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Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 23 September 2015

Session 4

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Scottish Parliament

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

Portfolio Question Time

Health, Wellbeing and Sport

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions. In order to get in as many members as possible, I would, as usual, prefer short and succinct questions and answers, please.

Scottish Medicines Consortium (Decision-making Processes)

1. Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will review the decision-making processes of the Scottish Medicines Consortium following its decision not to reimburse Vimizim for people with Morquio A syndrome. (S4O-04608)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): The independence of the Scottish Medicines Consortium's decisions on individual drugs is well established. In line with what was recommended when the SMC adopted its new approach to orphan, ultra-orphan and end-of-life drugs, there will be a formal review of the new SMC approach in 2015-16, and the Scottish Government is currently working with the SMC on the remit of the review.

Alex Fergusson: I am very grateful to the cabinet secretary for that response. As she knows, when I first became involved with this issue, those who made the case for reimbursement for Vimizim were very complimentary about the SMC process and rather less so about the process south of the border through the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. However, as time has gone on, that situation has reversed. It is quite clear that the NICE process was highly inclusive in nature and included round-table discussions with clinicians, patients and families, whereas the Scottish process was the very opposite.

Therefore, in drawing up the remit for the 2015-16 review, will the cabinet secretary ensure that the process becomes more inclusive so that those who are most affected are made to feel that they are a valued part of it, rather than being made to feel that they are outside it?

Shona Robison: The consultation with stakeholders that will be carried out as part of the review will be wide, and I encourage Alex

Fergusson to submit his view on the case that he has cited to the SMC as part of the review.

The review will look at the SMC process, the decision-making process and the issue of inclusivity. Alex Fergusson cites NICE's process as an example of an inclusive process, but there are many criticisms of the NICE process, too. I think that the new process is better than what we had before, but we always said that we would review the new process within the first year of operation. That is what we will do, and I will certainly ensure that the issue of inclusivity that the member raises forms part of the review and will discuss that with the SMC.

NHS Lanarkshire (Out-of-hours General Practitioner Services)

2. Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussion it has had with NHS Lanarkshire since its interim service model for out-of-hours GP services was implemented on 1 July 2015. (S4O-04609)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): Discussions with all national health service boards, including NHS Lanarkshire, are on-going as part of the national review of primary care out-of-hours services, which is being led by Professor Lewis Ritchie. The review will report its findings and recommendations in the autumn.

Linda Fabiani: In any discussion and consideration of the matter, will the cabinet secretary recognise that although East Kilbride is the largest population centre in Lanarkshire, it has been without an out-of-hours GP service since NHS Lanarkshire's interim model was implemented? Does she recognise that that is an anomalous situation that must surely be rectified in any long-term solution?

Shona Robison: I certainly expect NHS Lanarkshire to keep the interim service under review. Once we have Professor Lewis Ritchie's recommendations, I expect NHS Lanarkshire to look at them and to consider whether the interim service is in line with them. It has said publicly that it will undertake a full review, with public involvement, within six months. That will take account of the recommendations, which will be coming soon. I will, of course, consider NHS Lanarkshire's longer-term plans in the light of all that.

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): We now have further evidence that NHS Lanarkshire's so-called interim GP service—out of hours, out of hospital and running out of GPs—is not working. Despite the reduction in the number of centres from five to two, over a recent three-month period one in nine sessions was unfilled.

There is often just one GP out-of-hours centre for the whole of Lanarkshire.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I need a question, Mr Pentland.

John Pentland: Does the cabinet secretary agree that that is not the service that the people of Lanarkshire deserve and have the right to expect, as the chief executive promised? For how much longer will she tolerate this worsening position?

Shona Robison: With regard to the timeframe, the Ritchie review's recommendations—as I said in response to Linda Fabiani's question—are fundamental to the way in which not only NHS Lanarkshire but any other health board operates and organises its out-of-hours services.

John Pentland referred to the interim model. NHS Lanarkshire moved to an interim model because of patient safety concerns, as it made clear that it could not staff its rotas. The board now tells me that it is more able to staff the rotas than it was previously and that the service is safe, so John Pentland should take that on board.

As I have said, I expect that, moving forward, NHS Lanarkshire's out-of-hours services will be in line with the recommendations that come out of the national review. If the board wants to move to any permanent change in its out-of-hours services, that issue would come to the Scottish Government.

