Aberdeen and Orkney.

The Right Rev Dr Robert A Gillies (Bishop of Aberdeen and Orkney): Each year on 16 April, we remember Magnus of Orkney, who was killed by the blow of an axe wielded at the instigation of his cousin Haakon in 1116. Rarely in mediaeval literature do we have such full accounts of what happened as we do for the life, untimely death and subsequent glorification of Magnus. In addition, his bones still exist. They have been authenticated and reburied in a pillar in Kirkwall's great cathedral, the building of which began only 20 years after his death.

Political activism in those days, and with it the unfortunate consequences of political rivalry, could lead to martyrdom, which might then progress to sainthood. However, such a process had to be supported by local veneration from among those who had known the murdered individual. Evidence of miracles was also necessary; so too—let it not go unsaid—was the support of the local bishop.

Mercifully in our times, and in these islands, political rivalries rarely lead to axe blows on the head. Likewise, promotion to sainthood rarely, if ever, follows political demise—whether with or without the support of the local bishop. However, for many beyond our shores, extermination by opponents because of political, religious, societal or clan and tribal rivalries is a very real and everyday occurrence.

One has only to think of conflicts in any one of many countries and regions around the world to recognise the point that I am making. In those places, local people, whether leaders or just ordinary folk, are martyred for no reason other than being who they are, where they are, and believing what they hold dear.

Sadly, there are those who would wish brutality of that kind to be imported here, so we do well to stand by the martyrs of today and to challenge those who wield the axe and the assault rifle. We do well to protect our shores and defend the peace and liberty so hard won in and for our nation. By doing so, we increase the chance that

evildoers, like Magnus's cousin Haakon, will repent, as indeed he did.

That much at least we can learn from the tragic death of St Magnus, whose life lives on as we keep his faith and sacrifice in mind.

The Presiding Officer: Before our next item of business, I want to make a few personal remarks about Tom McCabe who, as members are aware, passed away on Sunday.

Tom McCabe had a unique place in the Parliament. He was our first elected MSP and the Parliament's first ever Minister for Parliament. Tom was a good, decent man and, like others from the first session, he has left us far too early. I know that members will join me in expressing our deep sorrow to his wife, Shuming, and to all his family.

Business Motion

14:05

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-12973, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to today's business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Tuesday 21 April 2015—

after

followed by Topical Questions

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Bonomy
Review—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

14:05

Europe (Rescue of Migrants)

1. Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what response it has received to its letter to the United Kingdom Government regarding the rescue of migrants attempting to enter Europe across the Mediterranean. (S4T-00996)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The tragic deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean is, sadly, not just a recent experience. I have persistently raised the deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean since 2013. I raised the issue at the joint ministerial committee on Europe on 31 October 2014, and my letters of 3 November to the Minister of State for Europe, David Lidington, and of 20 January to the Minister of State for Security and Immigration, James Brokenshire, both highlighted that abandoning search and rescue is wrong in humanitarian and practical terms and that the current policy has clearly failed. An immediate rethink in strategic terms is essential.

The United Kingdom Government's response to my letter of 3 November 2014 focuses on the traffickers, not the victims, as did the Home Secretary's statement on Monday. The agreed 10-point plan from the European foreign ministers is more hopeful, and the agreed summit to be held on Thursday is a positive development.

Humanitarian issues are cross-border and pan-European ones. Together, the European Union must prevent the Mediterranean from becoming a watery grave for so many fleeing conflict, fear and hate.

Alison Johnstone: I welcome the cabinet secretary's strong stance on the issue. Poisonous and damaging rhetoric on immigration has allowed Governments to create a policy in which thousands of people drown at sea. The UK Government believes that a search and rescue operation is a pull factor, ignoring the push factor—the persecution, conflict and war that cause many people to leave home and family behind to embark on truly terrifying journeys without any guarantee of safe arrival, let alone a warm welcome. Does the Scottish Government unequivocally reject the concept that drowning people will stop others making the crossing?

Fiona Hyslop: I very much agree with that last sentiment. The argument was continually used that that would somehow avert people from travelling. It is quite clear that that policy has failed.

There is an important point about where we are now and how to go forward. Not only does the EU have to take collective responsibility, which it is starting to do, instead of leaving the Italians to deal with the issue on their own; one of the concerns is that, because the UK is not a member of Frontex, as it is not part of the Schengen area, it does not have direct involvement in the exercise, so all that it has provided at the request of operation Triton is two debriefing officers in 2014 and this coming year. Therefore, the rethink has to be not just about the approach to immigration but about the value of human life in a dangerous context in which adults and children are drowning in the Mediterranean. It is not just in recent years that they have been drowning. An estimated 10,000 people have died in the Mediterranean in recent decades.

We want strategic thinking, but the most important point and the argument that we should put forward to David Cameron and the other EU leaders is that, as well as dealing with the strategic issues that we all need to address, they must take a humanitarian approach first and foremost.

Alison Johnstone: The cabinet secretary will be aware that merchant ships are preventing an even worse crisis. They rescued approximately 40,000 people in 2014 alone, and everyone expects that number to increase. Does the Government support the calls of Amnesty International and others for more safe and legal routes to Europe for people who are fleeing persecution and conflict? As the minister noted, Frontex is beyond the control of the European Parliament. Does the Government support more parliamentary accountability for that agency?

Fiona Hyslop: I would encourage parliamentary scrutiny of the issue not just at the European level but at the domestic level.

There is a concern that so much of the emphasis in and the focus of the Home Secretary's statement and the 10-point plan are on the traffickers and the smugglers. However, when we look at migrants' experiences, we see that most of them have paid for transportation and then go on to claim asylum in Europe. The general approach must be scrutinised further.

Alison Johnstone's point about better management of merchant shipping and legal routes across the Mediterranean must be addressed. However, the key issue is where the people are fleeing from. Many are from Syria and many are from Libya. The overall response of Europe and, from our perspective, the UK to Syria must be addressed. The problem will not be easily resolved but, in the meantime, we must renew the humanitarian efforts.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): Presiding Officer, 1,400 souls have perished since the beginning of the year. We are 101 days into 2015 and we have lost 1,400 men, women and children. Those are not just migrants or trafficked people—they are human beings. The EU and the UK have abdicated their responsibility and committed a dereliction of duty to those people. Will the cabinet secretary provide an assurance to us all that she will lobby the next UK Government to reverse the coalition's refusal to support the planned search and rescue of those souls who have perished?

Fiona Hyslop: I appreciate Christina McKelvie's point. As the convener of the European and External Affairs Committee, she was at the committee session when the Italian ambassador set out the Italian concerns and their pleas for more co-operation across Europe. I agree with her about the need to treat people as individuals and to stress the humanity aspect of the situation. However critical I have been of the previous UK Government's approach, let us take the opportunity that Thursday's summit provides to think and act differently. With the encouragement of all parties, I am sure that we can ensure that any incoming UK Government will approach the issue differently. If it took a different approach, I am sure that it would get support from across the chamber.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am sure that everyone was horrified to see the reports over the weekend on the tragedies in the Mediterranean. Those lost were mothers, fathers, sons and daughters. They were attempting to find a better future for themselves and escape the terrors and dangers of their home country.

As both Alison Johnstone and the cabinet secretary rightly highlight, the tactic of cancelling the search and rescue operations last year has failed, with horrendous consequences. As the cabinet secretary said, the problems are complex, which will require not just the EU but the international community to work together. That includes the need for humanitarian assistance. What contribution is the Scottish Government making in that area?

Fiona Hyslop: In my correspondence to the UK Government last November and in January 2015, we indicated that the Scottish Government stands ready to help. We have also said to the UK Government that we can play our part in whatever co-operation is required on Syrian refugees. We will continue to make those offers.

The UK is in a different position from the rest of the EU, but it should not be allowed to abdicate responsibility. Its non-membership of Frontex should not prevent it from providing assistance.

We stand ready to provide our support under the powers that this Parliament has.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):

When the Italian ambassador gave evidence to the European and External Affairs Committee in October last year, he called for work with countries of origin for example, to co-ordinate aid better and to create economic opportunities and jobs in those countries to discourage people from leaving their homes to look for a better future. What will the Scottish Government do to assist that approach?

Fiona Hyslop: I referred to the Italian ambassador's committee evidence in which he addressed the complex wider issues. It needs a multi-pronged response. I must stress again that a humanitarian response in the Mediterranean seas outwith the borders of operation Triton must be part and parcel of that approach.

As part of our strategic efforts, we must look at the displacement of millions of people and provide support for the rehabilitation and compassionate treatment of refugees at their countries of origin, which is what the Italians suggested initially.

The Italians have stood on their own. Operation mare nostrum finished in November 2014. It was replaced by an operation that has clearly failed. However, we must stand by our Italian friends and colleagues. They should not bear the burden by themselves. I would encourage EU leaders to look at the Italian ambassador's proposals.

National Health Service Staff (Stress)

2. Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to NHS staff to deal with stress. (S4T-00997)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): Our staff are at the heart of our NHS and the Government takes their health and wellbeing very seriously. The staff governance standard for NHS Scotland commits all boards to providing a continuously improving and safe working environment that promotes the health and wellbeing of staff, patients and the wider community. Standards are subject to a framework of local and national monitoring to ensure that measures are in place to achieve and maintain those objectives.

Dr Simpson: The cabinet secretary will be aware of concerns about staff using drugs and alcohol. The use of drugs and alcohol has always been a problem but may be increasing. I know from experience as a clinician that people can resort inappropriately to drugs and alcohol as a result of stress.

Is the cabinet secretary aware of the figures in the latest staff survey that showed that a quarter of

nurses agreed that they had enough time to do their jobs? In other words, 75 per cent did not feel that they had enough time. Fifty per cent felt that they were too busy to provide an appropriate level of care and 64 per cent felt that they were under too much pressure. What individual support is offered to nurses to manage the stress that they will inevitably face, whatever resources are provided?

Shona Robison: I say to Richard Simpson that I am aware of the issues that he raises. The staff survey shows a mixed picture, with some areas improving and others showing that there is more to do. Drugs and alcohol are an issue for many people in Scotland who work in many professions. We have to ensure that, when the issue is identified in the workplace, the right support is there for staff, whatever their job.

On the general issue of support, I am sure that Richard Simpson is aware that the partnership information network guideline on managing health at work is one of a range of human resources policies that are agreed nationally in partnership between NHS employers, trade unions and the Scottish Government. It covers the full range of occupational health matters, including work-related stress and staff wellbeing.

We expect boards locally to set out how they will meet or exceed that national PIN policy. That includes ensuring that nurses and other professionals in the NHS are supported in whatever issues they are dealing with. I am happy to write to Richard Simpson with more detail on that, and particularly on the drugs and alcohol issue, if he would find that helpful.

Dr Simpson: I agree with almost everything that the cabinet secretary said. My one concern—I wonder whether she agrees—is that we need to think more proactively about how we advise individual nurses. Once they get to occupational health services, their stress has been recognised. They might have been off sick with that stress. Can Healthcare Improvement Scotland examine the issue in more detail and look at how we can support individuals before they get to the point at which the stress requires them to go to occupational health?

Shona Robison: I agree with Richard Simpson about early intervention and prevention. There has been a lot of work—not just in the NHS but in other workplaces—on putting in place a range of prevention measures to ensure that we have good mental health in the workplace.

Richard Simpson is right that we should ensure that interventions and support are there at the earliest stage, when issues are raised and identified, rather than waiting until something becomes an occupational health matter. I am

happy to look at his suggestion that some organisations in the NHS could consider more early intervention support. I am happy to take that away and get back to him about that.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): The cabinet secretary will be aware of the recent news that Brimmond medical group practice in Bucksburn, Aberdeen, will close at the end of September because a number of general practitioners are retiring or leaving and replacements have been unable to be recruited. Does she agree that that example is symptomatic of the crisis in GP recruitment and retention, as an ever-increasing workload, combined with reduced resources and the stresses affecting GPs' working lives, has led many GPs to retire early or to work abroad? Will she continue to work closely with the Royal College of General Practitioners and the British Medical Association to find an urgent resolution to the problem, which could well come to affect patients in many parts of Scotland?

Shona Robison: I am well sighted on the local issue that Nanette Milne raises. We have been working with GPs, the BMA and the Scottish general practitioners committee on the redesign of the contract, to sustain and support general practice for the future. We have negotiated changes to the current contract to reduce the GP workload associated with bureaucracy, and the redesigned contract will continue to go in that direction.

On the general point, the number of GPs has increased by almost 7 per cent. Scotland has more GPs per head of population than England has, and we have invested almost £70 million in GP services. However, there is more to be done.

I am keen to look at the opportunities for the new Scotland-only contract that will be introduced in 2017, and we want to begin those discussions soon. I have already had productive discussions with the BMA, the royal college and others about what we can do to make general practice more attractive. There are issues with young doctors not choosing general practice for a variety of reasons, and we need to overcome that trend and change the situation to get more young doctors to choose general practice. I am keen to do that and would be happy to discuss—on, I hope, a cross-party basis—with Nanette Milne and others how we can do that.

Bonomy Review

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a statement by Michael Matheson on the Bonomy review. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, and there should therefore be no interventions or interruptions.

14:22

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson): On 23 April 2014, my predecessor as Cabinet Secretary for Justice announced agreement across parties that stage 2 of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill should be deferred until after Lord Bonomy's post-corroboration safeguards review completed its work. The Scottish Government initiated the Bonomy review after listening to views expressed during stage 1 of the bill about the impact of removing the general requirement for corroboration. Since taking up post in November, I have said that I would await the outcome of the review before reaching a decision on how to proceed on the matter.

Lord Bonomy has now completed his review and has provided recommendations on what further safeguards would be required following the removal of the corroboration requirement. Lord Bonomy's reference group comprises 18 of the most knowledgeable and respected representatives from across the justice system, including key figures from victims and human rights groups, academia and the legal profession, and judges. Those experts have given the issue thorough and careful scrutiny, undertaking a substantial academic analysis and public consultation. I am grateful to the members of the group for the work that they have undertaken and for the considered and collaborative manner in which they took it forward.

The group's proposals are substantial and complex. Taking forward all the changes would have a considerable impact on our justice system. One key finding is that research on jury decision making in Scotland is required before fully informed conclusions can be reached on issues relating to juries. In particular, the report of the review concludes that, without research, it is not possible to reach a definitive position on jury sizes, or on the not proven verdict. The report gives a provisional recommendation on jury majorities, but argues that that issue should also be subject to research.

The issues that Lord Bonomy has raised are of crucial importance, and we should take the time that is necessary to consider them fully.

The Scottish Government will look at Lord Bonomy's detailed recommendations as a

package, alongside the corroboration requirement, and will form a view on the best way forward. Our justice system must provide the appropriate balance so that the rights of suspects, victims and witnesses all get appropriate protection. It must, as far as possible, be fair to all. That is why I want to take a holistic approach and look at the issues in the round.

The Government will now work with stakeholders during the remainder of the current session of Parliament to develop and seek consensus on a package of proposals for criminal justice reform, including a full response to Lord Bonyon's recommendations. Given that approach, I do not consider that there is sufficient time to complete that work before the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill resumes its parliamentary passage. On that basis, it is clear to me that proceeding with the removal of the corroboration requirement in the bill would be neither appropriate nor feasible. I am therefore making this immediate statement to inform Parliament of that development.

The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill should proceed with amendments to remove the provisions on corroboration and the related increase in the jury majority that is required for conviction. Removing the corroboration provisions from the bill will allow the bill's other provisions to go forward as soon as the parliamentary timetable permits. Those provisions include important reforms to police procedure and practice, as well as the strengthening of rights to access to legal advice for suspects and improvements to sheriff and jury trials.

The Scottish Government still believes that there is a case to be made for the abolition of the corroboration requirement, but we will now consider whether to proceed with it, as part of a wider package, in the next parliamentary session. We should not forget that the original motivation behind the proposal to remove the general requirement for corroboration was to improve protections and access to justice for victims of crimes that are committed in private, including domestic abuse, sexual offences and abuse of older and vulnerable people. The Scottish Government remains committed absolutely and unequivocally to improving protections for victims and tackling inequality.

We all recognise the added difficulties of prosecuting crimes that are committed in private, and we all share the belief that victims of crime deserve access to justice. Despite that, it has not been possible to build a consensus around the corroboration rule at this time.

Strengthening access to justice remains a key priority for the Government. I believe that jury research could play a valuable role in developing a way forward, and there could be merit in looking at

wider issues through such research. I will therefore look at Lord Bonyon's proposals in that area, and I am open-minded about taking them forward.

Lord Bonyon has indicated that some of his recommendations would be worthwhile improvements, independent of corroboration reform. I will consider whether it is appropriate to take forward any of the review's recommendations in the current parliamentary session. I will be very interested to hear the views of others in the Parliament on that possibility.

In the meantime, the Government is already making real improvements for victims by strengthening legal protections and providing direct support in relation to access to justice. We are making progress in addressing domestic abuse and sexual offences. Although overall crime rates—including violent crime rates—have fallen, more cases involving domestic abuse and sexual offences are reaching our courts. During 2013-14 alone, there was a 50 per cent increase in the number of charges with a domestic abuse background that were sent to court, and the number of people with a charge proved in court for sexual offences, including rape and sexual assault, increased by 22 per cent. Those increases reflect more proactive policing, better evidence gathering and consistent marking by procurators fiscal, and greater confidence among victims in coming forward.

We are extending the rights of victims through the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014, and the Police Scotland pilots of domestic abuse disclosure—which is known as Clare's law—are due to be completed in May.

Last month, we launched a public consultation on a range of proposals to help victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence, including seeking views on a specific domestic abuse offence; measures to tackle the unauthorised publication of intimate images; and directions to juries in rape trials. The First Minister also announced funding of £20 million over three years to help speed up the processing of cases through the courts, to support victims through the criminal justice process and to address perpetrator behaviour in order to prevent further harm. Those measures have been widely welcomed by victims organisations and we will continue to work with them to support victims of crime.

In conclusion, I express my thanks to Lord Bonyon and his reference group for their hard work on this substantial review. Their findings will be valuable in ensuring a clear, fair and coherent justice system for Scotland, and I will now take the time to consider the review's recommendations in detail.

The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill should proceed without the abolition of the requirement for corroboration, and I will consider corroboration alongside Lord Bonomy's recommendations. The Government still believes that there is a case for abolition, but I have listened to the range of views on the issue. I will continue to listen to all who have an interest in our justice system and to work collaboratively towards a fairer Scotland for all.

The Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business. Members who wish to ask the cabinet secretary a question should press their request-to-speak button.

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I join the cabinet secretary in praising the work of Lord Bonomy and his reference group, who have worked within a very specific remit to come up with what I think is a very thorough and sensible report.

Today, we are not debating whether there should be corroboration—that is a debate for another time—but I think that it right to contrast the cabinet secretary's comments today with those made 14 months ago. What a difference 14 months can make. On that occasion, the then Cabinet Secretary for Justice told Graeme Pearson that the Labour Party's view that it did not make sense to go forward with the corroboration proposal was

"selling out ... its principles"

and that

"Labour has sold its soul and is in danger of selling out the victims of crime."—[*Official Report*, 27 February 2014; c 28376.]

Today, however, I think that we have heard a very measured, considerate and mature response from the cabinet secretary, and he is to be commended for that. We will work with him in trying to move the issue forward in whatever way we can. In response to his question whether there is any agreement on taking forward certain issues, I think that, if we can reach a consensus, we will work with the Scottish Government on seeing whether that is possible.

I want to put down a number of questions for the cabinet secretary to consider. There is a debate to be had about whether the waiver of legal advice is, in fact, informed consent. Will he consider that issue carefully? Will he ensure that if any changes are made to police procedures and practice there are adequate resources for video evidence? Will he also ensure that, with any changes, adequate resources are available for the hard-worked and overpressed fiscal service? Finally, will he give some consideration to the question that Lord Bonomy has considered of publishing the Lord

Advocate's guidelines, and whether consultation on and publication of those guidelines would prejudice the independence of the Lord Advocate and the Crown Office?

Michael Matheson: My primary focus, as members will appreciate, is to move the issue forward. My focus in doing so is on improving access to justice for individuals who continue to have difficulty in having cases brought before the courts, particularly for crimes committed in private. I believe that there is common ground across the chamber for achieving that.

I also believe that the questions and associated points that the member raised show why we need to take time to consider Lord Bonomy's recommendations and their implications.

For example, if we were immediately to move to the introduction of audiovisual recording of all police interviews, there would be a significant resource implication, as well as procedural and training implications, for the police. Although it would be worth developing those issues outwith consideration of the whole issue of corroboration, we must consider them in the round.

I therefore believe that the best way in which to deal with Lord Bonomy's recommendations, and with the corroboration rule, is as a package. We should take the time to engage with stakeholders to get their views on those matters and then consider the best approach to moving forward, with that primary focus on improving access to justice for those who feel that they are being denied justice as a result of the present arrangements in our criminal justice system. That is the approach that I intend to take with the report and its recommendations.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement. I very much welcome his confirmation that the abolition of the requirement for corroboration will be removed from the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill. That is most certainly the right thing to do, especially given the Bonomy review's recommendation that the requirement for corroboration should be retained for hearsay evidence and confession evidence.

In his statement, the cabinet secretary seemed open to the implementation of the third way, which the Scottish Conservatives have called for since it was omitted from the Carloway review, and which Lord Bonomy was not allowed to consider in his remit. I refer to the retaining of corroboration while including it in a wider review of the law of criminal evidence.

Given that, will the cabinet secretary now consider some of the helpful and effective recommendations of the review group, for example those in relation to the Judicial Institute

for Scotland, to clarifying and simplifying the language used in jury directions and to varying the means of communicating directions to juries?

To address the cabinet secretary's specific question, I believe that the recommendations could be taken forward in this parliamentary session.

Michael Matheson: One of the reasons why I wish to take time to consider the recommendations as a package of measures is to ensure that the balance within our criminal justice system is fair and reasonable. I wish to take the necessary time to do that.

I am open to the views of other stakeholders on some of the specific recommendations that Lord Bonomy made, which perhaps could be introduced as part of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill at a later stage if there is a consensus on how that should be done. I am open to considering those issues, but we must consider them as a package, taking into account their overall impact on our criminal justice system.

The member referred to jury directions. As she will be aware, we have just started a consultation on jury directions for rape cases; that is part of our proposals and consultation on domestic abuse. There is scope to consider taking some of that work further.

I do not want to take a piecemeal approach to Lord Bonomy's recommendations. We need to consider them as a package and to consider what impact they would have in the overall balance of our criminal justice system. That is the approach that I intend to take, with that specific focus on improving access to justice for those who experience crimes in private and who continue to feel that their cases are not being given the right hearing in court because of the arrangements that are presently in place.

The Presiding Officer: We are due to finish this session at 2.50 and there are 10 members who wish to ask a question, so I urge members to keep their questions brief.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for his statement. I refer him to the Justice Committee's stage 1 report of last year in which, at paragraph 27, we said:

"The majority of Committee Members are of the view that the case has not been made for abolishing the general requirement for corroboration and recommend that the Scottish Government consider removing the provisions from the Bill."

The committees of this Parliament are sometimes told that they are not doing their job, but in this case the Justice Committee did its job,

and thank goodness the Government listened. Does the cabinet secretary agree?

Michael Matheson: I was a member of the Parliament's justice committees for almost seven years, and I think that the Justice Committee does a very good job. As Cabinet Secretary for Justice I have appeared before the committee a number of times, and it is always diligent in its scrutiny of the decision making and actions of Government and its ministers.

I recognise the role that the committee has played in considering the proposed abolition of the requirement for corroboration and the concerns that have been raised in that respect. As I said in my statement, I recognise that consensus has not been reached on the issue of corroboration and that views are polarised.

However, I highlight that the original purpose for which the abolition of the requirement for corroboration was proposed was to improve access to justice for those who experience crimes in private. I have no doubt that the Justice Committee will, in considering the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill later this year, be interested in how we progress Lord Bonomy's recommendations as a package of measures, and how that sits alongside the corroboration rule. I have no doubt that the committee will want to scrutinise in due course any proposals that come from Government.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): In my closing speech in the debate on 27 February last year, I pleaded with the then Cabinet Secretary for Justice to remove the corroboration provisions from the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill to enable further consideration. I was met with what seemed to be a very hostile response, so I welcome the statement from the current cabinet secretary.

Lord Bonomy's review group identified significant issues, such as dock identification. I am not sure that the final year of this session of Parliament would allow us sufficient time to address that issue, but I wonder whether the matter could, with regard to the case for ending dock identification and the means to do so, be examined separately.

Michael Matheson: Elaine Murray makes a reasonable point about dock identification. However, removing dock identification from the court process would place a significant burden on our prosecutors and police as part of the process that they would have to put in place prior to a case coming to court.

On the surface, some of these initiatives may appear to be fairly straightforward, but the potential resource implications in other parts of the justice system could be significant. It is therefore important that we do not just jump ahead and

decide to select one or a couple of Lord Bonomy's recommendations without considering the full impact further along in the system on prosecutors and our police service.

It is worth keeping in mind that the Bonomy review group has focused primarily on protections for the accused. We need to ensure that any of the measures that we take forward do not create an imbalance in our system that could be difficult to justify. At this stage, therefore, I do not want to commit to implementing any specific recommendations until we have worked through the full practical implications, but I am happy to ensure that, as we take forward the work with stakeholders, we inform Parliament on what we believe is the best approach.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I argued for and secured the suspension of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill process until the outcome of the Bonomy review had been reached. Lord Bonomy's report today vindicates that approach, because it exposes the scale of the task that the Parliament would have faced had Kenny MacAskill had his way and the bill had already become law. We should not forget, however, that Kenny MacAskill was backed by the entire Cabinet. I wonder whether the current cabinet secretary regrets his Government's obstinacy on the issue.

On a more positive note, I share the cabinet secretary's wish to secure a better conviction rate for crimes that are committed in private. Research into jury decision making could be crucial in finding a way forward. Can the cabinet secretary explain his thinking with regard to progressing that important matter?

Michael Matheson: The first thing that I should say is that I am proud of this Government's determination to improve access to justice for those who are denied access to justice. We make no apology for that and we will continue to take forward an approach that we believe will deliver that particular objective.

On the specific point around jury research, I am conscious that this issue has been raised by a variety of stakeholders in the past with regard to the benefits that could come from the practice. There were concerns about its potential impact on the contempt of court positions but, as Lord Bonomy has pointed out, there is a mechanism by which that can be done that would overcome that particular obstacle. That is why I am open minded on the issue of research. However, I am open minded on it on the basis that not only will it enable us to consider the issues of jury size, majorities and the three verdicts, but it will allow us to consider some wider issues. I want to consider it on the basis that there could be value in considering some other issues in our justice

system, not just on the basis of the specific issues that Lord Bonomy recommended it for. Again, as we move forward, I want to consider what that process might look like.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will appreciate that there remains widespread public concern about the historically low prosecution and conviction rates for sexual offences and domestic abuse. Can he offer anything further in the interim to address those concerns?

Michael Matheson: As I set out in my statement, considerable progress has been made in relation to domestic abuse and sexual offences cases reaching the courts, with the significant increase that we have seen since 2013-14. We want that work to continue. One of the benefits that we have had from the establishment of Police Scotland is the specialist investigations unit, which has been able to give much more focus and dedication to such crimes and has allowed greater expertise to be deployed in tackling domestic abuse and sexual offences cases.

The other aspect concerns the additional £20 million that the First Minister announced several weeks ago. That relates to ways in which we can improve the operation of our criminal justice system with regard to getting cases through the system more quickly, providing support to victims in the course of a case going through the courts and considering ways in which we can speed up the intervention methods that can help to reduce the occurrence of such offences in the first place. That involves initiatives ranging from the Caledonian scheme right through to the violence reduction programmes that we run in our schools. All those measures will allow us to continue to improve the ways in which people experience our justice system and to reduce the levels of domestic and sexual violence in our society.

Alongside that, I intend to work with stakeholders on the recommendations from Lord Bonomy to consider which of those measures can assist us to improve further access to our justice system in Scotland.

Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I note from the cabinet secretary's statement that the Police Scotland pilots of domestic abuse disclosure—which is known as Clare's law—are due to be completed in May. Will the cabinet secretary say whether resources are to be made available to roll out that good practice and whether we will see progress on the issue during this session of Parliament?

Michael Matheson: We have already seen progress during this session of Parliament in the Police Scotland pilots. The additional £20 million

that we have announced will allow us to consider what other programmes can be taken forward.

The feedback that I have had on the domestic abuse notification scheme pilot has been positive. People value the scheme and Police Scotland believes that it is valuable. I am sympathetic to the scheme. It, too, will form part of the work that we will take forward, and we will be looking to see what we can learn from the pilots, with a view to considering how those lessons can be applied on a national basis.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): Given that the motivation for removal of the requirement for corroboration was improved access to justice for victims of crime—an aim that I supported at the time and still support—what steps is the Scottish Government now taking to help victims?

Michael Matheson: One of the areas of work that we are taking forward is contained in the provisions in the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014, which will improve the way in which victims' rights are promoted and supported in our criminal justice system. Alongside that, since we announced the additional £20 million for domestic violence organisations, we have been engaged with the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, Scottish Women's Aid, Rape Crisis Scotland and the ASSIST—advice, support, safety and information services together—project, all of which are considering ways in which we can take forward more proactive measures to support individuals who experience domestic violence, and how we can improve the system through use of those resources.

Alongside that, as I mentioned earlier, I am keen to see being developed preventative measures such as the Caledonian system, which has already been rolled out in some parts of the country. It can help to reduce the risk of perpetrators of domestic violence committing similar offences again in the future.

The additional resource will allow us to scope more work in the area and to consider how the system can be rolled out in other parts of the country, and so help to support victims much more effectively.

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will be aware that on two occasions now I have consulted on reform of the three verdicts and on jury majorities. Notwithstanding the report from Lord Bonomy's group, does the cabinet secretary recognise that the consultations that I have undertaken show widespread support among the legal and academic professions and the public for progress on the three-verdict system? Given that I have

achieved the necessary support from colleagues across Parliament to take forward my member's bill proposal, will the cabinet secretary meet me to discuss how we can make progress? I ask because the issue has been hanging around for far too long and needs to be genuinely addressed.

Michael Matheson: I acknowledge the work that Michael McMahon has done on the matter over several years, and I would be more than happy to meet him to discuss the issue. I am mindful, though, that the Lord Bonomy review group does not feel that it can make a recommendation on the three verdicts that we have at present until the research on juries has been undertaken. That is why I am open-minded about undertaking that particular type of research. Of course, that is also an issue for Michael McMahon to consider with regard to how he wishes to pursue his member's bill, but I would be more than happy to meet him to discuss that further.

The Presiding Officer: Three more members wish to ask questions. I intend to take them all, given the importance of the issue, but I ask for the questions to be brief.

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): As a member of the Justice Committee, I regret that we did not manage to reach a consensus on the corroboration rule. In the light of the questions today and the reactions of different members, I ask the cabinet secretary why he cannot provide clarity as to why not all Lord Bonomy's recommendations can be taken forward in this parliamentary session.

Michael Matheson: As I have mentioned in a couple of my responses, there are a number of significant complexities in respect of those particular recommendations. For example, there is the issue around the jury research in relation to verdicts, majorities and how we operate our jury system. It has been indicated that that work could take some time; it could take more than a year—possibly two years—to complete the detailed research that is necessary in order to form the right decisions on the matter. It is simply not possible to fit that work in in this parliamentary session.

On dock identification, although it appears to be straightforward, there are potential consequences that have to be considered in great detail. I mentioned audiovisual recording of police interviews in response to Hugh Henry's question; again, the potential resource implications of that and the practical implications for the police are considerable. There is insufficient time within this parliamentary session to allow us to progress the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill as it stands, to look at all those issues fully and to consider them in

sufficient detail before we can arrive at a final decision.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I thank the cabinet secretary for his statement. He rightly referred to the report as a “protection” for the accused, and the report reiterates a concern that was picked up in a report that Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary for Scotland delivered to the cabinet secretary a number of months ago about suspects waiving their right to legal assistance at police offices and the implication that the cost of that is a factor. Will the cabinet secretary lay before Parliament regulations that will disapply the provisions of the Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986, which cause suspects to pay for the cost of legal assistance that is provided to them at police stations? That is something that the cabinet secretary could do to enhance protections straight away.

Michael Matheson: I am conscious that Lord Bonyon has flagged up that issue in his review. As John Finnie will be aware, there are already provisions in the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill on vulnerable adults waiving their right to legal representation. I will, of course, consider all the recommendations, including the one that the member has highlighted, in considering the best way forward. I will also consider the views of the member, of the Justice Committee and of other stakeholders before we come to a final decision on which of the recommendations we will take forward in the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): The cabinet secretary has talked a lot about crimes that are committed in private. He will know that many of the organisations that are involved in the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on men’s violence against women, including Rape Crisis Scotland, Scottish Women’s Aid and Zero Tolerance, were supportive of withdrawing the need for corroboration. If the corroboration reform is not to go ahead at this time, what steps will the cabinet secretary take to address those concerns? Will he meet the cross-party group to help to address them?

Michael Matheson: As part of our response to the Bonyon review today, we have been engaging with stakeholders that have an interest in the matter. A range of stakeholders have in the past expressed their views on abolition of the corroboration rule. We will continue to engage with them. I am, of course, more than happy to engage with the cross-party group at some point.

As I mentioned, we have a specific consultation on a domestic abuse offence and we are considering how we can use the additional £20 million to improve support in our court system for victims of domestic abuse. The provisions of

the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014 are there to support all victims, including victims of domestic violence, sexual violence and rape. All the measures that we have been taking forward are leading to improvements in our criminal justice system, so we will continue to move them forward. Alongside that, we will look at which aspects of the Bonyon package we can take forward to improve the way in which individuals access our justice system.

Christina McKelvie can be absolutely assured about the Government’s commitment to improving access to justice for those who continue to experience crimes in private and who experience difficulty in getting justice through our court system. That will continue to be a central focus of our improvements to the justice system.

Culture, Visitor Attractions and Events (Contribution to Economy and Society)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-12958, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the contribution of culture, visitor attractions and events to Scotland's economy and society. I would be grateful if members changed seats as quickly as possible, because we have no extra time available for the debate.

14:57

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I am pleased to open this debate on the role that culture, visitor attractions and events play in Scotland's society and economy. We in Scotland have an incredibly rich and diverse culture and a calendar of events that we treasure and celebrate. Culture is key to our quality of life and wellbeing. It roots us in place, shapes how we think of ourselves and how others see us, challenges the way that we think and expands our horizons. Culture makes a vital contribution to Scotland's economy—it supports recovery and increases sustainable economic growth—and it is part of the fabric of our society.

All that means that culture is a key contributor in delivering the First Minister's one Scotland approach to government. The strategic priorities that are set out in the new programme for government are based on three key themes of creating more, better-paid jobs in a strong, sustainable economy; building a fairer Scotland and tackling inequalities; and passing power to our people and communities.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Fiona Hyslop: Let me continue.

The cultural sector has a significant role to play in taking forward all three of those priorities.

Engaging with culture is life enhancing in its own right, but it is also known to have a positive impact on our wellbeing and quality of life. Evidence shows a significant association between cultural engagement and good health and life satisfaction. Analysis of the Scottish household survey data found that those who attended a cultural or historic place or event were almost 60 per cent more likely to report good health than those who did not attend, and they were also more than 50 per cent more likely to report high life satisfaction. That connection with place is key to the sense of wellbeing in our community.

The Scottish household survey data demonstrates the high value that people in Scotland place on our culture and heritage. It shows that, in 2013, 91 per cent of adults engaged in cultural activities, with 89 per cent agreeing with the statement:

"It is important to me that heritage buildings and places are well looked after".

However, there is no room for complacency. We must continue to widen access and participation so that all Scotland's people can benefit from all that culture has to offer.

We have a wealth of examples that demonstrate the sector's achievements. "Our Place in Time: the Historic Environment Strategy for Scotland" makes increasing participation in heritage a priority, and a dedicated group has been established to take that forward. Our work under the umbrella of Scotland's youth arts strategy, time to shine, is similarly designed to ensure that no one's background is a barrier to taking part in cultural life. It is supported by initiatives including the youth music initiative and cashback for creativity.

Aspire Dundee is an innovative project that is taking place in nine Dundee primary schools in areas of high deprivation and is enabling 2,000 young people to take part in music, dance or drama. I recently had the pleasure of visiting Sidlaw View primary school to see the project in action and was deeply impressed by the impact that it is having on young people's lives.

At GalGael in Glasgow, the journey on programme uses traditional building skills as a practical focus for people who have suffered such hardships as unemployment, depression or addiction. It helps them to pick up new skills as well as build greater personal capacity and resilience.

Through those projects and many more, the Scottish Government is working with the sector to ensure that everyone in Scotland has the opportunity to access, enjoy and benefit from our culture and heritage.

In addition to those inspiring projects, Scotland's local museums, galleries and libraries are all cornerstones of our communities. They provide places to tell our stories locally and contribute to health and wellbeing, education and community engagement. Local museums can provide a valuable lifeline for the communities that they serve by providing opportunities to connect with others and to address social deprivation and mental health issues that are facing the community. The festival of museums on 15 to 17 May this year will be an opportunity to celebrate what our museums have to offer and will include activities throughout Scotland.

Neil Findlay: I absolutely agree with what the cabinet secretary says about our museums, but they are good only if they are open. Last week, the national museum of Scotland was closed for two days because of an industrial dispute that has been going on for 18 months. When will she get a grip on that situation?

Fiona Hyslop: Clearly, any closure of a museum is to be regretted. I have encouraged the unions to co-operate with the management and vice versa.

Neil Findlay must be aware that National Museum Wales—of course, Wales is run by a Labour Government—is looking to remove the weekend working allowance from existing staff. Existing staff in the national museum of Scotland still retain a weekend working allowance. However, he is right to pay tribute to the staff, as I have always done in the chamber.

It is important that we recognise the role that museums play. Despite the difficulty in the public finances, I am proud and pleased that, through a period of recession, we have managed to keep our museums free for the public to access. I want that to remain the case as we progress and would not want anything to put that in jeopardy.

I recognise how important our libraries are. They have a crucial role to play in helping to tackle inequalities and empower communities.

Our cultural and creative industries make a substantial contribution to the economy and sustainable economic growth. They attract tourism, support employment and skills development and are a driving force for regeneration.

Scotland is well established as a leading events destination. That attracts significant numbers of visitors and yields benefits for the economy while enhancing the country's international profile and reputation.

Our heritage and visitor attractions are the lifeblood of our vibrant tourism industry—43 per cent of first-time visitors to Scotland state that they chose to come here to learn more about Scotland's history and culture. The historic environment is estimated to contribute in excess of £2.3 billion to Scotland's national gross value added economic growth and to account for 2.5 per cent of Scotland's total employment.

Investing in our cultural heritage infrastructure can deliver a wide range of economic and social benefits. Let us take New Lanark as an example. In the early 1970s, much of the village lay redundant, and demolition of many of the buildings was a genuine possibility. The decision was taken to invest in and revive the village with the intention

of maximising its potential to generate income in the long term from housing as well as visitors.