The important point is that we send a message to the people of Lanarkshire that their services are safe; I am sure that even John Pentland would want to do that.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): The minister might be aware of reports at the weekend that NHS Lanarkshire is at risk of losing its training status for junior doctors, which is vital for providing out-of-hours services. What is her view on those very worrying reports?

Shona Robison: I am very much aware of the issue of the training status for junior doctors, and my officials and I are having on-going discussions with NHS Lanarkshire about those matters.

NHS Lanarkshire is clear about the improvements that it must put in place in order to resolve those issues, and I am clear that it has to do so. I will keep a close eye on those matters.

NHS Grampian (Recruitment and Retention) (Government Support)

3. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to NHS Grampian to help recruit and retain staff. (S4O-04610)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): NHS Grampian, along with all national health service boards, is required to have in place the correct staff to meet the needs of the service and ensure high-quality patient care.

The Scottish Government has increased NHS Grampian's resource budget by 6.7 per cent to more than £830 million for 2015-16. That rise is above inflation, and it is the largest increase for any mainland board, with the budget having previously increased by 4.6 per cent in 2014-15. The Scottish Government works closely with all boards to support their staff recruitment efforts.

Richard Baker: I know that the cabinet secretary is aware of the particular concern in the north-east regarding general practitioner recruitment, given the closure of the Brimmond medical practice in Aberdeen and the fact that other practices are being affected by staff recruitment issues.

I have raised that issue with the cabinet secretary previously. Can she provide any further details today on what action the Scottish Government is taking to tackle it, given that patients are already being affected and that approximately 20 per cent of GPs in the north-east are due to retire next year?

Shona Robison: We have taken a close interest in the issue with regard to Brimmond and other practices in Aberdeen and across the north-east. NHS Grampian is working closely to ensure that there is continuity of service for those patients.

In the medium to longer term, we require new ways of working in primary care. That is why we are discussing with the Royal College of General Practitioners, the British Medical Association and others radically different models of primary care and the need for the new GP contract that will run from 2017 to facilitate those new models of care.

A number of practices in Aberdeen are trailblazing the idea of a federated structure of GP surgeries. Rather than having small—in some cases, single-handed—practices, surgeries would come together in a cluster to provide a greater range of services to their patients. I am happy to keep Richard Baker apprised of progress on that.

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): In relation to the Brimmond medical group, will the cabinet secretary join me in welcoming the launch, by the Scotstoun medical group, of the new Dyce medical practice, which perhaps conforms to the approach of the federated structure that she has announced and which will ensure continuity for patients of the Brimmond practice who were affected by its withdrawal of general medical services?

Shona Robison: I very much welcome the new Dyce medical practice and the new federated structure. As well as the resilience that a federated structure brings to general practice and primary care in the area, the benefit is that it opens up opportunities for specialist services to be delivered to that patient population because of the range of experience and skills within the structure. We believe that the approach has wider application across Scotland, and that is informing our discussions with the profession as we go forward.

Robotic Radical Prostatectomy

4. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether robotic radical prostatectomy is available from the national health service. (S4O-04611)

The Minister for Public Health (Maureen Watt): I am pleased to confirm that, two months earlier than planned, robot-assisted surgery for prostate cancer is now available in NHS Scotland. The first robot has been located in Aberdeen royal infirmary and was purchased with the help of a £1 million capital contribution from the Scottish Government, which added to the magnificent fundraising efforts of the people of the north-east through the UCAN charity.

Jackie Baillie: The minister will be aware that such robotic surgery vastly improves outcomes and that recovery times are much quicker. However, she will not be aware that I have three constituents who had to travel to Leipzig and pay for the treatment themselves because Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board refused to fund the procedure. One of those people travelled a mere few weeks ago. Given that treatment was available at the new Queen Elizabeth hospital and should have been offered to my constituent, will she ensure that the money is refunded to him and will she end the postcode lottery of care?

Maureen Watt: I am happy to discuss with Jackie Baillie, outwith the chamber, the matter that she raises. She will be pleased to know that, this week, it has been confirmed that a robot has been purchased for the west of Scotland to help to deliver minimally invasive radical prostatectomy. An implementation date for that has yet to be confirmed, but we expect that it will be agreed following equipment installation and the completion of staff training.