Forty years on, New Lanark is a flourishing United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization world heritage site and a living, working community, with the majority of its buildings restored and a community of 65 households. It is also a centre for renewable energy production and provides an award-winning education and access programme. It attracts more than 20,000 visitors each year and provides direct employment for more than 150 people through a hotel, a hostel, a visitor centre and the manufacture and sale of woollen textiles. It contributes £7 million annually to the region's economy.

Looking back, we should reflect that 2014 was a momentous year for Scotland and our cultural sector, with hundreds of events across the country celebrating the best of Scotland's culture and creativity. The Commonwealth games had a highly successful cultural programme, we hosted the Ryder cup and we held the second year of homecoming and the second international culture summit. It was also the 700th anniversary of the battle of Bannockburn. That is not to mention the many diverse festivals and cultural events that took place all over the country, cementing Scotland's position as a world-leading events destination.

The Glasgow 2014 cultural programme, which the motion refers to, was the most ambitious national cultural celebration ever to take place in this country and provided a wonderful opportunity for us to share our great cultural traditions and our contemporary creativity with visitors from all over the Commonwealth. The final evaluation will be launched in the near future, and I will keep members fully informed of that. We already have headline figures that show that more than 2,000 events took place, involving thousands of artists, performers and participants across hundreds of locations and venues the length and breadth of Scotland. More than 750,000 people attended the festival 2014 live zones at Glasgow green, Kelvingrove bandstand, the merchant city and BBC at the quay.

The programme included Generation—a landmark series of exhibitions celebrating 25 years of contemporary art in Scotland that featured the work of more than 100 artists at over 60 venues and attracted 1.3 million visitors. I was lucky enough to see exhibitions in Edinburgh, Orkney and Thurso. That was a huge statement about the continuing dynamism of art in Scotland and its place in the world as it inspires audiences.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I agree whole-heartedly with the very complimentary speech that the cabinet secretary

is making about Scotland's culture. However, will she admit that the increase in enjoyment of our culture and the greater participation in it are putting considerable pressure on the funding of it, which the Government will have to address, particularly if there is to be free access to our best facilities?

Fiona Hyslop: I mentioned that our galleries and museums are an important part of our experience, and Liz Smith is right to say that, in difficult times, across different Governments, there can be pressures on the culture budget. To date, in local government and national Government, there has been no disproportionate reduction in the budget for culture, but I would welcome any support that I can get from across the chamber in recognition of the increased demand arising from our appreciation of culture through the experiences that I have talked about and through curriculum for excellence, the youth music initiative and our youth arts strategy creating more demand and interest. The point is well made.

The experiences of the past year and the other measures that I have mentioned show that we are really upping our game on audience participation and access. Whether our festivals are small or big and international in outlook or community focused, they are a hugely important aspect of our culture that celebrates and showcases our culture and creativity. From the St Magnus international festival in Orkney to Linlithgow's party in the palace, there are examples from across the range of experiences.

We must acknowledge that the Edinburgh festivals continue to provide a gateway for the Scottish population to share new and exciting cultural experiences. It is interesting to note the number of local people who attend the Edinburgh festivals, which is counter to people's understanding. Record attendances and box office figures were achieved during the summer of the Commonwealth games, which was a fantastic achievement. In contributing to our tourism businesses, our festivals generate £261 million for the Scottish economy, £41 million of which is spent on accommodation and £37 million of which is spent in our cafes and bars.

A phenomenal number of people attended our festivals and cultural events in 2014, when Scotland outperformed the rest of the United Kingdom with a 10 per cent increase in the number of visitors to attractions. Many of the 600,000 people who attended the Commonwealth games also enjoyed the wealth of attractions in Glasgow. Glasgow's Riverside transport museum saw an incredible 41.8 per cent increase in visitor numbers, while the Scottish national gallery saw a 39 per cent increase, much of which was to do with the Generation programme. There was also a

6 per cent increase in visitor numbers at Urquhart castle and a 7 per cent increase at Stirling castle. Total visits to Scotland from overseas between January and September 2014 increased by 12 per cent.

Our national and international successes clearly demonstrate how important Scotland's thriving culture is to making Scotland a greater place to live in, work in, study in and visit. However, we cannot rest on our laurels. We need to continue to nurture and develop our artists and our cultural life by investing in our cultural infrastructure, encouraging skills development and creating further opportunities.

We look forward to the coming years. We have a number of events to commemorate the first world war, and this year will see the presentation of the 2015 Turner prize at Glasgow's Tramway.

The Edinburgh festivals continue to go from strength to strength. We have seen a 25 per cent increase in ticket sales in the space of just two years. Of course, we send Fergus Linehan best wishes for this, his first Edinburgh international festival as director.

Our festivals, events and heritage and our vibrant cultural life do so much more for our society and our economy. They provide windows for transformation—personally and for our communities—and bring understanding and appreciation of other cultures and other experiences. They challenge and celebrate the human spirit and tell our stories. That is why I am proud that the Government continues to invest in and nurture these important assets.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the great contribution that Scotland's rich and diverse culture, events and visitor attractions make to Scotland's society and economy; applauds the role that Culture 2014 and Festival 2014 played in the success of the Commonwealth Games; notes that Edinburgh's festivals continued to achieve record attendances and box office figures during the Games; welcomes the 10% increase in visitor numbers to Scottish attractions in 2014, which outperformed the rest of the UK, and recognises the key role that Scotland's festivals, cultural events and attractions play in making the country a great place to live, work, study and visit and in enhancing its international reputation.

15:11

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I very much welcome this afternoon's debate. Scotland has a rich and diverse cultural and artistic life, which is built on centuries of traditional music and storytelling but which is now expansive, multicultural, innovative and world leading. Our cultural experiences embrace our past while telling the story of today and of the future.

We are very fortunate to have a rich historic environment, a wide selection of collections at our museums and galleries, a growing creative sector with a focus on new media, internationally recognised festivals and a network of artistic and creative groups across Scotland, which are encouraging and supporting participation. All of those contribute significantly to Scotland being a great place to live in, work in, and visit.

It is right that we use some of this afternoon's time to celebrate, recognise and value what Scotland's culture, visitor attractions and events give us. We have national companies that are growing in stature; the new developments at the National Theatre of Scotland have been exciting; Scottish Ballet is touring its production of "A Streetcar Named Desire"; and the opening sales weekend for the Edinburgh festival was the busiest yet.

As well as providing a way to bring history to life and tell our own story, our historic environment has been a long-time attraction for visitors to Scotland and has a vital part to play in promoting the country, particularly in the film and television sector.

Historic Scotland has seen year-on-year growth in visitors, with the recent winter months recording a record-breaking number of visitors, up 10 per cent on the previous year.

Stirling castle saw a remarkable increase of 63 per cent on the previous year when it hosted the "Great Tapestry of Scotland" exhibition—I am looking forward to it coming to the Kirkcaldy galleries this summer. The tapestry is the perfect example of the coming together of history, craft, community storytelling, cultural inclusiveness and identity. Alexander McCall Smith, Andrew Crummy and Alistair Moffat are to be thanked for their initiative and leadership on the project.

The cabinet secretary talked about the success of the Commonwealth games cultural programme. Last year the whole of the Commonwealth was able to enjoy not just the sport on offer in Glasgow but our thriving cultural community across the country.

Scotland is rightly proud of both our rich history and our multiculturalism. Our arts sector is a great example of how we can marry the two together. The Commonwealth games afforded us the perfect opportunity to showcase that to the world. Events such as the Glasgow mela, which were already established, were able to promote and play a prominent role in the year of celebration. I hope that this year, which is the 25th anniversary of the mela in Glasgow, will be the biggest and best yet.

Scotland's festival programme is wide ranging and exciting. At the start of the year we all debated

the winter festivals and recognised the contribution that they make to our economy and cultural life. The festivals programme continues to grow from established city festivals to an increasing number of regional festivals, bringing variety to local programmes, as Liz Smith's amendment highlights. Along with everything else that Scotland has to offer, our festivals enhance our international reputation.

One the biggest festivals in Scotland and the UK is T in the Park, which generates £15.4 million for the Scottish economy and some £2.7 million at local level. It attracts international acts to Scotland, ensuring that Scotland is a vibrant part of the festival circuit. Having been based at Balado for many years, it is in the process of currently moving site. Clearly, that is at a planning stage with Perth and Kinross Council, with a decision due to be made next month. It is up to the council to make the decision based on the facts before it, but we should today recognise the social, cultural and economic importance of the festival. As a Mid Scotland and Fife MSP, I recognise the festival's previous good environmental record at the Balado site, where it was the only UK festival to be awarded the greener festival award for seven years running.

As Labour's amendment recognises, alongside commercial activity there is a wide range of cultural activity supported by volunteers, with which people of all ages across Scotland engage. There are multiple benefits of cultural engagement. As we progress through life, we increasingly become the audience rather than creators, but there should be more encouragement and opportunity to do both.

In May, voluntary arts week will encourage people across the UK to try something new. More than half the UK adult population is involved in some kind of regular voluntary arts activity, from choirs and ceramics to dance and drawing. We do not tend to think of that as a crucial part of Scotland's economy, but those activities often support smaller venues and small local businesses, and they help to support viable local economies. Those opportunities can transform community engagement and generate good mental health and self-confidence.

All those activities and more, which I am sure that other members will talk about, support our growing confidence as a country. Its creative expression is a key ingredient of a healthy, productive, vibrant and modern country, and I am proud of what we achieve here in Scotland.

We need to better understand the engagement that is happening. The cabinet secretary commented on the recent household survey, which raises some interesting issues about engagement, attendance and participation in

culture. We have a range of activities. Last year, Creative Scotland's regularly funded organisations alone delivered some 62,000 performances, more than 9,000 exhibitions and almost 15,000 screenings. How deep and wide is that reach? There are positive figures—91 per cent of adults engaged in culture through attendance at or participation in a cultural event—but some interesting figures make it clear that there is much more to do if we are to get the greatest benefit from Scottish cultural activity.

An individual's level of education and income are key. Attendance at cultural events is highest among those from the most prosperous areas and those with the highest level of qualifications. The percentage of people with the highest level of qualifications who attended a cultural event is 93 per cent, compared with 53 per cent of those with no qualifications. There is a gap of 18 percentage points between the most prosperous 20 per cent and the most deprived 20 per cent, and there are similar indications of exclusion for people who have long-term physical or mental health conditions, who are less likely to attend cultural events. Participation in cultural events tells the same story: it is lowest among those in the most deprived areas, those with the lowest qualifications and people with a long-term health condition.

There are significant differences among age profiles. Attendance at cultural events decreases with age, with the decline starting to accelerate in the over-45s. That is concerning, because artistic and cultural experiences bring meaning, enjoyment and social interaction to our lives, and that is important for all ages.

That is all significant. We all recognise the value of cultural activity, yet too many people appear to be excluded. Do we understand fully the reasons for that? What steps are we taking to address it? Where should public policy and funding be directed if we want to see greater, more equitable engagement in culture?

We must recognise and address the fact that much cultural activity is done at local level by our local authorities and cultural trusts and we need to support that. There is a lot going on in Scotland. I will briefly mention Glasgow Life, which is doing a lot of work to engage with some of Scotland's most deprived communities. In a time of financial constraint, the arts can come under pressure, with no statutory protection, so we need to recognise and promote the value that they bring to individuals and our communities.

Our amendment highlights the welcome culture counts campaign, which since 2011 has played a role in articulating the importance of our cultural lives. It provides a platform for discussion of future

policy and is an advocate for the value of culture in its widest sense.

Our amendment also talks about people who work in the sector, about whom I will make a few points. Although the focus is often on performers, there is a host of technicians, support staff and engineers who work across the sector. Recently I visited Pitlochry theatre—I know that the cabinet secretary was there last year—where people talked to me about the skills gaps among theatre technicians and the difficulty that there can be in Scotland in getting people with appropriate training and experience. The creative industries are a growth sector and are increasingly important to our national economy, as well as an important tool for regeneration of regions and communities, and we need to ensure that we have the right skills coming through.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that the member has to close.

Claire Baker: In addition, there are infrastructure needs. There is a need for venue viability. The cabinet secretary is well aware of the recent journey of the Byre theatre and the support needed by the Beacon Arts Centre. Such venues are important for delivering cultural experiences outside our cities. We need to ensure that we have a strong regional network.

There are issues to do with low pay and in some cases no pay across the sector. The cabinet secretary is well aware of the on-going dispute at National Museums Scotland, which is leading to strike action at some of our most well-known and visited museums. That dispute needs to be resolved. As the direct funder of the national museums, the cabinet secretary has a responsibility.

There is also the Musicians Union's work not play campaign, which challenges practices of no pay or very little pay for performances. If we are to have a vibrant, varied and exciting cultural sector, we need to support artists to make a living.

I welcome the opportunity to argue for the importance of Scotland's cultural and artistic community.

I move amendment S4M-12958.2, to insert at end:

“; welcomes the Culture Counts campaign, which promotes the value of culture in Scotland, including culture's contribution toward improving learning, health, wellbeing, confidence and quality of life; looks forward to Voluntary Arts Week in May 2015, which highlights the positive contribution to Scotland's vibrant cultural sector made by voluntary arts, including encouraging people to engage with arts and culture in their community, and acknowledges the dedication and hard work of staff and

volunteers throughout Scotland in ensuring that venues, creative hubs and organisations are accessible and welcoming to all".

15:20

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): We are very happy to support the Scottish Government's motion and the Labour Party's amendment.

As the cabinet secretary rightly said, it is very hard to overstate the enormous contribution that Scotland's culture and associated events and visitor attractions make to our economy and society. On the one hand, the very positive economic impact in relation to job creation and economic growth is unmistakable, but just as important is the enriching nature of such a vibrant and evolving culture, with so many wonderful things to do and see. That cannot be overlooked.

There were nearly 15 million visitors to Scotland in 2013, and tourism remains one of the largest and fastest-growing sectors of the economy. Although the majority of Scotland's tourists come from within the UK, our attractiveness to international visitors is considerable and is probably on the way to increasing. In fact, the US news channel CNN named Scotland as the number 1 destination for US tourists in 2013. That was a very welcome accolade for us.

Fiona Hyslop: I have just returned from the US. Will Liz Smith acknowledge that the showing of "Outlander" in the US will undoubtedly add to the impetus for US visitors to come to Scotland?

Liz Smith: I could not possibly dispute that. I hope that the cabinet secretary enjoyed her time across the Atlantic.

The reasons behind Scotland's international popularity are probably easy to understand. Some say that it is because of our long and exciting history of epic battles; some say that it is because of our colourful historical personalities; and some say that it is because of our royal intrigues. Obviously, our rich culture and traditions have very much helped to shape the world in almost every conceivable way. The French philosopher Voltaire famously captured that sentiment in the middle of the 18th century when he noted:

"We look to Scotland for all our ideas of civilisation."

From Scotland's scientists, inventors, architects and philosophers to its writers, sports stars, musicians and artists of all sorts, our culture continues to exert a marked influence in the furthest corners of the globe.

Scotland's events and attractions range from the world-class arts festivals that the cabinet secretary has described and our sporting events, museums

and galleries, to all sorts of things that take us to every part of the world to attract our visitors.

The economic benefits of that tourism are striking. Figures that VisitScotland released highlight the fundamental importance of the growth in the tourism sector to the Scottish economy in relation to job creation and economic growth. There is as much as £220 million each year just from golf tourism alone. VisitScotland has estimated that, in 2013, visitor expenditure totalled nearly £5 billion. That is a considerable achievement. Moreover, it supports nearly 300,000 jobs, which equates to almost 11 per cent of the Scottish workforce.

The cabinet secretary mentioned last summer. We can all be very proud of events such as the Commonwealth games and the Ryder cup, and we should congratulate all the people who took part in them and really put Scotland on the international stage.

Obviously, there will be issues. Claire Baker is quite right when she talks about the sustainability of some aspects of tourism.

I come to my amendment. Obviously, there is a very positive impact in our rural communities, and that brings a bit of a dilemma. The number of jobs per head of the population is really quite high, but some of our rural areas currently have difficulties with sustainability. Many have lost their library, local school, police counter or various other local services such as the post office for the local community.

Rural festivals and events obviously help to bind a community together, which leads to the enrichment of culture that the cabinet secretary spoke about. However, there is a potential dilemma there. If we want people to access events as freely as possible, but also to ensure that those events can be sustained, that obviously takes much greater resource from the Scottish Government.

We want to be proud that demand is increasing and that the sector is healthy because it has become much more diverse—indeed, that is good news. However, the sustainability of our rural communities is part of our society's fabric, and we must look for that in future.

The economic benefits are absolutely clear, as is the social enrichment of our culture. More important is how we envisage society moving forward and passing on a lot of Scotland's best assets to future generations.

Winston Churchill observed that

"perhaps only the ancient Greeks surpass the Scots in their contribution to mankind."

That makes us all immensely proud to be Scottish. The “contribution to mankind” stems from a deep cultural heritage from which so many superb visitor attractions and events have stemmed. Those not only benefit us economically but enrich us as human beings in our society and in our local communities. I bring my amendment to the chamber on that basis. As I say, we are very happy to support the Government’s motion and the Labour amendment.

I move amendment S4M-12958.1, to insert at end:

“; and believes that smaller cultural events and festivals have a crucial role to play in sustaining more fragile, remote rural communities”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask members who hope to contribute to the debate to press their request-to-speak button, please. We are very tight for time. Speeches should be of six minutes, although that may have to change.

15:26

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): I am sure that no one in the chamber underestimates the importance of Scottish culture to Scotland’s economic wellbeing. For example, in 2011-12, there were 1,314,974 visitors to Edinburgh castle alone. Edinburgh castle is Historic Scotland’s top visitor attraction, and although it is situated in the capital city, the economic benefits of visitors coming to Scotland to see the castle benefit our country’s wider economy. Those benefits to all parts of our economy cannot be overstated.

It is not just the capital or other big cities that benefit. In 2011-12, Skara Brae, which is one of my favourite places to visit, was Historic Scotland’s fourth most popular site, attracting 68,852 visitors. All those visitors to Orkney needed transportation, accommodation and refreshments—and, of course, they spent money and took back souvenirs of their visit.

In West Scotland, Historic Scotland’s most visited attraction is Dumbarton castle, which is well worth a visit—to which, I am sure, the cabinet secretary can attest. In 2011-2012, it attracted 14,623 visitors. It should attract many more visitors than that because it is a fascinating place to visit and, indeed, a great stop-off point on the way to Loch Lomond and the Trossachs.

It is not just our interesting history that makes a contribution to our economy. In 2011, filming boosted Glasgow’s economy to the tune of some £20 million. I think that we can all remember George Square’s transformation for a dramatic scene from “World War Z”. However, it is not just the big stars and productions that are important—smaller productions with only one-day or two-day shoots also contribute to the economy.

In 2012, the Edinburgh festivals made an economic impact of £261 million, and sustained 5,242 full-time jobs in Edinburgh alone. It is easy to overlook the boost to the economy that is made by more recent and more youthful events. *The Herald* reported that a study of T in the Park 2014 showed that the festival’s economic impact was almost £15.4 million. In 2010, the Celtic Connections event was held in Glasgow. The festival, which started only in 1994, generated more than £10 million to the city and £12 million to the wider Scottish economy.

Innovation through the introduction of modern showcases for Scotland’s cultural heritage—a heritage that has gone around the world with Scottish emigrants—has proved to be popular and successful.

Our economy is boosted not just from within, but from without, because Scotland has a strong brand that is recognised and admired the world over. For example, VisitScotland noted that after the Disney film “Brave” was released, Dunnottar castle, which was the inspiration for Dunbroch castle in the film, and the Callanish standing stones reported significant increases in visitors in the summer of 2013 of around 16 per cent and 10 per cent respectively, with the interest in “Brave” being the principal reason behind the rise in visitor numbers.