Homoeopathic Medicine Prescription Withdrawal (Court of Session Decision)

5. Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the Court of Session's recent decision not to overturn NHS Lothian's withdrawal of prescriptive homoeopathic medicine to a Midlothian resident. (S4O-04612)

The Minister for Public Health (Maureen Watt): The decision was one for the Court of Session to take and is not a matter for the Scottish Government.

Colin Beattie: Although the scientific benefits of homoeopathy are generally unproven, it is clear that, even as a placebo, many people find it of great help. Will the minister outline some ways in which homoeopathy can be supported in the national health service?

Maureen Watt: As the member knows, it is for individual NHS boards to decide what complementary and alternative therapies are made available, based on the needs of their resident population and in line with national guidance. We expect boards to ensure that people receive the appropriate clinical care that meets the totality of their needs and that that care is person centred, safe and effective.

Deep-end General Practices (Support)

6. Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what support it provides to so-called deep-end general practitioner practices in the most socioeconomically deprived populations. (S4O-04613)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): There is recognition of the additional needs of patients in areas of deprivation in the calculation of Scottish Government funding to GPs for the provision of core services. That is shown in the weighting that is given to reflect deprivation, as a marker for increased morbidity for patients and increased workload for practices, covering the essential element of general medical services.

Patricia Ferguson: It has long been recognised that patients who attend such practices often suffer from a range of illnesses, as the cabinet secretary said, which often contribute to premature death. Is she aware that such patients are also likely to suffer some 20 years more of poor health than are those in more affluent areas? Is it not time that the funding formula for GP practices properly recognised that concern and the other challenges that face the deep-end practices and therefore supported the GPs whose patients suffer the most from health inequality, such as those in the Balmore surgery in Possilpark in my area?

Shona Robison: I am certainly very well aware of the issues that Patricia Ferguson has raised and I have a lot of sympathy for the points that she has made. There is an opportunity to discuss what the new contract from 2017 onwards—the first Scotland-only one—will look like and how it will facilitate new models of care. Within that, we must have a sharp focus on tackling health inequalities.

I am happy to continue the dialogue on the issue with Patricia Ferguson, because what she said is very much in line with my thinking as we take the discussions forward.

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): I recently met GPs at the deep-end Balmore practice in Possilpark. They have a unique situation and they have made an evidence-led and powerful case for more resources from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. I am in correspondence with the NHS board on the issue and I have written to the cabinet secretary about it.

Will the cabinet secretary consider my suggestion to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde that the particular stresses that the Balmore surgery will experience over the winter period need to be mitigated and that the health board could use winter resilience moneys to get the surgery through that period to the spring? An additional resource allocation for the surgery could be considered then, given the unique and powerful case that it has made to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

Shona Robison: I recognise Bob Doris's interest in the matter and I issued a written reply to him today about it. We all want to ensure that the Balmore practice is able to continue its important work in an area of deprivation. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has been discussing with the practice how to provide support, and that has led to the board providing short-term support.

As for what happens after that, it is important that the board continues to discuss with Balmore how to take the practice forward, because we need to put the practice on a sustainable footing. I certainly encourage Bob Doris to continue to liaise with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde on the issue, and I am happy to keep him informed of any discussions and to ensure that the board is aware of his and other members' representations.

General Practitioner Training Programme

7. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it is experiencing difficulties in recruiting for the four-year general practitioner training programme. (S4O-04614)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): It is NHS Education for Scotland, working with the GP National Recruitment Office, that oversees arrangements for selection and recruitment into three-year and four-year GP training programmes. In 2015 national recruitment, 305 GP specialty training posts were advertised in Scotland, and 237 were filled, which is a fill rate of 78 per cent. Of the 305 posts, 172 were for the four-year programme.

We are continuing to work with health boards and the medical profession to make general practice a more attractive career option. The work includes some redesign of the medical training curricula and taking forward recommendations from the shape of training review to provide GPs with enhanced skills as part of their training.

Ken Macintosh: From what the cabinet secretary said, I am not entirely sure whether she recognises the conclusions of, for example, GPs in my area, who include Dr Iain McColl, that what is currently a problem could become a crisis in five years. Will she elaborate on the steps that she is taking to make general practice a more successful and attractive long-term career option? In particular, will she reverse the funding cuts that the Government has made to general practice?

Shona Robison: The member can be assured that the issue is a very high priority for me and the Scottish Government, but we must look at a number of interrelated issues. First, in medical schools, general practice is often not seen as the most attractive specialty to go into. There is a range of reasons for that, but we have to change that perception and change the way in which medical students are encouraged or not encouraged to go into general practice.