There is no doubt that our culture boosts our economy and creates jobs; in that particular sense, our culture is good for our country. However, our vibrant cultural scene is good for Scotland and for everyone who lives here in a much wider and more profound sense.

A Norwegian study, published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*—I knew that I would fall over that word—the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*—

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Say it again.

Stewart Maxwell: No, I will not say it again.

On 23 May 2011, *The Daily Telegraph* reported the finding of the study that

“Simply observing culture improves the physical health and mental wellbeing of men”

and that

“in men all ‘receptive cultural activities’ were linked to better health.”

The academics behind the report concluded that

“This population-based study suggests gender-dependent associations between cultural participation and physical health, anxiety, depression and satisfaction with life.”

In 2013 there were, sadly, 795 suicides in Scotland, of which 611—nearly 77 per cent—were

men. Culture is life enhancing and men stand to benefit enormously from cultural participation.

In an article in the *Canadian Journal of Communication* in 2006, there was a report of the findings of a workshop of experts who had met to discuss the question, “What are the social effects of participation in arts and heritage?” According to the article,

“The participants at the workshop identified six social effects of culture, arts, and heritage”,

among which was the finding that culture builds social cohesion and increased citizenship capacity. Social cohesion was defined as

“the willingness of people in a society to cooperate with each other in common enterprises to achieve collective goals”.

The report also noted that

“Increased civic participation is a consequence of a dynamic and diverse cultural scene in the community.”

Given all of the above, I was pleased to note that the Scottish household survey 2013, which was mentioned earlier, found that 91 per cent of adults engaged in culture of some sort, 80 per cent of adults had attended a cultural event or a place of culture, and 78 per cent had participated in a cultural activity in the previous 12 months. Sadly, however, there is still in Scotland, through deprivation, a divide when it comes to participation—just as there is with education, health, longevity and every other indicator.

The Scottish household survey 2013 found that 33 per cent of people in Scotland’s most-deprived areas were more likely to agree that culture and the arts are

“not really for people like me”,

compared to only 16 per cent in the least-deprived areas.

It is now a well-known fact that social inequalities and deprivation lead to poorer outcomes in all aspects of people’s lives. Successive Scottish Governments have worked hard through many initiatives to counter the effects of deprivation on the lives of the poorest people in Scotland. Have a heart Paisley, the Cranhill community project, and childsmile—the nursery toothbrushing project, which has proved to be extremely successful—are just a few examples of the efforts that have been made. However, there is a case to be made for building culture into the strategies for improving Scotland’s physical and mental health.

When the Scottish Government ministerial task force on health inequalities next meets, perhaps it will take into account the tremendous impact for good that culture has, and make some attempt to build increased access to cultural events and

cultural participation into its considerations on the best way of improving the lives of the people of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that I need to make it clear that there is absolutely no spare time in the debate. Members must stop before six minutes.

15:33

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Fiona Hyslop for the motion and Claire Baker for her amendment.

Regardless of its constitutional status, Scotland is a proud nation. Our unique culture makes Scotland unlike any other place in the world. There is clear evidence from the previous year that proves that Scotland’s cultural identity is valuable, not only to our society but to our economy. As a nation, we have much to offer the world, as is seen in last year’s impressive increase in tourism.

The international reputation of Scotland can be immensely beneficial for our economic growth. With 12 world-famous international festivals, Scotland has a platform for connecting with the rest of the world, which brings money, resources and a brand that can prove to be invaluable.

I have seen the effects that the latest Commonwealth games had on the city of Glasgow. Millions of pounds re-energised the Clyde waterfront and much of the east end of Glasgow. The games were not only about sports, though; the cultural events of the Commonwealth games festival were an amazing success that brought crowds and recognition to Glasgow, as well as the rest of Scotland.

In terms of a legacy, those events have proven to offer not only a temporary benefit but substantial long-term promise. I join many of my MSP colleagues in welcoming those promising results, but I urge the Scottish Government not to allow complacency. The international recognition that we seek is not inherited but must be earned and nurtured. We in Scotland must always keep our culture close, but when we share it with the world amazing things happen. Let us continue to foster our identity so that we can share it with more and more people around the world. To do that, we must continue to fund festivals and to broaden international awareness, and we must always improve how we brand our nation to the outside world.

To give an example, I believe that the Glasgow mela should be in the Scottish Government’s funding pool; such an important event should be under a national banner. I know that Glasgow City Council would not want to give up such a successful event, which started with small events

around the city and culminated in their coming together for one to two days, and now for three days, to create a successful event. This year is the mela's 25th anniversary, and I call on the Scottish Government to play its role in ensuring that it is a successful event not only in this 25th anniversary year, but as an event that continues in the Scottish calendar. I believe that multicultural events such as the Glasgow mela need that recognition, so I look forward to Fiona Hyslop's comments and to her drawing up a list of events including the mela that can develop ideas for representing all Scotland's communities.

Recently, the focus seems to have been taken off what minorities contribute to our culture and history, and they have been let down. Organisations such as those that organise the Edinburgh and Glasgow melas go a long way in supporting and rekindling such activity. Having been a local councillor in Glasgow for 17 years, I know for a fact that it took a lot of time, effort, energy and dedication by a small number of people to establish the Glasgow mela and to see it become a successful Scottish event. The participants come not only from all over Scotland and from all over the United Kingdom but from all over the world, and that makes me really proud, because when we celebrate the mela in Glasgow it is not only about the minority communities but about minority communities engaging with the rest of the communities in Scotland while at the same time selling the brand of Scotland around the world. That is something that, as a Glaswegian, I am proud of. I therefore call on the Scottish Government to look at some of the minority organisations that bring so much to our culture and diversity that we can be proud of.

15:38

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): I am lucky to represent the constituency of Aberdeenshire West, so it will come as no surprise to the cabinet secretary that I want to mention Huntly. In Huntly, they say that "The town is the venue", because people there engage with the community. They take arts to the community, whether it be walking, painting or engagement with local folk music and dance, but that is the story in only one area, because Deveron Arts promotes that activity in the Huntly area. I also have 12 castles in my constituency. I have not been to all of them, but—

Christine Grahame: Have you not?

Dennis Robertson: Not yet, but I can assure members that we have 12 castles and one palace, at Balmoral.

Does my constituency sell itself? In some ways, it does. People come back to the area because of

their clan origins. The other week, I was in Finzean—which is a name that I love saying in this chamber—at the Finzean estate. I was reminded that the Farquharsons have been there for only 400 years and was told that perhaps they could soon become local. I discovered that that estate is a breeding place for the capercaillie.

I am immensely proud of the community spirit in the area. In the community hall, older and younger people are brought together and mix well, whether in putting on performances to raise money for the estate or in exploring the area's fine woodlands. They have developed their own community spirit.

Liz Smith mentioned that Scotland's rural areas are in danger of missing out, but I think that the opposite is true: some of our rural areas are thriving. The members of the community in Logie Coldstone in my constituency have embraced one another. They work with the local school and with young people to look at their history and their culture. In rural communities, there is a great sense of wellbeing, which is extremely important—

Liz Smith: I do not deny that some rural communities are doing a fantastic job, but in other rural communities the situation is much more difficult, not least because the sustainability of some services has been threatened. That is where support needs to be provided.

Dennis Robertson: I fully appreciate and understand what Liz Smith says, but people in the communities that I am talking about have seen that not as a barrier but as a challenge and an opportunity to move forward using the limited resources that are available in those communities. Instead of looking to the local council or the Government, they are asking what they can do to embrace their own heritage. We should encourage more of that in our communities.

I talk about Aberdeenshire West with great pride. When it comes to health and wellbeing, people in many of our small towns and villages are doing extremely well. They are going out walking and exploring their heritage and, during the winter, they are getting people to come and talk about the past—the poetry, the folk music and the folklore. That is exciting for many of our people—especially people in the Alzheimer groups, who are given an opportunity to embrace their past and to talk about it with passion and, indeed, happiness.

We also have Westhill Men's Shed, which brings together men who can relate to some of our older industries. Working with old tools, they have restored steam engines. They ask what they can do for their community. Westhill Men's Shed allows a group of men to talk quite fondly about the past—not the distant past, although when I hear some of the stories, it makes me wonder.

I am very fortunate to have been to many of the places in my constituency that I have mentioned. Recently, I met Paul Anderson, who is one of Scotland's world-renowned fiddlers. He graciously wrote a tune called "Mr Q". Within communities, young people are learning about the older traditions, such as the music that keeps us alive. That expectation is there.

My constituency is a great place for tourism. We have distilleries, Lochnagar, the palace at Balmoral and the fishing. The fishing needs to be sustainable so that if the tourists come, the fish are there—perhaps the cabinet secretary can speak to other ministers about that.

To conclude: isn't it nice to be the MSP for Aberdeenshire West?

15:44

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to participate in this afternoon's debate on Scotland's culture and the benefits that it brings to our economy and wider Scottish society. Like other members from across the chamber, I am proud to be Scottish, proud of our history, culture and heritage, and proud of what our nation has achieved and continues to achieve. From Robert Burns to Disney's "Brave", from whisky to Stornoway black pudding, from the Highland games to golf at St Andrews, from tartan week in the United States to the tartan army travelling the globe and—every once in a while—being left disappointed, Scotland's culture, heritage and people make us all proud to be Scots and are all tremendous ambassadors for Scotland.

Scotland attracts millions of domestic and overseas visitors each year, with more than 12 million people having attended Scotland's tourist attractions last year. Many of those attractions saw a 10 per cent increase on the 2013 figures. The Commonwealth games and the Ryder cup played an important role in attracting visitors to our shores, and their benefits to our economy are clear. I was delighted that Strathclyde country park in my region hosted the first competitive event of the Commonwealth games—the triathlon—with thousands of athletes and visitors from across the globe making their way to North Lanarkshire. In addition to that, the cycling time trial took place along the A80 corridor, showcasing the villages in the Muirhead and Moodiesburn area.

The games' legacy was always of utmost importance so it is excellent to see that more than 3,000 Commonwealth apprenticeships have been secured, more than £198 million has been spent on new and improved sports facilities, and more than £145 million-worth of conferences and events was secured in Glasgow and the wider area due to

its having host-city status. All that contributed massively to Scotland's economy and has attracted visitors to see our sights.

There can be no doubt that the talents of the people of Scotland have strengthened Scottish culture, from Edwin Morgan's fascinating "Sonnets of Scotland" to the bizarre imaginative world of Iain Banks's "The Wasp Factory" and the humour and desperation of Irvine Welsh's "Trainspotting". Scotland's literary leaders have helped to take Scotland to the world. Similarly, we have artists such as Andy Scott, whose now world-famous sculptures attract thousands of people to locations across my region of Central Scotland, and we have thousands of talented actors, directors and producers who entertain audiences here and across the globe.

We also have the benefit of many excellent visitor attractions, from Edinburgh castle in the east to the more modern Glasgow science centre in the west. Across the length and breadth of Scotland, locals and foreign visitors alike flock to those attractions. I am delighted that in my area, in Cumbernauld, we have the fantastic Palacerigg country park. Established in the early 1970s, Palacerigg has developed into a hub of conservation, countryside recreation and environmental education. Over the years, more than 40 hectares have been transformed from farmland, and hundreds and thousands of native trees and shrubs have been planted. Palacerigg is also home to a unique rare-breed collection, including Eriskay ponies, Tamworth pigs and Scots Dumpy poultry among an extensive collection of other rare farm animals. That collection and the wider natural beauty of Palacerigg attract thousands of people, free of charge, every year.

Not too far from Palacerigg is Summerlee, which is Scotland's leading industrial heritage museum and is set around the 19th century Summerlee ironworks in Coatbridge. The museum has many attractions, including Scotland's only operational heritage tramway and a re-created mine, along with miners' cottages. It is open all year round and is free to visit. Central Scotland has excellent cultural venues, which attract local people and international visitors year on year and contribute greatly to Scottish society and our wider economy. That is replicated right across Scotland.

Through the success of international events such as the Commonwealth games and its legacy; through UK-wide events such as the British transplant games, which will be hosted by North Lanarkshire in 2017; through international venues such as the Hydro attracting world-famous performers; through Scotland's natural beauty and historical sites; and through our food, our drink and—most important—our people, I am confident

that Scotland will continue to welcome the world to our shores and that we will continue to enhance our international reputation.

15:50

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I say to Dennis Robertson that he should just forget Aberdeenshire West—welcome to Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale. The next train leaving Edinburgh Waverley is the train for the Borders, calling at Newtongrange, Gorebridge, Stow, Galashiels and Tweedbank. The date is 6 September 2015, and the fare will be less than £10 end to end, with arrival at the final destination in 55 minutes every half hour at peak times and hourly off peak. The first train, for those who are up with the lark, is at 5.20 am from Tweedbank. People can get the last train back from Edinburgh at 11.54—not a minute later.

We have come a long way in 16 years, from the Campaign for Borders Rail, the petition to the Parliament in 1999, the cross-party group on Borders rail and the Parliament's vote to restore the line on 2 June 2000. The line is on budget and on time. It is the most significant economic development for Midlothian and the Scottish Borders in decades, not just for commuters but for opening up the entire area to a substantial increase in tourism. There is plenty to see, such as the Scottish mining museum, which is housed in the restored Lady Victoria colliery at Newtongrange. The museum is already predicted to hit 63,000 visitors this year and is the only Scottish visitor attraction to have won the best visitor award. It is currently graded as a five-star attraction.

There is also the purpose-built mining village around Newtongrange, with rows of identical cottages on First Street, Second Street, Third Street, Fourth Street and so on. It is not easy to get lost there. For the opening of the railway, people in Newtongrange have got together with VisitScotland, Midlothian Council and the local tourism forum to create tourism packages, joint ticketing and special events. That example shows how opportunities around the railway line are opening up.

It is proposed to have a customised building at Tweedbank for the great tapestry of Scotland. That is not my choice of location—and this is where I get controversial. I think that it was the trustees who decided to have a business park. It is a mystery to me why a tourist attraction is being sited at a business park. Even more worrying is the comment from the leader of Scottish Borders Council on the project, which is costing millions of pounds:

“What we've done is design the building very carefully so that it's a multi-purpose building, so that in years to come, if the tapestry didn't work then we could do something with the building and still get a return for our public purse.”

That is hardly an optimistic proposal. The tapestry will be at Tweedbank, although I think that it should have been in Galashiels.

A stone's throw away from Tweedbank is Abbotsford—the eclectic home of Sir Walter Scott. It is now restored and it is an absolutely wonderful place. The gardens have been restored and there is a rather splendid visitor centre. That is all part funded and supported by the Government. The house had more than 40,000 visitors last year.

There are parts of the Borders that the train will not reach. The plan is to use the line beyond its tracks and to extend the Borders and Midlothian experience.

I support the Conservative amendment, which, importantly, mentions how local festivals and issues bring so much to the economy. It marries well with the Labour amendment, which mentions the role of the volunteers who keep those festivals going.

The recent Melrose sevens brought £2 million into the economy in Melrose and the area. The two-week TweedLove biking events festival is the biggest bike festival and involves more than 40 bike events in the Tweed valley. It is 100 per cent organised by volunteers, who give it their all.

The Traquair fair is held by the Maxwell Stuarts in August in the grounds of the oldest continuously inhabited house in Scotland. It is an excellent festival, with speeches and books and, of course, its own brew of beer. People cannot drink it now, of course, given the higher standard of tests for driving but, if people can take it and get the bus, they will be able to get the bus to the train and then the train back to Edinburgh.

Throughout the summer months, there are all the ridings and local festivals: the braw lads and lasses of Gala, Beltane at Peebles, the whipman at West Linton and the Penicuik hunter and lass. At that time of year, all those places are full of different colours, with bunting strewn over the streets and hanging from the windows of houses. Local people make the towns jolly, attractive and exciting, and that brings business to the communities.

I return to the railway and the opportunities to bring international visitors to Midlothian and the Borders during the festival, away from the overheated and overpriced city of Edinburgh. Think of that late-night train—people could stay in the Borders or Midlothian at half the price of staying in the city of Edinburgh. People could go to a show, get on the train and get up in the morning

to see lovely scenery. I should get commission for that.

If I sound excited about the railway line—well, I am. I hope that there will be a seat on the train for me and, if Dennis Robertson is really nice to me, I will have a seat for him and Mr Q too.

15:55

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):

Like my colleague Dennis Robertson, I will return to the area where everything takes place: the north-east of Scotland and Aberdeenshire. The contribution of culture, visitor attractions and events to Scotland's economy and society is great in north-east Scotland. I agree that festival 2014 was a huge success: the Glasgow cultural programme was the most ambitious national culture celebration to have taken place in Scotland.

Scotland's historic environment is a vital resource in cultural, social and economic terms. It can and should deliver greater benefits to all communities, and in particular the communities that I represent in North East Scotland. One well-known event is the Portsoy boat festival, which will take place on 4 and 5 July this year and will—importantly—celebrate the year of food and drink. We will celebrate Scotland's fantastic natural larder and exceptional natural produce as well as the landscape. More important, given that the debate is about culture, we will celebrate the people and culture that make our food heritage so unique.

Stewart Maxwell spoke about Scotland the brand, and we are unique in having food linked to our culture in a way that makes it part of our economic growth. Economic growth locally is linked closely with the celebration of that culture. The 2015 festival promises a programme packed with music, song and dance and children's entertainment—it will be a grand day out for all the family. This year's Friday showcase concert will start with Banff academy's traditional band, led by Sharon Hassan, whom we know from her visit to the Parliament with the north east folk collective. She empowers young people through the learning of Scottish traditional music, very much following in the footsteps of our Tarland fiddler, Paul Anderson, whom my colleague Dennis Robertson spoke about. Since its formation in 2009, the north east folk collective has performed at a number of festivals and venues throughout the UK and elsewhere, from the Stonehaven folk festival in the north-east to Derry.

Scottish people place great value on culture and heritage. I know that, as I have been part of my local heritage society, Skene Heritage Society. It is open to everybody: people do not need to be born

in Scotland to enjoy our culture or to become a guardian of our heritage. Those local groups are fantastic; they are full of local volunteers, and we share our culture and heritage.

The Skene Heritage Society will be at the 12th BA Events vintage country fair on the weekend of 16 and 17 May in Lyne of Skene and in June at the Bon Accord steam festival, which is held at Castle Fraser. As members can see, I have found plenty for them all to do during the summer.

The Scottish household survey 2013, which has been mentioned, found that 89 per cent of adults agreed with the following statement:

"It is important to me that heritage buildings and places are well looked after."

In Aberdeen we have Marischal college, which has, as the new headquarters of Aberdeen City Council, quickly become a fantastic tourist attraction. In May 2011, an 18ft-high sculpture of King Robert the Bruce was unveiled outside Marischal college. The statue, which was created by the sculptor Alan Beattie Herriot, was commissioned following the lodging of a motion by the then councillor—and now MSP for Aberdeen Central—Kevin Stewart.

There was the political will to recognise the importance of the statue, which is now very much an iconic piece of the city and is cherished by all Aberdonians and admired by all visitors to the city. It has become a magnet for tourists.

The Scottish household survey found that 72 per cent of people agreed that the heritage in their local area is well looked after. Unfortunately, the current administration of Aberdeen City Council is not getting that right yet.

The survey told us that 57 per cent of the population agree that there are lots of opportunities to get involved in culture and the arts. The Scottish Government is providing funding for Sistema Scotland's big noise orchestra. In Aberdeen, big noise Torry will be officially launched with a community concert at the end of term in June. El Sistema is very much thriving in the north-east of Scotland. The aim is that, as these children grow up, they will do better in school, they will be healthier and happier and their lives will have been transformed by being involved in music.

It is important to understand how much such activities contribute to our society and to the economic growth of the north-east of Scotland. One place that Dennis Robertson did not mention is Woodend Barn in Banchory, which is a creative hub that welcomes all and is a great asset to the north-east. It is no surprise that Creative Scotland has shortlisted Banchory as one of the

communities that could win £125,000 in the creative place awards 2015.

As the Aberdeen city region project progresses, it is important that culture and the arts are not forgotten by the Scottish Government, the two local authorities and everyone who is involved in the project, and that they are seen as very much part of the growth of the north-east of Scotland.

16:02

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Many people have referred to Scotland's rich and diverse cultural landscape. Across the arts, the music scene and sport we see exciting developments taking place. For spectators or participants in any of those cultural activities, their enjoyment is determined not just by the talent and ability of the performers, artists or sporting stars but by the often unseen contribution of the staff who make those great events happen. The organisers, the administrators, the fundraisers, the committee men and women, the trustees, the security staff and so on all play a huge role in ensuring that the events happen and that people are safe and can enjoy all that is on offer.

With that in mind, and as chair of the Public and Commercial Services Union's parliamentary group, I will raise the issue that I mentioned when I intervened on the cabinet secretary, which is the long-running dispute at the national museum of Scotland. Last Thursday and Friday, PCS staff at the museum walked out, resulting in the closure of what should be a place of huge national pride. The museum is our most visited attraction, with around 1.7 million people going through its doors each year. That success has been achieved because of the staff who work there.

However, the lowest-paid members of that staff team see their wages and conditions under attack. The museum's management—with, I presume, the then cabinet secretary's approval—broke an Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service agreement and imposed a two-tier system on museum staff, with the result that any staff member who has been employed since 1 January 2011 and who works weekends as part of their duties does not receive a weekend allowance, while those who were working prior to that date do.

That allowance was previously negotiated and agreed to recognise that working weekends, when children are off school or family members are off work and when people want to visit tourist attractions such as the museum, impacts on people and their family life. That unsocial element of the staff's shift rota was recognised in their pay. However, now, we can have two low-paid workers on the same shift, doing the same job for the same

employer, but one will be paid much less than his or her colleague.

We are not talking about a small amount of money. It is up to 20 per cent of those workers' salaries—up to £3,000 a year in hard cash. For someone who earns around £18,000 and lives in the city that Christine Grahame noted is expensive, £3,000 is a significant amount of money. It might not be significant for the chief executive, who earns more than £110,000, but it most certainly is for the low-paid staff who run the place, some of whom take home almost less than £1,000 a month, while the chief executive takes home nearer £2,000 a week.

What about the Government's role? The responsibility for resolving this year-and-a-half-long dispute lies fairly and squarely with the cabinet secretary, who, as far as I can see, has done zero to bring it to an end. Only two weeks ago, her colleague John Swinney said:

"Fair work will play a key role in making Scotland the fairer, more equal society everyone wants to see—which is why it is a principle which the SNP will be putting at the heart of our election campaign for the next four weeks."

How does that statement square with ripping off those staff to the tune of £3,000 a year?

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member confirm that no one at the national museum of Scotland has had their take-home pay cut? Will he also confirm that National Museum Wales is planning to take away the weekend allowance from existing staff, which is not the case in Scotland? Will he further confirm that seven-day working in the tourism and heritage sector is the norm and that the following organisations—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Briefly, please.

Fiona Hyslop: —do not pay weekend working allowances: Historic Scotland, the National Trust, VisitScotland, Our Dynamic Earth—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is enough. I call Neil Findlay.

Neil Findlay: The minister is responsible for culture in Scotland, not Wales, so she should take her responsibilities seriously. If seven-day working is the norm, let us have a race to the top on terms and conditions—not a race to the bottom, which she wants. Why is it that the Government, in a desperate bid to prevent strikes in the Prison Service in the run-up to the UK and Scottish elections, can find money to give prison officers £2,000 each—and good luck to the Prison Officers Association for negotiating an increase—but cannot find the cash to pay the museum staff what they deserve?

The cabinet secretary cannot blame anyone else for the situation—no amount of deflection will

work this time. None of the usual bogeymen can be rolled out as part of another diversionary tactic. It is not the UK Government's fault; it is not the Labour Party's fault; it is not any Labour council's fault; it is not because of European law; and it is not even because of a lack of powers, so all the old chestnuts cannot be rolled out—it is simply because of the cabinet secretary's lack of political will and desperately poor leadership. She and the museum management could sort this out with about £200,000—a tiny proportion of the £414 million Government underspend—yet the cabinet secretary has sat by for 18 months and done nothing. Once again, the Government has been found out, as it has been on so many other things when it comes to people in the workplace.

16:08

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): As we have just heard, this is a wide-ranging debate that covers a lot of issues. Although “culture” is the first key word in the debate's title, visitor attractions and events are also mentioned, which makes the debate even wider. Sport is not specifically mentioned in the title, but the Commonwealth games are mentioned in the motion, and I presume that “events” cover all events, including sport.

Events such as the Commonwealth games attract visitors in the year when they happen, and the same is true for the cultural events surrounding the games that happened in 2014. However, the other side of the coin is that such events raise the profile of the host city and country, and some people come not in the year of the event but later. It is harder to measure and pin down exactly why visitors come to Glasgow or Scotland in a particular year, but the fact that it is harder to measure does not mean that it is less important.

Venues built for the Commonwealth games continue to hold events that should encourage visitors—for example, visitors can watch Scotland's only professional basketball team, Glasgow Rocks, at the Emirates arena. Cycling, swimming and hockey all now have world-class facilities, so we can look forward to regularly holding major events in the future and not least to Glasgow co-hosting the first European sports championships with Berlin in 2018.

Culture clearly includes Scottish culture in all its various forms, and I want us to unashamedly celebrate Scottish culture, be it Burns, bagpipes or Scottish films, such as one of my favourites from a few years ago, “Shallow Grave”, which was one of the first Scottish films that I saw with no cringe factor.

However, as Hanzala Malik reminded us, Scotland has become increasingly diverse and international, so we need and should want to celebrate other cultures that have found a home in Scotland. In the east end of Glasgow, that certainly includes Irish culture, which clearly includes Celtic Football Club. To say that Celtic are just a football team is to miss a lot of points. Here, culture and sport very much overlap. Hibernian Football Club in Edinburgh and Celtic in Glasgow grew out of the Irish experience in Scotland, and we all need to be a bit more relaxed about that and welcome it. Visitors to all European cities want to see sports stadia as part of their city experience, but I am not sure that we have fully tapped into that potential in Glasgow.

I see Scotland and our culture largely as part of the Celtic family of nations, and I would like that traditional link to be strengthened. Celtic Connections has been a huge success in more ways than one and has helped us to draw together the many strands of our Celtic heritage. The main venue for Celtic Connections in my constituency is St Andrew's in the Square, which is now the centre for traditional Scottish music, song and dance. If members have never visited the building, I certainly encourage them to do so. It is a superb building, which was being built when Bonnie Prince Charlie visited the city. This year, I have been at three events there. I particularly enjoyed St Roch's Ceili Band, which comes from an Irish background.

There are many ways in which we can tackle serious subjects such as sectarianism and anti-Irish racism, but cultural events such as music events are among the best. I understand that, this evening, Joan McAlpine is hosting the anti-sectarian play “Freedom Square” by Ryan Youth Theatre. That is welcome and I look forward to being at it.

Theatre and music can often help us to think through issues at a deeper level, which is harder to do in a debate in this place or on social media. As the Labour amendment says, culture can contribute towards

“improving learning, health, wellbeing, confidence and quality of life”.

I echo that.

On the international stage, we have the world pipe band championship at Glasgow Green in my constituency, which has been held in the city every year since 1986. That involves about 7,000 musicians and an audience of around 30,000 and is reckoned to generate perhaps £10 million for the local economy.

As members probably know, Glasgow Green is just east of the city centre, as is St Andrew's in the Square. I, too, have a palace, although it is slightly

different from Dennis Robertson's and is called the People's Palace. It is close to the merchant city, which has been a huge success in many ways, but it is also close to areas that have been struggling, such as the Barras, Calton, Bridgeton and Dalmarnock.

The Barras market was a major visitor attraction in the past, but it has struggled in recent times. We do not seem to have been able to help it to fulfil its potential in the way that markets in other cities have. All of that brings home to me in a particularly clear way how culture, visitor attractions and events can play a key role in boosting the economy and regeneration. However, that does not mean that it is all plain sailing or that there is an easy fix. All the area around Glasgow Green still faces big challenges, and changes will take time. The merchant city regeneration has not spread east as rapidly as many of us might have hoped.

I realise that I have focused on my constituency, so I will finish by mentioning a few things further away. The Edinburgh festival is a fabulous event that is only 40 miles from Glasgow, yet traditionally very few Glaswegians have attended it. There have been moves to change that, but we need to do more.

Another example is that many folk from the central belt do not travel north. I meet many people in Glasgow who have never been to Inverness, let alone the islands. We need to put more emphasis on getting our own people to visit our attractions.

16:14

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Stewart Maxwell is not in the chamber at present, but I commend him on his speech, which was on inequalities. I want to focus on that issue, too.

El Sistema involves half a million children across Venezuela. It has produced some of the finest classical musicians in the world, but behind those musical achievements is an even more exciting story, because El Sistema uses the symphony orchestra to benefit society. It produces not only musicians but happy and well-equipped citizens, often from the poorest and most vulnerable backgrounds.

Nowadays, visitors to Raploch in Stirling will often be met by a small voice asking, "What do you play?", because the children there just assume that everyone has an instrument and that everyone plays something. The Raploch is home to the UK's first flowering of the remarkable El Sistema movement. The development was seen as integral to the environmental improvements in

the Raploch in Stirling, which the Labour council has fostered over many years.

Neil Findlay: I had the pleasure of being in the Caracas opera house to see El Sistema a few years back when I was on a deputation to Venezuela. I strongly encourage Richard Simpson to go to see where El Sistema originated because it was absolutely amazing.

Dr Simpson: I might visit Venezuela when I retire. I hope to do that.

The Raploch is quite a tiny place, but more than 450 children from babes in arms through to 14-year-olds are involved in the big noise orchestra programme, which was launched in 2008, and 75 per cent of primary school children in the estate are involved at any given time. The big noise orchestra will grow with that new generation through to adulthood.

That is all happening in only a couple of square miles that are tucked into a meander on the River Forth. That area was once lumbered with a negative image; the community is now becoming famous for its young maestros instead. More than that, the children have become role models and the community has become an inspiration. Govanhill is now copying it.

Although the El Sistema approach is not an inexpensive option, it can help to improve health, wellbeing, aspiration and achievement in a way that no previous programme has done. It fulfils through art many of the principles of the policy that is outlined in Sir John Elvidge's papers for the Carnegie UK Trust entitled "The Enabling State", which I have recommended to colleagues before and have no hesitation in recommending again.

The approach is about doing things with communities and fulfilling their aspirations. However, musical instrument education is under great pressure and is one of the potential longer-term casualties of the cuts. The Government's role is traditionally seen as funding the big events such as the Commonwealth games. Those are certainly important for our brand on the world stage, but working with the communities and supporting the programmes that they support provides a much better approach.

I will give three further examples. First, spinning out from the Scottish Chamber Orchestra—which I had been a supporter for 20 years—is the east neuk festival. It is unique because it has a high level of private sponsorship and for its use of multiple local venues, mainly churches. We should recognise and complement the level of private sponsorship. Communities should be encouraged to help to fund themselves.

I also commend the paper by Lyn Tett on a project supported by Creative Scotland involving

five national organisations that worked with offenders. There are clear findings from research from north Africa, New Zealand and the UK that arts participation can encourage the development of better relationships between prisoners, with prison staff and between the offenders and their families. Participating in arts projects often improves self-esteem and self-confidence. It helps communication and social skills, enables people to work together and help each other as peers, and results in prisoners taking part in other education courses after completing an arts project.

The finding of the Creative Scotland-sponsored paper makes it clear that international research, which I have mentioned, is replicated in the projects. It works when traditional pedagogy has failed. That culture-based approach has much to commend it. Artlink Central, which is based in Stirling, has made effective contributions to Cornton Vale and Polmont and engaged young men who would otherwise not engage.

I strongly recommend to the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs that she talk to her justice and health colleagues about continuing and supporting those projects.

In 2001, as the Deputy Minister for Justice, I was happy to support the business plan from the registrar general for Scotland to integrate the register of births, deaths and marriages and the register of sasines. I supported it because I believed that genealogy would become much more important. The modest investment that we made has paid off in the substantial growth of genealogical tourism.

We have a diaspora of 60 million plus. We need a more comprehensive and integrated approach beyond the years of homecoming to encourage even greater growth in genealogical tourism. I hope that the Government is ready to do that.

16:19

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Presiding Officer,

Fit like loon?
Chavin doon!
Far ye ging?
Aff te sing!
Foo's te hear?
Aw foo's aer!
Fan's it ower?
Ae see a glower!

That is my imperfect attempt at poetry, which is not something that we have heard anything of in the debate thus far. It is also poetry that uses the language of the north-east, the Doric.

Poetry is something for which Scotland is known worldwide, through the great poems of Robert Burns. Outside the Canongate kirk, however, there

is a nice new statute of Robert Fergusson, who was the fellow Robert Burns wrote an obituary of in which he referred to Fergusson as his elder brother in the muse. We see tourists being photographed alongside the statue of Robert Fergusson without, I suspect, any great sense of who he was except for the fact, which is inscribed beneath the statue, that he died in Bedlam—which was not the best place to die if one was going to die in Edinburgh.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank the member for raising the issue of Robert Fergusson. Does he agree that the poet would perhaps be better known among Scots if the national portrait gallery had not hidden his portrait away in the vaults instead of putting it on permanent display?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You may answer as a poet, Mr Stevenson.

Stewart Stevenson: I find extemporising poetry even more difficult than putting words on a bit of paper, Presiding Officer, so I will resist that temptation.

What I have just heard is news to me, and I am minded to agree with what the member says.

Words, literature and poetry are an important part of our connection with the world and our gift to the world. We are fortunate that our neighbours to the south of us in this island have given us one of the richest languages on the earth, English, with a huge vocabulary, great opportunities to write and many things for us to read. I hope that that becomes an important part of what we do. The Wigtown book festival is a good example of a small town having created a niche in cultural and tourist terms that can be copied elsewhere. I also feel that there is room for a food town in the north-east of Scotland, and I would like to think that we might do something about that. Joan McAlpine has secured a debate on food on Thursday.

We have lots of locations that people visit because of family connections. Richard Simpson mentioned genealogy. I have been studying the genealogy of my family for over 50 years, and it helps me to connect with history. My grandfather was born when Abraham Lincoln was the President, and all my grandparents were born before the first secret ballot in a parliamentary election—that took place in Pontefract on 15 August 1872. When we study our family, we connect with our history, our antecedents and the diaspora of 40 million or 50 million Scots around the world.

I meet those people when they come here to study their family history. Members of my wife's family recently came across from New Zealand. Their forebears had travelled from Scotland to Canada and had eventually ended up in New

Zealand. We did not know that they existed, but they came specifically to study their family history. The Aberdeen and North-East Scotland Family History Society has thousands of members and a huge building full of information that people come to see. I am never in there but I hear the voices of people who have travelled halfway round the globe to research their family history.

We also have many places from today's literature and films that attract tourists. Pennan, in my constituency, has a year-round population of some 24. Yet, more than 30 years after "Local Hero" was filmed there, people still come to Pennan to look at the phone box. It needs a bit of TLC at the moment—my colleague Eilidh Whiteford is on that particular case—but the mark of a film more than three decades old is still there. The Oxford bar, in Edinburgh, is home to the fictional Detective Inspector Rebus. Ian Rankin chose it as the locale for his drinking because he could not make it up—real life is even better—and it is a place that tourists visit on the back of that.

When I first came to Edinburgh more than 40 years ago, the publican there was a guy called Willie Ross, who was so antipathetic to the Edinburgh festival that he used to shut the bar for three weeks during the festival and put up a notice in the window saying, "Shut due to festival"—that was very much the exception.

Last week I had a coffee in the Elephant House on George IV Bridge, where the Harry Potter novels had their genesis. We have a huge amount in all our cities and areas of Scotland that drags people from across the world.

We have heard talk of the national museum, laying the foundation stone of which was the very last public act of Prince Albert before he died in the 1860s. I went there when I was a youngster. I can still remember things that I saw there. Let us hope that the cultural heritage for those who come to Scotland today is as rich as I feel that mine is.

16:25

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):

I thank the cabinet secretary for her motion and the opportunity to debate these interesting issues around Scotland's many different cultures.

I endorse both amendments. Claire Baker's amendment refers to the culture counts campaign. I lodged a motion on that, which was supported. More than 50 different cultural organisations in Scotland are calling for recognition in the national performance framework so that we begin to look at the kind of outcomes that we might like to see, whereby culture really is at the heart of much of what we do. The campaign has the membership of over 50 of Scotland's organisations and is driven to continue to make the case for recognition for

the arts and arts for all in every aspect, whether that involves art going into prisons in connection with work on reform or poets going into old folk's homes—things that really make a difference to people's lives.

I thank Liz Smith for highlighting the case for smaller cultural events and festivals. It is almost easy to celebrate the success of Edinburgh's international festivals—all of them—but perhaps that sometimes overshadows the importance of the much smaller festivals that are happening. I know that the cabinet secretary enjoys those festivals just as much, but I want to make the case for them.

Some time ago in this chamber the tourism minister, when announcing extra funding for promoting events through EventScotland, reassured me that smaller and more rural events should be recognised as important. I reinforce that case again.

The book festivals in Stornoway, Coll, Ullapool or Lerwick do attract international visitors, but they might not meet the 27 or 30 per cent threshold for funding that is asked for by EventScotland. I ask the cabinet secretary to check some of the figures, because I sometimes wonder whether the bigger festivals or events that are given funding do any better in that regard.

It is really important, certainly in the area that I represent, to recognise that culture is about a way of life. Often that is what attracts visitors to our country. Maybe it is about going to a sheep shearing or sheepdog trials and then the ceilidh at night. Who would deny that the enjoyment of that could be greater than an evening at the theatre during the fringe? I would like those events to be given the prominence that they deserve, given the importance that they have in more rural areas.

Mention has been made of the Edinburgh mela and Glasgow mela—I do not know what the plural of "mela" is. We have acknowledged Scotland's cultural diversity and I wonder whether we should start to look at how strong that is. Recently I read about the Scots taking their culture to Nova Scotia and the Gaelic community there. I wonder how much Scotland benefits from the cultures that make up our diverse populations. Are we engaging enough with the Polish, Lithuanian or Romanian communities in our midst, which I suspect would like to take part even more among smaller communities and more rural places? I look forward to the day when the traditional music awards include traditional Polish, Latvian, Spanish, French, Dutch or Swiss songs—songs from all the different communities that make up our cultural diversity.

I had occasion to entertain some Norwegian politicians in the Highlands and Islands. They were

looking at population change and how to keep young people in the Highlands. They were impressed by organisations like Fèis Rois and others, which were giving people a sense of identity after a long time in which their culture was not recognised.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Draw to a close, please.

Jean Urquhart: At one point I got a bit frustrated with them as they argued among themselves, and I asked them what Norway would look like in their ideal world. They immediately said, "Scotland." When I asked them about that, they said, "What country would not want that?" Scotland's culture is worldwide. We have a song that is sung in every country on hogmanay. I wonder whether we really enjoy knowledge of some of that.

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

Jean Urquhart: My final plea is that we start to recognise the many cultures in our country and acknowledge that there is a great deal for us to learn about their wealth.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Many thanks. I now call Joan McAlpine, after whom we will move to closing speeches.