Secondly, we need to make the training of GPs more attractive. Some of the enhanced training that we are looking at is about bridging the gap between general practice and hospital-based practice and seeing whether there are opportunities for different models that blur more of the boundaries between primary and secondary care.

There is also the requirement to develop and deliver new models of primary care that are based around multidisciplinary teams that allow the general practitioner to work to the top of their skill level and use their clinical skill and training while other health professionals do some of the work that GPs can find frustrating and time consuming. I would be happy to write to Ken Macintosh with further details.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Chief Executive (Meetings)

8. Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met the chief executive of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. (S4O-04615)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): Ministers and Government officials regularly meet representatives of all health boards, including NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

Stuart McMillan: The cabinet secretary will be aware of correspondence that I have sent to her

about smoking in hospital grounds ceasing from 1 October. That will have an impact on Ravenscraig hospital in Greenock, which provides continuing care and in-patient services for adult and elderly psychiatric patients along with rehabilitation and alcohol addiction in-patient services.

I would be grateful to know about any discussions that the cabinet secretary has had with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to consider introducing contingency measures to assist staff with the smoking ban when it comes into force. How will patients who have limited mobility be able to leave the grounds to smoke? Have any hospitals in Scotland been given an exemption from the policy?

Shona Robison: I confirm to Stuart McMillan that a letter will be on its way shortly in response to the issues that he has raised. It is a matter for NHS boards to decide whether it is appropriate and in the interests of patients to designate the grounds of their mental health facilities as smoke-free.

In line with the view of the mental welfare commissioner, the Scottish Government recognises that people with mental ill-health face some of the greatest health inequalities. As such, we support action by health boards to protect the health of that population group.

Where health boards have decided to create no-smoking outdoor areas, I expect them to ensure that patients have swift access to smoking cessation support. We are providing more than £10 million to health boards for tobacco control activity, including the provision of specialist cessation services.

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): During the cabinet secretary's discussions with the chief executive of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, did she have time to discuss the staggering £44 million maintenance backlog at Inverclyde royal hospital? Reported in 2013, that figure is almost double the figure that was reported in 2011. As I understand it, rather than it being diminished, that figure is increasing and placing a huge question mark over the future of our local hospital. Can the cabinet secretary assure us that the issue will be addressed urgently to ensure that there is a viable future for Inverclyde royal hospital?

Shona Robison: I can confirm and reassure Duncan McNeil that Inverclyde royal hospital has a viable future.

On the maintenance backlog, we expect all health boards to have in their capital plans a clear plan for maintenance, particularly if there is a backlog. We will continue to discuss issues with the health boards, including NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

Polypropylene Mesh Implants

9. Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when it expects to receive the interim conclusions of the independent review into polypropylene mesh implants and what progress the expert group has made in developing pathways of care for women experiencing complications. (S4O-04616)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government expects the independent review of transvaginal mesh implants to publish its interim report at the end of this month or the beginning of October.

The expert group suspended its activities during the period of the independent review's main work programme and reconvened at the end of August. The new pathways of care for women who are experiencing complications can now be progressed. Evidence that has been gathered by the independent review will inform the configuration of this service.

Jackson Carlaw: I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for her reply and for her continued focus on the issue. I know that she will give evidence to the Public Petitions Committee on 6 October, and I look forward to engaging with her on the detail of the report.

Will the cabinet secretary confirm that there is not one surgeon on the expert group who is not a proponent of polypropylene mesh, and whether that might yet prove to be a cause for concern? Meanwhile, will the cabinet secretary update members positively on the helpline that was launched on 3 August?

Shona Robison: The make-up of the expert group and the work that has been undertaken should be respected and should give us confidence. Indeed, the women who have been directly affected by the issue to whom I have spoken have been supportive of the work of the expert group. We need to enable it and leave it to draw its work to its conclusion.

I will write to Jackson Carlaw with an update on the use of the helpline. The helpline was well received by the women concerned. Their input into the development of the helpline and the recruitment to the service has been valuable.

I want to put on record again my thanks to the women concerned. They have had a terrible experience and have been badly affected by the issue. Their intention to support other women who are affected deserves all our praise.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are not progressing very far today. Questions and answers will need to be briefer.

Rhoda Grant: What progress is being made to reduce the use of the implants? Can the cabinet secretary guarantee that any woman using them is fully apprised of the risks that are involved?