16:32

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, of which I am a member, recently conducted an inquiry into the economic impact of the creative industries. What came across quite clearly during our early evidence gathering was the huge impact of the creative industries on the economy. The task of looking at all the creative industries in sufficient depth was too big, so we concentrated on the impact of computer games, film and television.

Film and television are a reflection of the cultural successes and vibrancy that many members have highlighted, so they are particularly important—the committee said in its report that there is room for growth in film and television in particular. The flourishing in culture that we have seen in Scotland through literature, visual arts, performing arts and the National Theatre has not necessarily been reflected on the small or large screens, and we need to look at viable ways to tackle that problem.

On television, on which I wish to concentrate, the committee heard that few independent Scottish producers are producing returnable television drama. That is a serious missed opportunity, given that it is a key tier for building successful businesses. The lift-and-shift tactic,

used mainly by the BBC, was described as damaging to sustainable television production in Scotland. The term "lift and shift" describes the process of moving production of pre-existing shows to Scotland in order to meet quotas for Scotland-based output. Lift and shift provides short-term production employment in Scotland, but not sustainability.

When the production of a programme is complete and the cast and crew have gone back to London, the benefit of that work, such as the financial profits and the key relationships between the seller and the buyer, remain in the south-east with London-based producers. By contrast, Scotland-based producers are here for the long term, and they generate ideas and attract work into Scotland.

Independent producers who came before the committee were quite unequivocal that London-centric commissioners are a huge obstacle for Scotland's television and film industry. There is a wider point in relation to the promotion of Scottish culture on television. If commissioning is always commercially driven, productions of cultural value are more likely to be overlooked, particularly by London-based commissioners who are unfamiliar with Scottish work. For example, STV's Alan Clements told the committee that

"The commissioners are the gatekeepers of the cash",

and

"the commissioning must be by people who are aware of the books or the movements".

The producer Bob Last agreed. He stated:

"We are talking about a cultural reality that needs active balancing."—[*Official Report, Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee*, 21 January 2015; c 27, 46.]

Perhaps we need a new mechanism in which we promote material that is culturally important to Scotland, even if a commissioner in London does not think so.

Some witnesses pointed to confusion in the current devolved settlement as well as the failure of the Smith commission to devolve broadcasting. The independent producer Ken Hay advocated that the devolution of public service broadcasters' production budgets along with commissioning powers was needed. At the very least, we need a commitment from broadcasters to scrap the lift-and-shift tactic in favour of proper investment in independent production companies with a permanent base in Scotland. The committee has called on the BBC and Channel 4 to adopt that new approach to commissioning by the end of 2016.

Culture extends beyond the screen industry, of course. I want to move away from the committee report to look at the importance of festivals, which

other members have talked about. There are a number of successful festivals in my South Scotland region and across Scotland, and I want to draw attention to their cultural and economic importance.

Festival-goers who visit the South Scotland region this year will be spoiled for choice. For example, the 14th Moniaive folk festival will take place next month and has a great line-up scheduled, including Whirligig and this year's Radio Scotland's young traditional musician of the year, Claire Hastings. The Wickerman festival, which is also in its 14th year, will kick off in Dundrennan in July. In August, the smaller Rockerbie festival will take place in the town of Lockerbie. Members will not be surprised to hear that it will offer fun around rock bands.

T in the Park, which is the biggest festival in Scotland, is, of course, a national treasure. Now in its 22nd year, it is the second-largest festival in the UK. We know that it generates £15.4 million for the Scottish economy and well over £2 million at a local level. As members may be aware, plans to relocate the festival this year from its traditional home in Balado to a new venue at Strathallan castle were in doubt when rare birds were found nesting near the site. Happily, it now seems likely that the event will be able to go ahead, as the experienced team has made it clear that it will adhere to environmental conditions to ensure the safety of the birds. I very much hope that that is the case, and I am sure that members across the chamber hope that, too. That will be good news for the local economy and the Scottish economy, which benefit from that expenditure, and of course for the fans, who have a great time at that festival.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the closing speeches. Cameron Buchanan has up to six minutes. I would be grateful if all members who have taken part in the debate returned to the chamber now, please.

16:38

Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con): It is clear to all that culture, visitor attractions and events make a huge contribution to Scotland's economy and society. Be they daily, annual or even one-off, the various activities that we have to offer have a valued impact on our lives. I hope that all of us in the chamber can agree to welcome the hosting of international events in all Scottish venues.

It is also important to have the chance to celebrate our culture, and to boast proudly about what the region that I represent has to offer. Although cultural activities, tourism and events are often conflated, it is important to shine a light on

each aspect so that we can recognise their great economic and social value.

We recently discussed in the chamber the spectacular successes of the international sporting events that were hosted in Scotland last year, among them the Commonwealth games and the Ryder cup. It was evident that those international sporting occasions showcased Scotland to the world and provided a boost to many aspects of our tourism industry.

I mentioned back then that it is important to add to that legacy. I therefore welcome the recent announcement that Glasgow will be a host city for the multisport European sports championships that are taking place in July and August 2018—it will co-host the championships with Berlin. The combination of swimming, cycling, rowing and triathlon will showcase our capabilities internationally. I am particularly looking forward to Edinburgh playing its part.

It will come as little surprise to anyone in Scotland, the United Kingdom or even the world to hear that Edinburgh's culture makes a substantial contribution to the local and national economy. Although the city is famed for its summer and winter festivals, which I will come on to, a person need only travel around Edinburgh—at any time—to know that we attract tourists throughout the year. They are attracted by the rich variety of cultural offerings, from whisky tasting and kilt tailoring to historic architecture and captivating ghost tours.

It is clear that our heritage accounts for a large proportion of that rich culture, which leads me to raise the interesting point that many visitors to Edinburgh come not only because they are interested in our heritage and diaspora, but because they share it. That was touched on when Dr Simpson mentioned genealogy. That shared appreciation of our culture truly enables locals to enjoy a great sense of pride in the city that they call home.

As for visitor attractions, Edinburgh offers many that make a marked contribution to both our economy and our culture. It would, of course, be very difficult to discuss Edinburgh's attractions without mentioning the world-famous Edinburgh castle, which, as we have heard from other members, was recently voted the top UK heritage attraction in the British travel awards. Furthermore, its economic contribution as Scotland's number 1 paid-for tourist attraction gives a sustained boost to the city's economy. Unfortunately, I do not have the time to highlight the castle's every detail, but I must say that I was delighted when Mons Meg was recently returned to its rightful place in pristine condition. I remember clambering all over it as a child and putting a footprint on it, which, fortunately, came off quickly.

To give another example, the national museum of Scotland provides an excellent cultural focus point for residents and visitors. When we have a thriving tourism industry, its success drives new investment into the city, as the recently renovated Scotch whisky experience demonstrates.

Although the term “events” could span all manner of occasions, I will focus on two forms: festivals and sports. The multiday hogmanay festival, which we know contributes around £32 million to the Scottish economy, is a shining example of an event that boosts the economy, particularly as it is repeated annually—for obvious reasons. In addition, Edinburgh’s international reputation as an ideal location to welcome in the new year underlines our status as a first-class destination for cultural tourism. I remember when, many years ago, everywhere was shut at new year—it was a desert. Fortunately, thanks to Pete Irvine of Unique Events, the tradition was revived.

Members will probably not be surprised to hear that I will also use this opportunity to focus on the Edinburgh International Festival and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Edinburgh locals take great pride in multiple aspects of the Edinburgh festival and, for both economic and social reasons, we should all applaud the organisations and people whose commitment enables such successful shows to be delivered time and time again.

As for sports, our society benefits most when a legacy is secured after a high-profile sporting competition. In the Lothian region that I represent, an obvious example is the Royal Commonwealth pool. Undoubtedly, the ability to use a swimming pool for exercise or leisure or to teach children how to swim is a most welcome contribution to our society. With that in mind, I am rather intrigued to discover what events may be hosted in Edinburgh as part of the multisport European sports championships in 2018.

I welcome the chance to celebrate the economic and social contributions of Scotland’s culture, visitor attractions and events. They have all fostered our well-earned reputation as one of the best places in the world for the arts, tourism and sports to flourish. I hope that the economic impact of those sectors is monitored extensively and reported in the Scottish Parliament, so that we can be as informed as possible about that.

On another level, it is clear that prestigious events, festivals, shows and their legacies enrich Scotland’s society in a manner that we can all be proud of. I hope that the debate and the attention that it brings deliver some of the recognition that all the people involved deserve for their invaluable contribution to the economy, our prosperity, our society and our international reputation. All of us in

this chamber should do everything that we can to support them.

I support the motion.

16:44

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): In closing the debate for the Scottish Labour Party, I must say how fantastic it is to have the opportunity to discuss the huge contribution that Scotland’s cultural and creative attractions make to our society, our economy and our diversity as a nation.

As we have heard, last year was an excellent one for Scottish cultural events. In culture 2014, with its branding designed by the superb Jim Lambie, we had brilliant events such as big big sing, blue block studio—which was a big hit across Scotland—and the amazing Tam Dean Burn and his Julia Donaldson cycling marathon, which I had the pleasure of seeing at Creative Scotland’s reception in Parliament a few weeks ago. World-leading artists and local communities working together across the country once again demonstrated the best of Scotland’s arts and culture. I am sure that we all agree that it showcased Scotland at its very best. Just as the Commonwealth games brought some of the best athletes in the world to Scotland, festival 2014 brought some of the world’s finest entertainment and culture to Glasgow.

The Edinburgh festival also had a bumper year during the games. It achieved record attendances and box-office figures, further cementing Scotland’s place internationally as a nation of culture and the arts that is unrivalled on the world stage.

We were able to share that great celebration with guests from around the world, as Scotland saw a 10 per cent increase in visitor numbers to Scottish attractions.

However, I am sure that we are all asking how we can top that. We all know that doing so will be challenging. The world’s eyes are always on Scotland’s cultural sector, as time and again it punches well above its weight in the world. This year promises to be no different. From the world of music, we have already had the amazing Celtic Connections festival, which, once again, showed why Scotland’s bands are among the most influential in the world.

Festivals, and music festivals in particular, have played a crucial role in Scotland’s cultural calendar for a number of years. This August, party at the palace is back at the stunning Linlithgow palace. There are the smaller music festivals, such as the Wickerman festival, which is perhaps one of Scotland’s best-loved independent music events,

and larger ones, such as the Belladrum Tartan Heart festival and the peerless T in the Park. I am sure that we would all agree that, providing all relevant environmental safeguards are in place, T in the Park provides a great boost to Scotland's economy.

In Glasgow, we once again welcome back to Glasgow Green the world pipe band championships, with more than 300 live performances. If I can just give a wee plug, my amazing nieces and nephews will be taking part again this year, as pipers and drummers in the East Kilbride pipe band.

All those events, and many more besides, will take place over the next year. They will allow Scots throughout the country to harness the energy, friendship and enjoyment gained from the Commonwealth games, continuing them into the next 12 months.

Even here in the Scottish Parliament, we are getting in on the act. Holyrood rocks has its launch event in Parliament on Wednesday 27 May, with the final taking place on Saturday 31 October. Holyrood rocks will be a great way to harness the hugely positive energy gained from the games and its related events and to ensure that our young people—particularly 16 and 17-year-olds, who will be voting in the Scottish Parliament elections for the first time next year—know the importance of using their vote.

Throughout the chamber, we feel proud of our country's achievements last year. To watch a nation come together to celebrate the best that Scotland has to offer with friends from all over the world, and to do so with such vigour and good faith, made me truly proud to be Scottish. I look forward to events such as voluntary arts week in May 2015, which will highlight the positive contribution to Scotland's vibrant cultural sector by voluntary arts staff and volunteers from throughout Scotland. Their contribution ensures that venues, creative hubs and organisations are accessible and welcoming to all. Neil Findlay mentioned their importance and asked us all to remedy and support the on-going dispute of some of our lowest-paid staff.

In conclusion, 2014 was indeed a momentous year for culture in Scotland, and not only because Dennis Robertson managed to get a fiddle tune written for Mr Q, because Mark Griffin highlighted the Commonwealth games cycle path route in my bonny home town of Moodiesburn, because we all rushed out to buy a train pass to Christine Grahame's patch in the Borders, or even because Mr Maxwell showed us some of his literacy skills—I cannot even say that—by pronouncing—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You might wish to draw to a close now.

Anne McTaggart: I think that the word was “repediology”—I hope that that is right. I am sorry, Presiding Officer. I will finish.

As members across the chamber can all agree, there are promising signs to suggest that 2014 was no fluke. Today's debate has been interesting and has shown that there is real commitment to art and culture—and poetry, for Stewart Stevenson—across the chamber and across Scotland. Let us ensure that 2014 is the rule rather than the exception and that, with our continued support in this Parliament, Scotland continues to flourish creatively and culturally. I fully support the motion and the amendments lodged by Liz Smith and Claire Baker.

16:51

Fiona Hyslop: I do not know whether you knew that Holyrood rocks, Presiding Officer, but you do now, after Anne McTaggart's contribution.

I welcome the contributions from all the members who have spoken. It is clear is that there is a shared appreciation of the contribution of culture and heritage, visitor attractions and events to Scotland's economy, communities and sense of wellbeing. The Government will be supporting the amendments from the Labour and Conservative parties, which make important points about rural communities and volunteering, and marking voluntary arts week.

Although Scotland is steeped in stories and history, it is continually on the move, celebrating its past while seeking new and innovative ways to engage. The events of 2014 had a huge impact on Scotland's visitor economy in terms of income generated, but, more importantly, events across Scotland enabled people to access, enjoy, participate in and benefit from a wide range of cultural activities. Creative Scotland funds and supports a broad range of individuals and organisations across the cultural sector, helping to build capacity and to deliver high-quality work in communities across Scotland.

Claire Baker, in a thoughtful speech, posed the question of how wide and deep support for cultural activity reaches. That is a central point and one that I hope the Parliament will continue to examine. There were other important contributions in that area. Stewart Maxwell talked about the role of culture and the opportunities that it provides for mental health, particularly for men, and he is right to say that we should look at the role of culture in tackling inequalities. Richard Simpson talked about the prison population, and I remember seeing a fantastic performance in Greenock prison, supported by the Citizens Theatre, where women had to examine their experiences in front of an audience. That shows how the power of

culture can be transformative, and that is a point to which we should return.

Hanzala Malik talked about the need to focus on minority communities. I have tasked Creative Scotland with looking at what we can do better to help, support and identify provision in that area. Jean Urquhart quite rightly asked how we are looking at all the communities of Scotland. I can tell her that I spent my St Andrew's night celebrating a multicultural homecoming with performances from members of the Polish, Irish and Indian communities in Scotland, but she is quite right to say that that should become more of a norm in our exposition of what culture means in Scotland in the modern day. John Mason talked about Celtic Connections and the importance of recognising and celebrating our Irish heritage. He might be keen to know that I will be attending the Celtic Media Festival this week, because the role of Gaelic culture and how it is demonstrated on our screens are important.

How we make an impact and how we transform people's access is a key area, particularly for children and young people. That relates to the question posed by Claire Baker. We now have our first youth arts strategy "Time to Shine", the youth music initiative and cashback for creativity, which have all been designed to ensure that no one's background is a barrier to taking part in cultural life.

The "Time to Shine" strategy sets out a range of recommendations to support children and young people and to enable them to flourish in the arts. There is a £3.5 million youth arts development fund, which has supported nine youth arts hubs across Scotland. Those hubs, which have been developed through partnerships between local and national arts and youth service providers, aim to engage with 40,000 children and young people.

A real strength is the fact that many of the hubs are being driven by young people themselves. I recently had the pleasure of meeting those involved in the Highland youth arts hub at Eden Court to hear about their exciting plans, and I intend to visit all the youth arts hubs in the future.

Dennis Robertson: The cabinet secretary has mentioned the hubs. Can she reassure us that as many venues as possible will be fully accessible, not just to people from poorer backgrounds but to people with disabilities? In my speech, I mentioned the importance of small local communities working together to ensure full inclusiveness.

Fiona Hyslop: I can indeed. I will make sure that I come back to the member with details on how the youth arts hubs in particular will operate.

Richard Simpson talked about the big noise project in Raploch. By increasing the confidence,

the aspirations and the self-esteem of our children and young people, it has had a transformative and quite profound impact in providing social regeneration. That is why we have helped El Sistema to look at developing the big noise project in other areas—for example, we have supported it in Govanhill, and Christian Allard told us about the ambitions for big noise Torry, which is due to be launched formally at the end of June.

Much of the debate has been about the economic contribution that culture and visitor attractions make to Scotland. Claire Baker, Joan McAlpine and Stewart Maxwell talked about the economic contribution that T in the Park makes. In her amendment and in her speech, Liz Smith talked about rural sustainability and the virtuous circle of culture and local festivals in driving rural sustainability. She probably took a glass-half-empty view of the world, because we heard from Dennis Robertson about the vibrancy of Huntly and how its community is using culture, Richard Simpson mentioned the east neuk of Fife, and Christine Grahame talked about how the Borders rail link will open up the cultural offering in the Borders to those who live further afield.

There are opportunities, particularly for our rural communities, to grasp the opportunity that cultural festivals present to take things forward. The responsibility for funding such work does not lie just with the national cultural budget; local authorities have a responsibility in that area, too. There is also an important role for private investment to play. In my constituency, the Bathgate music festival was an initiative of the local business community, which recognised that the increased footfall would benefit the area.

We must invest in order to support our cultural provision. The refurbished Theatre Royal that is now open received a contribution from the Scottish Government, as did the Glasgow royal concert hall, which is the home of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, which made an important contribution to the Commonwealth games cultural programme.

As far as our national collections are concerned, there are significant projects at Causewayside, the Kelvin hall and the art conservation facility. Claire Baker mentioned the National Theatre of Scotland—the theatre without walls—which makes sure that its provision is seen by many across the country. The provision of a new creativity hub will help with what it can offer.

We want to bring culture to new audiences. I have empowered the national performing companies to ensure that they take their high-quality work across the country. I take the opportunity to congratulate Stuart Stratford, who was today appointed as Scottish Opera's new music director. In addition, many of our national

companies are performing overseas. David Greig's play "Dunsinane" has been met with great acclaim in the US. Interestingly, it got an audience of 125,000 on Radio 3, which is the equivalent of selling out 200 consecutive performances at the Royal Lyceum theatre.

There is much to look forward to: 2015 is the year of food and drink, and we have the Orkney folk festival, the Glasgow science festival, the Borders book festival and cake fest Edinburgh. In addition, of course, we will have many more themed years in the years ahead.

To go back to the transformation theme, I finish by saying that culture can transform rural communities through festivals, and it can transform individuals' lives, communities and the economy. I look forward to taking the agenda forward, and I thank all members who have spoken in what has been a lively and informed debate.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): That concludes the debate on the contribution of culture, visitor attractions and events to Scotland's economy and society. Before we move to decision time, I invite members to join me in welcoming to the gallery Her Excellency Teresita Vicente, the ambassador of the Republic of Cuba. [*Applause.*]

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-12958.2, in the name of Claire Baker, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12958, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the contribution of culture, visitor attractions and events to Scotland's economy and society, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-12958.1, in the name of Liz Smith, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12958, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the contribution of culture, visitor attractions and events to Scotland's economy and society, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-12958, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the contribution of culture, visitor attractions and events to Scotland's economy and society, as amended twice, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament acknowledges the great contribution that Scotland's rich and diverse culture, events and visitor attractions make to Scotland's society and economy; applauds the role that Culture 2014 and Festival 2014 played in the success of the Commonwealth Games; notes that Edinburgh's festivals continued to achieve record attendances and box office figures during the Games; welcomes the 10% increase in visitor numbers to Scottish attractions in 2014, which outperformed the rest of the UK; recognises the key role that Scotland's festivals, cultural events and attractions play in making the country a great place to live, work, study and visit and in enhancing its international reputation; welcomes the Culture Counts campaign, which promotes the value of culture in Scotland, including culture's contribution toward improving learning, health, wellbeing, confidence and quality of life; looks forward to Voluntary Arts Week in May 2015, which highlights the positive contribution to Scotland's vibrant cultural sector made by voluntary arts, including encouraging people to engage with arts and culture in their community; acknowledges the dedication and hard work of staff and volunteers throughout Scotland in ensuring that venues, creative hubs and organisations are accessible and welcoming to all, and believes that smaller cultural events and festivals have a crucial role to play in sustaining more fragile, remote rural communities.