Shona Robison: As I have said, most health boards have suspended mesh implant procedures for stress urinary incontinence and pelvic organ prolapse. Women affected and health boards are eagerly awaiting the findings of the review, as am I.

General Practitioners (Shortage)

10. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what measures it is taking to address the shortage of GPs. (S4O-04617)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): Under this Government, the number of general practitioners employed in Scotland has risen by 7 per cent to nearly 5,000—the highest ever on record. We have also increased investment in primary medical services by more than £88 million, and there are more GPs per head of population in Scotland than in England. However, I recognise that demand is increasing, which is why I have recently announced that, over the next three years, an additional £60 million will be invested to address immediate workload and recruitment issues.

Joan McAlpine: I welcome the investment in general practice. The reason for the shortage of GPs is complex and, of course, not confined to Scotland. However, I have been told by national health service insiders that the high rates that are being paid to locum doctors, including GPs, can exacerbate the shortage, as some doctors choose to pull out of the NHS and return as part-time locums.

Given that trend, would the Scottish Government support health boards that choose to cap the rates that are paid to locums?

Shona Robison: Joan McAlpine raises an important point. Our long-standing agency locum contract already caps the rate at which locums can be paid at the national NHS rates, and the doctors and dentists terms and conditions of service again ensure a capped rate for locum staff who are engaged through local supplementary staffing services such as the medical staff bank.

Health boards have been advised to use only agencies that are on the nationally agreed contract and to ensure that any local locums are paid at the contracted rates.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome the recent statements in support of federated practices or clusters, which were proposed by the Royal College of General

Practitioners eight years ago. Will the minister now examine Labour's consultation paper, "Fit for the Future", which I have sent to her and Maureen Watt? It is based on GP responses. Will the cabinet secretary or Maureen Watt come to the chamber with a statement on the developing crisis in GP recruitment and retention? In the meantime, will the cabinet secretary ensure that, where advanced nurse practitioners are being deployed instead of or alongside GPs, they are fully qualified?

Shona Robison: To be fair to Richard Simpson, at least he is trying to develop some Labour health policies. I have looked at his paper and I can tell him three things: every element of the paper either has already happened, is already happening or is already under active consideration. There is nothing in the paper that we were not already doing, looking to do or planning to do. I thank him anyway for his thoughts on the matter.

General Practitioners (North-east Vacancies)

11. Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on progress in filling GP vacancies across the north-east. (S4O-04618)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): Senior managers and GP clinical leads within Aberdeen health and social care partnership are working closely with practices offering support and assistance where required with advertising and recruitment.

Alison McInnes: The minister will know that the acute shortage of GPs is impacting daily and directly on local communities throughout the north-east, with surgeries at Gamrie, Cuminstown and Brimmond particularly affected and thousands of patients being displaced to other already busy practices in a fairly ad hoc way. What patient safety risk assessments does the cabinet secretary expect health boards to carry out in such circumstances and what safeguards have been put in place to ensure that patients with long-term and complex conditions do not experience any potentially critical disruption to their medical care?

Shona Robison: Two practices in the north-east are under what is described as special measures, which is when the board steps in to support them: one is Brimmond and the other is Gamrie. In the case of Gamrie, it was due to a GP being injured and, therefore, on sick leave, so some of the situations are difficult to predict. Obviously, the board has taken swift action. We guarantee patient continuity either through other practices taking on patients or through a salaried service as required. Boards are expected to respond rapidly to such cases, whether in Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire or anywhere else in Scotland.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for attending a recent constructive meeting with GPs, NHS Grampian and colleagues.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Stewart, I really need a question.

Kevin Stewart: At the meeting, it was said that United Kingdom pension changes were having an effect and GPs were retiring early. Will the cabinet secretary comment on that? Is it a real problem?

Shona Robison: The organisations that represent general practitioners have raised the issue that those changes have facilitated more rapid retirement in some cases. It is not the only backdrop to the challenges with GPs and primary care, but it is an issue.

Primary Care (Aberdeen) (Support)

12. Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting primary care in Aberdeen. (S4O-04619)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government continues to support NHS boards in this work through investments and initiatives that have been set up to test at scale new ways of working in primary care. Within Aberdeen, we have supported the development of a cluster model as the basis for improving patient care. That involves six practices across three community health partnerships with practices in Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray with a combined patient population of around 60,000 working together to ensure a fully integrated approach to patient care.