Palestinian State (Recognition)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-12630, in the name of Sandra White, on recognition of the Palestinian state. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament believes that the recognition of the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel based on 1967 borders could be a stimulus to securing a negotiated two-state solution in the Middle East and notes the opinion of many Israelis and Palestinians living in Glasgow, the rest of Scotland and beyond that resolution through peaceful means is the only option.

17:03

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I thank the members of the Scottish Parliament who signed my motion, giving it cross-party support and enabling the debate to take place. I also thank the many groups that have contacted me and other members about the debate. Some of their representatives are in the public gallery tonight, and I welcome them to the Scottish Parliament.

There is often a great deal of misunderstanding and misrepresentation around the issue of Palestine, whether it be from individuals, the media or various Governments, but certain historical facts cannot be altered or dismissed. They must, in turn, be recognised.

It is a fact that, in November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 181, which recommended the creation of a two-state solution with a special international regime for the city of Jerusalem. At that time, those proposals were not seen as acceptable by the Palestinians and other Arab countries in the region because they went against the principles of the right to self-determination and imposed conditions that were generally seen as unfair and unworkable.

The breakdown of a workable plan led to the 1948 Palestinian war in which Israeli forces took control of a much larger area of land than was proposed in the UN resolution, an estimated 700,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled, and hundreds of Palestinian towns and villages were depopulated and destroyed.

In 1967, Israel conquered the West Bank, the Gaza strip and the Golan Heights, while annexing east Jerusalem. The UN and Governments across the world have repeatedly condemned that annexation and the subsequent building on the occupied territories, and it is considered to be illegal under international law.

I therefore hope that, in this debate, regardless of our opinions on what is happening today, we can all agree that that short history of Palestine needs to be recognised. Importantly, we must also recognise the more recent attempts at reaching a solution to the conflict, centred on the 1967 borders. It is indisputable that settlements built on occupied territories are considered to be illegal under international law, and we should not simply forget that fact.

Many people are quick to criticise nations that violate UN resolutions or do not abide by international law. I believe that, if we fail to acknowledge that where Israel is concerned, we fail to present the situation objectively and we fail to be taken seriously by the rest of the world.

Let us be clear: regardless of the history, I believe that the way forward and the only way to achieve a lasting peace is to recognise a Palestinian state alongside an Israeli one. That was not possible in 1947 but, for me and many others, it is the only viable option open to us now. Let us be clear also that the time is now. The time is not tomorrow or some point in the future; it is now.

Last October, the United Kingdom Parliament voted by 274 votes to 12 in favour of recognising Palestine. I congratulate MPs on that. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, stated that that will not change the UK Government's views on recognition. We are now in the last stages of the Westminster election campaign, and I hope that whoever wins the election will not only recognise Palestine but actively support a two-state solution.

We cannot continue to bury our heads in the sand. Already 134 out of 193 UN member states have taken steps to recognise the state of Palestine, and it is time that the UK did the same. I believe that it is morally incumbent on the UK to take that step, given its involvement and its resulting culpability for the current situation.

From the time when Britain administered Palestine after the first world war until it abandoned it in 1948, our involvement in Palestine has been quite shameful, from the promises of an independent Palestinian state to refusing to support UN efforts for a two-state solution, leading to the 1948 war and the subsequent loss of Palestinian land. Our actions have loomed large over the history of Palestine; it is time for our actions to loom large over the future of Palestine.

I believe that, given our previous involvement in Palestine, our recognition of Palestine will carry extra weight and will be a huge stimulus to peace efforts. Therefore, by definition, it will help those peace efforts. The time to recognise Palestine is now. Across the world, people recognise that that

is the way forward, and it is time that we joined them.

When the motion was scheduled for debate, I received support from many different quarters, alongside a petition from citizens of Israel, which stated:

"We the undersigned, Citizens of Israel who wish it to be a safe and thriving country, are worried by the continued political stalemate and by the occupation and settlements activities which lead to further confrontations with the Palestinians and torpedo the chances for a compromise.

It is clear that the prospects for Israel's security and existence depend on the existence of a Palestinian state side by side with Israel. Israel should recognize the state of Palestine and Palestine should recognize the state of Israel, based on the June 4 1967 borders."

Those are not my words but the words of the people who signed that petition. It was signed by Israelis from all walks of life, including students, lawyers, teachers, members of the Israeli Parliament, army colonels and former ambassadors.

The will is there in Israel, and we owe it as much to the Israelis as we do to the Palestinians to support them. The establishment of a two-state solution is essential if we are to do that; it is essential if we are to free Palestinians from occupation and from the injustices that have been wrought upon them. It is essential if we are to provide security for both Palestinians and Israelis.

There is of course a lot of work to be done by both sides but, by taking this step, we can demonstrate to those who are entrenched in their views, whatever side they are on, that there is an alternative—one that is very much worth pursuing.

We do not have power over foreign affairs in the Scottish Parliament, but I believe that today's debate is important and that we can make a difference. On 7 May, Scotland will choose 59 MPs to represent our views, and we should send a strong message that a two-state solution is what the majority of MSPs want.

Yesterday, the Scottish National Party launched its UK election manifesto. In it was a promise to

"call on the next UK government to pursue a two state solution for Israel and Palestine and to support the formal recognition of a Palestinian state."

I welcome that commitment, and the commitment of other parties to that solution, but we need to understand that it is imperative that we act now—indeed, we are beholden to do so. We must learn from the mistakes of the past and not repeat them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A large number of members want to speak in the debate this evening. In order to ensure that I can call everyone, I am minded at this stage to accept a

motion from Sandra White, under rule 8.14.3, that the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[*Sandra White.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. Even so, I must still ask members to keep speeches to four minutes.

17:10

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I apologise to Sandra White because I will have to leave after my speech. I commend her for bringing the debate to the chamber: it is absolutely the right thing to do. This Parliament should state very clearly that we recognise the state of Palestine.

The situation in Palestine is one of the big remaining long-standing international injustices. We have seen peace in Ireland, and we see the first steps towards ending the 50-year embargo against Cuba—the Miami five were recently released after long periods in US jails and allowed to return home.

However, despite progress elsewhere, the great injustice against the Palestinian people remains. Two thirds of the world's countries now recognise Palestine as a state, and increasing numbers of church groups, trade unions and international organisations support that recognition, as defined by the 1967 borders. Recognition by this Parliament and others is no magic bullet, but it sends a clear message of solidarity to the people—the message that we care and that we want justice and peace for a people whose appalling suffering has gone on for way too long.

Illegal occupation, aggressive actions by the Israeli army and the expansion of settlements—which now host about 650,000 people—are all major barriers to creating any movement for a just peace. If we are going to see progress, it will—as in all disputes—take two sides to make a deal. I fear that that will not happen, given the aggressiveness and complete unwillingness of the current Israeli Government to accept or recognise all that is going on: ethnic cleansing; the holding of child prisoners and of prisoners without trial; torture; the demolition of homes, hospitals and power stations; and land grabs.

If there is no recognition or admission of those war crimes and gross human rights violations, there is unlikely to be any progress. The blockade of Gaza and further attacks on innocent men, women and children have only increased tensions, conflict and tragedy in the region. I have to say that my blood ran cold when Netanyahu was re-elected earlier this year.

The international community will need to be extremely forceful if we are going to see progress over the next while. Our actions today are a small step in the right direction. I thank Sandra White for bringing the debate to the chamber.

17:13

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): I thank my friend and colleague Sandra White for bringing the issue, once again, to Parliament. She has been a great champion of the cause, and she has certainly educated many members of our party about some of the issues.

What is peace? Peace is a period of harmony between different social groups that is characterized by a lack of violence and conflict behaviours, and by freedom from fear of violence. It is commonly understood to be an absence of hostility and retribution. Peace also suggests sincere attempts at reconciliation, the existence of healthy or newly healed interpersonal or international relationships, prosperity in matters of social or economic welfare, and the establishment of equality and a working political order that serves the true interests of all.

My consideration of that idea of peace led me to an initiative that I had heard about: the Nobel Women's Initiative. Everything that it does embodies the interpretation of peace that I have just given. The initiative has three objectives—"Women Forging Peace", "Women Achieving Justice" and "Women Advancing Equality and Human Rights". A few years ago, the initiative produced a fascinating report on the work that it was doing with Palestinian and Israeli women. The report was called, "Partners for Peace: Women in Israel and Palestine Working for an End to the Conflict and Lasting Reconciliation", and I am sure that what we all want for Palestine and Israel is women—mothers, wives, sisters and daughters—in Palestinian and Israeli communities working together for peace and reconciliation. The report states:

"Any meeting between the Palestinian and Israeli members of the group has an element of a miracle ... If we, who have lost the most precious of all, can sit and talk, then surely others could use this as an example."

I am sure that we can all agree with that.

That have been many moments when I have been proud of my party, but I have never been prouder than I was at the manifesto launch yesterday, when I saw, written in bold in our manifesto, a commitment to recognise a Palestinian state. I back Sandra White's call on whoever forms the next UK government to take that into account.

A good few years ago, I hosted the middle east peace festival in this building. Part of that festival was a photographic exhibition in the garden lobby. The display was a narrative of some of the reconciliation work that was going on in Gaza. The photographer was Angela Catlin and the reporter was Billy Briggs. Many, many photographs depicted scenes that were symbolic of peace and reconciliation, but one in particular kept drawing me back over and over again. That photograph now hangs in my office—it has been there for about seven years. It reminds me of why we need to do what we are doing, and it brings us back to the idea of "Women Forging Peace"—I know that the guys are pretty good at that as well, but I thought that it would be different to focus on women. The photograph shows a three-year-old girl in a bright red jumper, holding a white dove. The symbology of that tells us everything that we need to know: youth, the future, the bright reality of the red jumper, and the white of the dove, meaning peace.

For all of our sakes—for the sake of that wee girl and for the sake of Israel and Palestine—we need a two-state solution that is enshrined in the philosophy of peace.

17:17

Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con): I, too, congratulate Sandra White on securing today's debate on this sensitive and incredibly important international issue. I think that all of us can agree with key elements of the motion in relation to the need for a negotiated two-state solution, and with the view that that resolution must come through peaceful means.

However, my position on the specific issue of recognition of Palestine is in line with that of the UK Government—namely, that although the UK reserves the right to recognise a Palestinian state bilaterally, and keeps the matter under constant consideration, that must happen at a time when it can best help to bring about peace. As the UK Foreign Office minister Tobias Ellwood stated last October in a similar debate at Westminster, the timing of any such recognition is vital and is, diplomatically, a card that we can play only once.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): Could Cameron Buchanan comment on most people's view that the best time for peace is always now?

Cameron Buchanan: I agree that the best time for peace is now, but recognition of a Palestinian state is dependent on certain conditions being met first and which I will now enunciate. One of them is that, for its part, Palestine must recognise the right of the Jewish state to exist, which at the moment it does not. The immediate focus must continue to

be on a negotiated end to the occupation, which is the most effective way for Palestinian aspirations to statehood to be met. That must come as part of a comprehensive peace agreement that delivers an independent Palestine alongside a safe and secure Israel. We are under no illusions about how difficult it looks to achieve that.

However, the UK, with international partners, is continuing to push for progress towards peace, and leads the way in supporting Palestinian state building and measures to address Israel's security concerns. Making progress towards the two-state solution remains a foreign-policy priority for the UK. In commenting on the result of the recent Israeli general election and the re-election of Mr Netanyahu, the UK again called on the Israeli Government to demonstrate leadership and courage in working with the international community to secure the peace that is so strongly in the interests both of Israelis and of Palestinians.

We recognise the severe suffering of the inhabitants of Gaza. The UK Government is one of the leading donors in supporting the much-needed reconstruction efforts in Gaza; indeed, we will have provided £350 million between 2011 and 2015 to build Palestinian institutions, deliver essential services and relieve the humanitarian situation. We share the concerns about Israeli settlement building in the West Bank and have said that Israel's settlement-building makes it hard for its friends to make the case that Israel is committed to peace. The Palestinian Authority must also make progress on governance and security for Palestinians in Gaza as well as the West Bank.

At the same time, the Palestinians must take steps to address Israel's significant and legitimate security concerns. We should all recognise that Israel has faced an unacceptable barrage of rockets from Hamas and other militant groups, which is unsustainable.

Again, I welcome the debate and look forward to the time when the UK can formally recognise the Palestinian state, which I hope will happen when we have made genuine progress towards peace and towards achieving a just and lasting solution to the long-stated aim of a negotiated two-state solution.

17:21

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab): I congratulate Sandra White on securing this important debate and I declare an interest as a member of the cross-party group on Palestine and as a member of the Scottish Palestine solidarity campaign. Scotland has strong links with Palestine, and the Scottish labour movement has

a long history of supporting the Palestinian struggle for justice.

The UK, as the originator of the Balfour declaration, has a unique historical and moral responsibility to the people of both Palestine and Israel, yet, 100 years on from our 1920 commitment to guide Palestinians to statehood, the Palestinian people are still struggling for self-determination and for recognition.

Last October, the UK Parliament voted overwhelmingly to recognise Palestine, but just two days later—as Sandra White mentioned—David Cameron said that he would recognise Palestine only

“when the time is right”.

The time is not only right, it is long overdue. The UK has neglected its responsibilities and obligations to the Palestinian people for too long.

Recognition of Palestine is not, and can never be, a bargaining chip or a negotiating tool. It is a fundamental and unconditional human right for the Palestinian people. The fact that the UK is one of a handful of nations that refused to support recognition at the United Nations is simply shameful. I hope that one of the first actions of the new UK Government will be to join the 135 nations right across the world that now recognise Palestine, because the need for international pressure has never been greater.

The two-state solution seems to be slipping away under Prime Minister Netanyahu—a man who just one day before Israel's general election ruled out a Palestinian state while he was Prime Minister; who is on record as saying that Israel has no respect for international law; who believes the deaths of 2,000 civilians during last year's atrocities in Gaza was “proportionate”; and whose actions appear to be geared towards destroying what little hope the Palestinian people have left.

In recent years, we have seen the illegal settlements expand rapidly, we have seen Palestinians subjected to ever-increasing and punitive restrictions on movement, we have seen the continued building of the illegal apartheid wall, which is dividing and isolating Palestinian land and families, and all the time we are witnessing a large-scale and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Recognition of Palestine will not secure peace, it will not end the blockade and it will not stop the day-to-day reality of occupation in Palestine, or the collective punishment of people in Gaza. However, it will help to restore hope at a time when diplomacy appears to have failed, and it will send a message to the Israeli Government that Scotland and the UK believe that Palestine has the same right to recognition and security that

Israel does and that the existence of a Palestinian state is an absolute requirement for peace. That change needs to happen now and is in the best interests of both the Palestinian and the Israeli people.

Last summer, the world united in its condemnation of Israel's atrocities in Gaza. Day after day, our television screens were filled with images of schools, hospitals and housing estates reduced to rubble by the Israeli army. More than 500 children lost their lives. The UN secretary general said that Israel's actions caused an "unprecedented" level of destruction, creating a man-made humanitarian crisis from which it will take Gaza decades to recover. Nine months on, only a quarter of the money that was pledged to rebuild Gaza has been released and reconstruction and recovery have barely begun. A staggering 100,000 people are still homeless and no action has been taken to end the illegal blockade that is denying the people of Gaza access to basic essentials of life, including clean water and healthcare.

Recognition of Palestine is only the start of the journey to justice. I hope that we can send out a strong message from the Scottish Parliament that we recognise the right of the Palestinian people to freedom and self-determination and that we will use our influence, politically and economically, to support the Palestinians' struggle for justice. The message should be that we will not sit by and watch while the Israeli Government breaches international law by operating what is, in effect, an apartheid regime that treats Palestinian people—including Palestinian children—as second-class citizens, that denies them basic human rights and that believes that the life of an Israeli child is more precious than the life of a Palestinian child, because we believe that every child's life is precious and that every child in this world is equal. It is time to secure justice and freedom for the Palestinian people; it is time to recognise Palestine.

17:25

Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I commend Sandra White for securing the debate and I commend the many other members past and present—I notice that Pauline McNeill is in the public gallery—who have championed the cause of Palestine in Parliament and across Scotland. I have a long-term involvement in the issue through family connections.

The question has to be: if the solution is not a two-state solution, what is it, and if the time is not now, when is the time? The endless debate and discussion and the internationalisation of the issues have not led to a solution. The two-state solution was originally proposed in the early 1970s

and there have been many diplomatic efforts to implement it, including the 1991 Madrid conference, the 1993 Oslo accords, the failed 2000 Camp David summit, the Taba negotiations in early 2001, the Arab League proposals in 2002 and, of course, the 2013-14 peace talks.

At the outset of those peace talks, Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary general, said:

"Israeli and Palestinian leaders must move beyond words".

However, two years later, the movement beyond words has been a movement only to kill innocent civilians. There has to be a time when the two-state solution is implemented, because there is no other solution on the table that would be acceptable to both sides. The solution is very simple, as all those who have been involved in the debate over many years know—it is to ensure not only that Israel has a right to exist but that Palestine has a right to exist. If it is recognised that both states have a right to exist, the work is to ensure that that solution is implemented.

How can the work be implemented? Sir John Maffey, the UK ambassador to Ireland during the second world war, rather ruefully observed at one stage that "Phrases make history here". One of the great problems in this debate is the language that is used and the language that is sometimes forced out of us when we confront the sheer horror of situations such as that in Gaza last year and the continuing situation there. There has to be a moment at which all those who are involved simply say that enough is enough. Many of us felt that that might have come in 2013-14, when there was a willingness to debate and discuss, but the recent Israeli elections seem to have pushed that even further away. Again, it is also language that has pushed it away. A Prime Minister who seeks re-election on the basis of forbidding the implementation of international resolutions is a Prime Minister who is using language to prevent peace.

John Finnie was absolutely right to ask, "If not now, when?" There has to be peace immediately. The moment that there is any discussion about delaying the opportunity for peace and the end of suffering, we are—like it or not—contributing to that suffering. That is one thing to settle on and, fortunately, it has been settled on. Of the 193 United Nations countries, 135 recognise the existence of a separate Palestinian state. In 2012, Palestine was granted non-member observer status at the UN, with 138 in favour, nine against and 41 abstentions. There is global willingness to accept the two-state solution, including willingness in Palestine and Israel. In Ban Ki-moon's words, it is time to "move beyond words" and to accept the inevitability of peace, which can come only when there is justice for both sides. That is settled on

and it will happen. The question is, "When?" If that is the question, the answer must always be, "Now."

17:29

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I thank Sandra White for lodging the motion, which I fully support. She has a history of supporting the Palestinian cause, not only in the Parliament but in the middle east. I had the privilege of joining her on a 24-hour mission to east Jerusalem, the West Bank and Israel not long ago. We met the families of two hunger-striking prisoners, various political representatives and the UK ambassador to Israel in Tel Aviv.

Those two prisoners had been hunger striking for more than 200 days because they had been arrested and held in custody without any charge. They were at the point of death and the fear was that, if they died in custody, an uprising might occur.