Mark McDonald: The cabinet secretary might be aware that part of the work that is being done to modernise primary care in Aberdeen is being carried out in the Danestone medical practice in my constituency. In light of the First Minister's announcement in the programme for government about the Scottish Government looking to remodel primary care, how will that work feed into the national agenda?

Shona Robison: Danestone medical practice is one of the six practices in NHS Grampian that are taking part in the work, which is exploring how we can develop a new model of delivery in primary care to address current and future patient demand. The Government looks forward to hearing more about the findings from that work, and the lessons learned will play an important part in informing the work on the future delivery of primary care.

Environmental Health Workforce (Capacity)

13. Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland's reported concerns regarding the capacity of the environmental health workforce in local authorities. (S4O-04620)

The Minister for Public Health (Maureen Watt): The environmental health staff who are employed by local authorities contribute significantly to environmental and public health in Scotland. I know how important it is that we have an effective and experienced workforce. Ministers have met the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland in the past to discuss these matters, and I would be happy to do so again to understand the work that has been undertaken in recent years to address some of the challenges.

Stewart Maxwell: In 2009, local authorities in Scotland employed 556 environmental health officers and 105.6 food safety officers. By September 2014, that had dropped to 470.74 EHOs and 77.6 FSOs, a reduction of 85.26 EHOs and 20 FSOs. Given the vital front-line role that EHOs and FSOs play in safeguarding Scotland's public health and the very important educational and, therefore, preventative role that they carry out with the producers in Scotland, does the minister share my concerns about the threat posed to public health by the drop in the number of EHOs local authorities employ? What can the Scottish Government do to ensure that we have enough EHOs and FSOs in Scotland to safeguard our excellent public health standards?

Maureen Watt: The figures described certainly show a decline in numbers. In 2010, the then Minister for Public Health, Shona Robison, received a report from a short-life working group that ministers established to look at these issues. That group made a number of recommendations and the Royal Environmental Health Institute agreed to take forward some work, in particular on the training and education of environmental health staff and on the establishment of a Scottish environmental health advisory group to strengthen local environmental health.

I intend to meet that group to understand what work it has been doing in recent years but, again, I would be happy to meet REHIS and the Society of Chief Officers of Environmental Health in Scotland to explore what more can be done to support and promote environmental health provision.

General Practitioners (Recruitment Problems)

14. Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to alleviate the problems in recruiting GPs across the country. (S4O-04621)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): Scotland continues to have the most general practitioners per head of population and spends the second highest amount per head in the United Kingdom on primary care. However, we recognise that increasing attendances and recruitment challenges are putting additional pressure on GPs and that is why, last month, I announced that an additional £60 million would be invested in primary care over the next three years.

Jenny Marra: That is a drop in the ocean. With huge numbers of GPs retiring, vacancies impossible to fill, highly paid locums having their pick of where to work, doctors leaving for Australia, patient lists closing down, general practice as we know it is under threat—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Jenny Marra: —and that is what the doctors say. This Government has been in power for nine years.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Come to your question, Ms Marra.

Jenny Marra: Where is its prescription to rescue GP services in Scotland?

Shona Robison: Again, I thank Richard Simpson for his ideas on the matter. They are most welcome. However, as I said earlier, we are already doing them, have already done them—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Shona Robison: —or are already considering doing them. Be assured that Labour's suggestions are things that we have already done or are doing. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Shona Robison: I say to Jenny Marra that £60 million is not a drop in the ocean; it is a substantial investment over the next three years. However, working with the Royal College of General Practitioners, the British Medical Association and others, the most critical thing for us to do is to devise and look at new models of care. Of course we will ensure that those new models of care are properly funded and that we have the workforce that is required to deliver those new models of care. I hope that, instead of carping from the sidelines, Labour will support that. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Orthopaedic Specialisms (Patient Needs)

15. Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government

what evidence it has that orthopaedic specialisms are meeting the needs of patients. (S4O-04622)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government works closely with the Scottish Committee for Orthopaedics and Trauma to ensure that each orthopaedic sub-specialty is providing high-quality care for patients as well as monitoring clinical outcomes. However, it is for individual health boards to plan services, including orthopaedics, to meet the needs of their local population.

Rob Gibson: My health board has had rather a long waiting list for some of those things. Is the availability of consultants in rural areas keeping pace with demand as the population ages? Operating on knees and hips keeps people active and mobile for longer.