The Parliament has a proud record of standing up for the recognition of the Palestinian state. Pauline McNeill, who is in the public gallery and was an MSP in the previous session, is still deeply involved. Hugh O'Donnell, Claudia Beamish, John Finnie and Jean Urquhart are all active in standing up for the people who others fear to stand up for.

The Parliament is not the only place where recognition of Palestine is increasing, although it is not increasing quickly enough, of course. At the Lib Dem party conference in October, we passed a motion to

"Encourage the European Union to recognise the State of Palestine within pre-1967 borders and with land swaps agreed by the Israeli and Palestinian authorities through peace negotiations in good faith on the basis of each side's entitlements under international law."

As others have mentioned, on 13 October, the House of Commons voted by 274 votes to a mere 12 to approve the motion

"That this House believes that the Government should recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel, as a contribution to securing a negotiated two state solution."

Sandra White is right to recognise our responsibility. After all, Mr Balfour of the Balfour declaration was one of my constituents—he was from East Lothian—so he was a Scot.

The world's view of Palestine is changing, albeit slowly, but there has never been a greater need for parity for Palestine. It fulfilled its obligations for electing its representatives and, from that, we should have been able to negotiate meaningfully—without bloodshed and without repercussions—towards the two-state solution agreed by the UN. We have only to look at India and South Africa to see that progress is made only through peaceful

negotiations and mutual respect. Nothing is gained from any side taking up arms. Too many innocents have shed blood already.

We all remember the work that many politicians from all sides did in Scotland and the UK to make our concerns about South Africa ring loud and clear. Apartheid is inhumane, but we see it still today. When Sandra White and I were last in the middle east, it had recently been announced that there would be Israeli-only bus routes with no Palestinians allowed. On our route back to the airport, we negotiated for about half an hour with an armed Israeli official who admitted that the reason why he questioned us so much was that our taxi driver happened to hold a Palestinian passport. Such treatment is the norm in the occupied territories.

Four minutes is not long to make the case for the recognition of the Palestinian state in a two-state solution going back to 1967 borders. The situation in Palestine is intolerable. Gaza is still besieged, apartheid is the norm and prisoners are held without charge. There is evidence of children being illegally arrested. The people have no identity and no simple access to medicine, employment, schooling or their human rights. That is unsustainable, is inhuman and has no place in our 21st century world. After all,

"The inhumanity of man toward man is our greatest sin."

I support the motion in Sandra White's name and look forward to visiting Palestine in the near future when the Palestinians have equality and parity of rights with their fellow world citizens and neighbours.

17:34

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I warmly welcome the opportunity to participate in this debate on an issue of such international importance and warmly congratulate Sandra White on securing time in the Parliament to air the cause of justice for the Palestinian people, which is an essential prerequisite for a lasting peace in the middle east.

The position of the United Nations, which is clearly expressed in resolution 242, is in essence to support a viable Palestinian state coexisting alongside a secure Israel. That resolution's objective continues to be backed by communities across Scotland, throughout the UK and internationally.

The Church of Scotland's position is stated clearly in the message that all members have received from the Rev Sally Foster-Fulton, which says:

"We reaffirm the ... position of the Church of Scotland that Israel is a country"

and

"We reaffirm the historic commitment of the Church of Scotland to a State of Palestine with the same rights and responsibilities".

The position of the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church is also unequivocal. When the matter was debated at Westminster in October, the bishops of Coventry and Clifton published a joint letter that said:

"it is the reasonable aspiration of all peoples to belong to a state"

and

"we believe Palestinians should also have a state that they can at long last call home."

As members know, those sentiments are shared by people of all faiths and none across all our communities. We have all seen the letter that was circulated by retired ambassador Dr Alon Liel, which was signed by 1,000 citizens of Israel. It states the wish for a safe and thriving Israel and recognises that the fulfilment of that wish is inextricably linked to and dependent on

"the existence of a Palestinian state alongside Israel".

The letter adds that

"Israel should recognise the state of Palestine and Palestine should recognise the state of Israel, based on the June 4th, 1967 borders."

I believe that the overwhelming majority of the international community agree with that position. The overwhelming vote of the UN General Assembly in 2012—by 138 votes to nine—is clear evidence of support for recognition of the Palestinian state. The Scottish Labour Party, the Labour Party and the labour and trade union movement across the UK have a record of strong support for the Palestinians, who for decades, as we have heard, have endured military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. The latter is under almost total blockade and is still suffering from the effects of last year's military action by the Israeli state, when thousands—the majority of them civilians—were maimed or killed.

That principled position was clearly demonstrated in the vote at Westminster last year, when the parliamentary Labour Party voted overwhelmingly to recognise a Palestinian state and members of all other parties supported that principled stance. Will such votes and what we support today lead to the objective that is shared by all who wish to make peaceful progress towards the aim of resolution 242? Of course not. However, they will preserve the objective of a two-state solution.

Recognition will restate that hope. Recognition is necessary, not sufficient. It is the precursor to a reinvigorated peace process. It will be a clear and visible indication of the serious intent of the UK

and the wider international community not to allow Mr Netanyahu to believe that we will stand idly by and allow him to block the road to peace and justice in the middle east.

I hope that Ed Miliband will become the Prime Minister in 17 days' time—other members' views may differ—and that the recognition of the state of Palestine, which is contained in Labour's manifesto, will be one of his first foreign policy initiatives. It is long overdue. As Douglas Alexander said at the Labour Party conference,

"recognition of Palestine is not a gift to be given, but a right to be had."

17:38

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I, too, congratulate Sandra White on bringing this timely debate to the chamber.

I have confidence in humanity's ability to do things right. It sometimes takes us a considerable time to do so, but we can get there. We have repeatedly heard the statistic that 135 out of 193 UN member states have already done the right thing, and I commend them for that. Although recognising the Palestinian state will perhaps have little practical effect immediately, it is significant for the issues that are important to people, such as equality, the regard that they are held in and the solidarity that is shown to them.

The Scottish Parliament does not have responsibility for foreign affairs, so many people might wonder why we are discussing this matter. However, it is highly appropriate that we do so. The Parliament has always been outward looking. At topical question time today, my colleague Alison Johnstone raised the plight of migrants drowning in the Mediterranean Sea. I venture that that is very much a metaphor for the plight of the Palestinian people. I welcomed the Scottish Government's response, which we heard from the cabinet secretary. It was compassionate and constructive, and it sought to work collaboratively with people. I contrast that with what many would characterise as the UK Government's position, which is that drowning acts as a deterrent.

There is a similarity with what we have heard before from the Scottish Government in relation to the attacks on Gaza, when there was a call for the international community to act together to condemn the collective punishment and the disregard for international law and to offer to treat the injured and offer asylum. It is by acting together that we will secure what we have to secure for the Palestinian state.

The blockade has been mentioned. I have to say that, if someone is homeless, hungry or dispossessed, fine words will count for zero. We need to see action on the ground. Sadly, the UK

could be characterised as standing by—the worst sort of gallows bystanders.

I am unequivocally opposed to violence. Coexistence is not a complicated political concept, but it requires good will. The EU was founded on the principle of equality of human rights. We must ask ourselves why some states that we would think would be outward looking and compassionate have taken the position that they have. Clearly there are vested interests, which are often financial and are very pernicious.

The UN resolutions have been alluded to. They are an important signal, but what is more important for the people of Gaza—which I have had the privilege to visit, as have many colleagues—is the practical support that is given on the ground by the people wearing a UN badge. During my visit, I had the opportunity to see at first hand a resilient population, but a population of a systematically brutalised piece of land. It is a just settlement, not illegal settlements, that we need to move things on.

Peaceful coexistence might appear a dream, but it is the right approach to take. The power of reason over the force of arms will always win through. I will not repeat—not least because he would appreciate the characterisation—the Prime Minister of Israel's present position, but he is certainly not the architect of peace; he is the architect of further division.

What will history say about those who recognised the Palestinian state? It will say that a stance was taken on points of principle, recognising international law and humanitarian norms. That is the only principled stance, as part of the two-state solution.

17:42

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased that members of the Parliament have gathered to hold this important debate. I thank Sandra White for bringing the motion to our chamber and for her analysis of the developments leading to today.

I feel strongly about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, like many others in the chamber and far beyond, and I am grateful for the chance to speak. I welcome the people in the public gallery and recognise the work that they do, often on a voluntary basis, to take forward a just solution.

As members may be aware, in 2012 John Finnie and I joined a fact-finding mission to Gaza on a delegation from the Council for European Palestinian Relations. That was just after the Israeli-named operation pillar of defence. The level of destruction was shocking, but equally striking was the resilience and spirit of the people whom

John Finnie and I encountered. Many of the bombings—then and in more recent attacks, with difficulties faced by the people there—were gratuitous. I have never forgotten the bombing of the goals and the spectator facilities at the Al Yarmouk community football stadium, which was lauded by the Israeli pilot in callous humour on the radio on his return to Israel.

After 20 years of a failed peace process, it is time for co-operation and an end to the violence. As a Labour member and co-convenor, along with others in the chamber, of the cross-party group on Palestine, I am proud that Ed Miliband committed himself to recognition of the state of Palestine should he be elected in May. That is a powerful symbolic moment and it is right that the UK should join others in the vanguard of recognising the two independent states. Supporting co-convenor Sandra White's motion is more than just symbolism, however; international recognition of Palestine could catalyse real-life impacts for some of the most victimised people in the world.

As we know, the blockade has left people in Gaza without the means to run any enterprise. The limit on movement extends beyond people to include their goods, which means that trade is virtually suffocated and that people cannot be self-reliant. However, the recent accession of Palestine to membership of the International Criminal Court must be sure to facilitate the protection of Palestinian rights against war crimes.

I was recently contacted by the Palestinian Farmers Union, which empowers Palestinian farmers and protects their rights. Palestine's new ICC membership may assist with challenging the illegal seizure of Palestinian farmers' land in the West Bank and Gaza.

In 2011, the economy ministry and the Applied Research Institute Jerusalem compiled a report that stated that there is a huge discrepancy between land allocation for Israeli and Palestinian farmers in the West Bank and east Jerusalem area. Some 620,000 Israeli settlers cultivated 64,000 dunams, whereas 4 million Palestinians cultivated just 100,000 dunams. A dunam is traditionally the amount of land that could be ploughed by a team of oxen in a day. The Palestinian Farmers Union hopes that the ICC will expose the situation and deliver justice to those dispossessed of their land. It would also help those threatened by the Israeli military when they try to farm their land near Israeli settlements.

Of course, human rights violations by one party do not justify violations by its opponents, and the cycle of violence has continued for far too long. The visit to Gaza in November 2012 enabled me to witness the stark reality of Israel's disproportionate military actions, and many MSP

colleagues have also had the chance to bear witness.

Following Netanyahu's re-election, I am concerned that the Israeli Government will only become increasingly intransigent. Based on his comments, his re-election seems to be a retrograde step for the whole region. Support for the motion and calling for international recognition of the Palestinian state will send a powerful message to the Government of Israel and to the world that a two-state solution is the only solution.

17:47

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I, too, thank Sandra White for lodging the motion. I agree with the motion's proposal that we need a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine. There are quite a few other things that we need as well.

Primarily I would want to see Britain, Scotland and the European Union acting as peacemakers in the middle east. Jumping on board with one side or the other will not be helpful. Both sides already have lots of rich and powerful supporters, so what they need are some genuinely trustworthy friends who will not take sides but seek to get all parties round the table. I say all parties and not just two, because this is not just about Israel and Palestine. Other big players such as the United States, Egypt, Iran and Saudi Arabia must all be part of any serious long-term solution.

If we look at just Israel and Palestine, we see that Israel is bigger and stronger, but when we look at the other players in the region we see that several of them are much bigger and stronger than Israel, so both Israel and Palestine may feel nervous about some of their neighbours. Palestine has about 4 million people and Israel some 8 million. However, Egypt has 82 million and Iran 77 million, so let us not forget which are the really big countries in the region. Palestine has very little to spend on defence, whereas Israel spends \$18 billion or thereabouts on its defence budget. However, let us remember that Saudi Arabia spends \$59 billion on defence, which is much more than what Israel spends.

While we are making comparisons, perhaps we can mention human rights. The international human rights rank indicator puts Israel at 71st in the world, Palestine 107th, Iran 166th and Saudi Arabia 205th. Israel's rank of 71st is not great, but it is certainly not the worst in the region. I would have more time for those who demand sanctions against Israel or want its leaders charged with war crimes if those people were consistently critical of Saudi Arabia, where there is little democracy to speak of and human rights are largely ignored.

Why are so many people and even political parties so critical of Israel and so lenient towards

Saudi Arabia? Is it because Saudi Arabia is a rich and powerful country and we want its business and its money whereas Israel is a pretty small country and it is easier to bully it around?

Last week, I attended a Yom Hashoah event in Giffnock. The evening was very powerful and moving. Ken Macintosh, Jackson Carlaw and Jim Murphy were there, as well. Jews in the west of Scotland marked the Holocaust and especially the British liberation of Bergen-Belsen. It is clear that the Jews feel somewhat vulnerable these days, as criticism of Israel very readily spills over into anti-Semitism in Glasgow.

Sandra White: Will the member take an intervention?

John Mason: No, if Sandra White does not mind—I am just about finished.

There is a Jewish cemetery that backs on to my garden. Some time ago, its wall had anti-Jewish slogans painted on it. Let us not think that Scotland is immune to anti-Semitism.

I am not saying that we should never criticise Israel for fear of anti-Semitism when that state carries out wrong actions, but I am asking for two things: let us be consistent in our treatment of Israel and other states, and let us redouble our efforts to be peacemakers and a trusted friend to both sides.

17:50

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I, too, thank Sandra White for bringing this important debate to the chamber.

As Sandra White noted, the UN General Assembly proposed a two-state solution in 1947, but the conflict and the illegal blockade of Palestine continue. I am pleased that we are demonstrating a strong stance in support of the people of Palestine and a peaceful two-state solution.

The United Nations chief, Ban Ki-moon, previously described Israeli military action towards Palestine as

"a moral outrage and a criminal act".

David Cameron's defence of Israel's actions towards a blockaded population demonstrated that many of us are not being represented by the UK Government when it comes to a lack of support for Palestine in foreign policy.

Palestine must be recognised as a state by the UK Government, and we must join the nations that have already done that. We here can try to influence that situation as positively as we can.

As John Mason pointed out, the conflict involves and affects many across the globe. Although we

may lack foreign policy powers, we can look at ethical public procurement. We can call on public bodies to bring in wider international matters in their purchase of particular products with taxpayers' money. We should put those policies in place not just for particular countries, but when we buy anything. We should have an ethical procurement policy. Many constituents have written to me about that issue not just this week but on an on-going basis. They all urgently desire peace in the middle east and they support a two-state solution.

The people in Palestine and Israel need peace now. They need a safe, secure and truly sustainable future. I support recognition of the Palestinian state based on the borders of 1967, which were recognised by the United Nations.

The current Westminster election campaign gives all parties a chance to highlight their position on the issue and it gives our constituents a chance to question parties on their stance. Those who hope to represent our people at Westminster should be informing constituents what their views are on that incredibly important international issue.

It is fair to say that the plight of the Palestinian people has not improved since the Israeli election of 17 March. People in Palestine face the daily challenge of access to education, land for farming, water supplies and homes. Claudia Beamish highlighted the inequality when it comes to access to farm land. There are abuses of human rights.

The time for recognition of Palestine by all is long overdue. That recognition is an important step towards justice and peace for Palestine and Israel. A two-state solution is required now, and we in the Parliament, with the many determined campaigners outwith it, must do all that we can to bring that about.

17:54

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I, too, congratulate Sandra White on securing this debate, and I also pay tribute to her for her long-standing work on Palestine, and to others across the chamber.

Peace depends on there being two secure, stable and prosperous states of Israel and Palestine, living side by side. To that end, the Scottish Government has firmly and consistently encouraged

"Israel and Palestine to reach a sustainable, negotiated settlement under international law, which has as its foundation mutual recognition and the determination to co-exist peacefully."

That is the vision at the heart of the middle east peace plan. However, the process appears to

have reached an impasse. The occupation continues, settlements expand, and rocket attacks, bombardments and incursions continue in a horrific cycle of violence and destruction.

Despite considerable diplomatic efforts, the two-state solution looks to be no closer to reality. In 2013, US Secretary of State John Kerry stated that there were two years left to find a two-state solution. William Hague, the then Foreign Secretary, said the same thing in 2012. Those two years have passed, and it is clear that not enough progress has been made to change the course of history. The construction of illegal settlements continues to be tolerated—even encouraged—by the Israeli Government, and the Palestinians' right to govern their own land seems to be as distant as ever.

There is widespread recognition that something needs to change. Sir Vincent Fean, the former British consul general to Jerusalem, wrote an article for the *Sunday Herald*, which was published this week, urging the international community to recognise Palestine alongside Israel, because recognition is a necessity to ending the conflict. A way must be found to break the political deadlock.

Self-determination is a right, not a privilege to be earned. It is unjust to hold out statehood as a reward for participation in negotiations. Recognising the state of Palestine would send a signal that we acknowledge the rights of the people of Palestine to self-determination; and that we support them in their endeavour to build peaceful, prosperous lives for themselves in their own land. That would also make clear the expectations of an independent state that is part of the community of nations. The people of Palestine should not allow their territories to be abused by those who seek the destruction of Israel.

Palestine has recently signed up to a number of international treaties and conventions. It should aspire to the standards that those describe on respect for human rights, on the integrity of its neighbours and on the sanctity of the lives of their people.

To support the Palestinian people's aspirations is not to be an enemy of Israel. I am certain that the majority of Israelis and Palestinians want peace and that they want an end to the decades of violence.

We should support those who seek a peaceful political solution to the conflict, such as the 1,000 Israelis, including eminent politicians, academics and retired military officers, who have signed a petition encouraging the international community to recognise Palestine's statehood as a necessary step for the peace and security of Palestine and Israel.

I also want to reflect on the letter that has been sent to us all by the Church of Scotland. It states:

"We reaffirm the historic commitment of the Church of Scotland to a State of Palestine with the same rights and responsibilities recognised within the international community of States, with all the rights and responsibilities attendant on that status."

It goes further, in saying:

"We support ongoing commitment to dialogue and conversation, with particular concern to make sure that those who are on the margins and whose voices are rarely heard get the opportunity to be listened to, especially Christians who live in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory."

That issue was brought home to me by the minister and the members of St Michael's church in my home town of Linlithgow, who have recently returned from visiting their sister church, the Holy Family Episcopal church in Reineh, near Nazareth. Sandra White was absolutely right when she said that all voices in Israel need to be heard. We urge the UK Government and the European Union to do all that is in their powers to ensure that human rights are protected and promoted.

We support all on-going international diplomatic efforts to achieve peace in the region. The UN, the world's major powers and the Israelis and Palestinians have committed to achieving a peace that is based on two states. Accepting Palestine as a state in its own right alongside Israel should be the starting point of negotiations. It would make clear the principle that the rights of Palestinians and Israelis are equal.

As members have said, more than 130 countries around the world have formally recognised the state of Palestine. In October 2014, our colleagues in the House of Commons voted by a huge majority to support a motion encouraging the UK Government to follow suit.

In the past, the Scottish Government has spoken to UK ministers to urge them formally to recognise the Palestinian state. As members may be aware, my party, the SNP, has set out its position that SNP members of Parliament will press for the new UK Government to recognise the state of Palestine. The current UK Government's position is that a negotiated two-state solution should be pursued. There is clearly sentiment in this chamber and beyond that that position needs to go further. It is time, now, to recognise the state of Palestine.

Meeting closed at 18:00.

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