Shona Robison: Rob Gibson raises an important issue about the recruitment of consultants to our remote and rural areas. NHS Grampian and NHS Highland have been quite innovative in looking at how to recruit consultants on to networks, which would involve consultants working in a large hospital but spending some of their time in the rural general hospitals as well. Those are exactly the type of developments that we need to ensure that our rural and remote populations get access to the services that they require.

Rob Gibson will also be aware that we are looking at elective capacity and ensuring that we have enough elective capacity to meet the needs of patients, particularly in the area of hip, knee and eye operations.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions.

Agriculture (Challenges and Opportunities)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-14327, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on agriculture, current challenges facing the sector and opportunities. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak button now.

I call Richard Lochhead to speak to and move the motion. Cabinet secretary, you have 14 minutes—and I should tell members that we are tight for time this afternoon.

14:40

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment (Richard Lochhead): I am very pleased to open this important debate on the opportunities and current challenges facing Scottish agriculture. As we are all aware, agriculture matters hugely to our country; indeed, 98 per cent of Scotland is agricultural. It underpins what is now our £14 billion food and drinks industry; it contributes to our environment by delivering clean air and water and carbon capture, and by protecting and sustaining our rich and varied wildlife; and, of course, it generates jobs in the wider economy, supporting communities and other industries throughout the nation. Last year, agriculture contributed more than £3 billion to the Scottish economy, with around 40 per cent coming from the livestock sector alone.

First of all, however, I want to turn to the current challenges that face agriculture. As we know, our farmers are used to difficult and sometimes challenging weather and the vagaries of the marketplace, but this year the challenges that they face are really quite exceptional. Right now, the industry seems to be facing a perfect storm, with local, European, United Kingdom and global factors all coming together. In particular, bad weather, with heavy and prolonged rain, has had a huge impact on farming in some parts of the country, particularly in the north and north-west of Scotland. In fact, the first six months of the year have been the wettest in a century in Orkney.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Richard Lochhead: I will take an intervention on the subject of Orkney.

Liam McArthur: I thank the cabinet secretary for teeing me up so expertly. He will be aware of the on-going discussions between his officials and local representatives in Orkney about the implications of the wet weather. I understand that the winter fodder shortage has reached the point

where the need to sell off breeding stock is rapidly approaching. For example, 900 large square bales are needed in Westray, but their cost—and, indeed, the cost of getting them there—is prohibitive. What specifically can the cabinet secretary do to assure farmers in Westray and across Orkney that they will get the fodder they need to ensure that they do not have to send breeding stock off the islands?

Richard Lochhead: I am aware of some of the challenges that are facing many of the farmers in Orkney. I simply assure Liam McArthur that my officials are working on the transportation issues that he has mentioned and on other matters where the Government can help out. Those talks are ongoing, and I have asked for an urgent report back on the progress that is being made. Some practical issues have to be ironed out, but I assure Mr McArthur that we are looking closely at the issues.

As Liam McArthur has suggested, the effect of continuous rainfall can be profound: the ground becomes saturated; the grass does not grow; and farmers have to buy in extra feed and straw for their stock. Harvests have been delayed, and we are waiting to see what yields are like and whether the drying costs for wet grain will be higher this year. As I have said, we are working closely with the industry to identify what can be done to help those who have been affected most by the heavy rainfall in Orkney and elsewhere.

Other challenges include the euro-sterling exchange rate, which affects the value of farm payments. In recent years, the exchange rate has resulted in higher payments, which have helped to buffer the impact of additional costs. Last year, however, a combination of the exchange rate and a smaller common agricultural policy budget overall led to support falling by around 12 per cent or £70 million.

We are also having to cope with the wider international economic backdrop. For example, we have heard of the economic challenges in China that might slow down growth. Given that China is a big barometer for world trade conditions as well as a potentially huge market for Scotland, its economic prospects are very relevant to the debate. Moreover, the Russian ban on imports from Europe is having both a direct and an indirect effect on our sectors, including dairy, with produce that normally leaves the EU now remaining in European markets.

Of course, the challenges facing the dairy sector have very much occupied the headlines in recent months. Some of our producers are now receiving some of the lowest prices anywhere for their milk. Efficiency improvements have allowed the sector to increase total milk production by 97 million litres since 2004; unfortunately, however, that has

coincided with a global oversupply of milk, and the price for many dairy farmers both in Scotland and elsewhere in Europe has plummeted. The situation here has been compounded by our overdependency on liquid milk rather than added-value products. There are some small signs that international dairy prices may be improving, and Europe has made some extra funding available for milk and meat producers. I will come back to that later.

Times are tough for many other livestock producers; it is not just a dairy issue. Beef prices this year are sluggish, and rising costs in the beef sector over the past 10 years have led to a real-terms fall in the average net farm income of more than £6,000. Early analysis by one group of economists suggests that the decisions that the Scottish Government took to have three payments regions under the new common agricultural policy and to use the maximum amount of coupled support available under the policy will help to keep beef cow numbers up. Therefore, there are some bright spots.

I turn to the sheep sector. At the start of the season, lamb prices were again disappointingly low, partly because of slow growth as a result of poor grass, but there are now some signs of improvement in that sector, too.

On arable land, we will have to wait and see what this year's harvest will yield and how much that contrasts with last year's harvest, when the amount of arable land was the highest since 1994 and Scottish farmers produced more than 2 million tonnes of barley and 1 million tonnes of wheat.

With the poor market situation, many farmers face cash-flow problems, so the direct payments that are issued to us every year through the common agricultural policy are particularly important this year. However, as members are well aware, we have to implement the first year of the new common agricultural policy this year, with the biggest reforms in a generation.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Given the huge uncertainty that exists about the payment schedule, can the cabinet secretary confirm the timetable for the delivery of those payments?

Richard Lochhead: If Sarah Boyack will bear with me, I am just coming on to that.

By the end of this year, we will have launched or relaunched between 15 and 20 schemes, each of which needs its own programming. The timespan between Europe agreeing the new common agricultural policy and when we need to make payments is incredibly short. We have an excellent track record of making payments in this country, and we are pulling out all the stops to start to make payments by the end of December, as I have said before. We have registered more than

20,000 customers in the new payments system and have allocated around 400,000 fields to basic payment regions. That gives members an idea of the scale of the challenge that our officials face.

Our challenge under the new European policy is that we are not able to calculate payment rates until we know exactly how many eligible hectares we have in each region. Claims are now being checked and eligible areas are being confirmed so that the value of each farmer's entitlements can be calculated properly for 2015 and subsequent years. We have the option of delivering part payments to get cash out the door to businesses, and we will seriously consider using that option.

Europe has also given some recognition to the industry's cash-flow issues and has brought forward a €500 million package: €420 million for direct aid for milk and meat producers, and €80 million for private storage aid and some promotional activities. The UK's share is just over €36 million, so it is clear that Scotland's share will be quite modest. However, we must ensure that we get a fair share of the UK's allocation, as the UK's track record in such matters is not good. The UK ministers must acknowledge the serious challenges that Scottish farmers face, which I have set out to them. We need the UK to urgently right the wrongs that were done to Scotland when the external convergence uplift was allocated across the whole of the UK, which resulted in Scotland's farmers losing out on £145 million between now and 2019. That compounds the £1 million per annum that we are already losing through the lost red meat levies, which are now needed back in Scotland more than ever before.

Once we get our share of the EU aid package, Europe requires us to make the payments extremely quickly—in December. Therefore, there will be a focus on pragmatism to make the payments on time.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): The cabinet secretary mentioned the convergence uplift. Does he accept that the UK Government is, as I understand it, still committed to undertaking the review in 2016-17, as has always been the case?

Richard Lochhead: Yes, but my concern remains that that review will take place in 2016-17, which is already too late, and that once it is completed and implemented, we will be into the next common agricultural policy period. Scotland needs the wrongs to be put right now, not later.

A range of sectors faces challenges, and we have had to step up to the plate and respond to them urgently. We have done our best to do that, particularly in areas such as dairy. In March, we launched our action plan, which was designed to help to ensure a viable future for the dairy sector

in the context of extreme price volatility. Under the plan, we have unveiled a new dairy brand; supported dairy farmers through the dairy hub; given £400,000 of capital support to First Milk in Campbeltown; taken steps to encourage serious investment in processing; and taken every opportunity to beat the drum with retailers and others to increase the sourcing of Scottish produce. There is no reason whatsoever why 70 per cent of the dairy products that we consume should come from outside Scotland.

We have also been active in the poultry sector, and we have just established a sheep industry group to address marketing and processing capacity issues that have been outstanding for many years. Many of the causes of those issues are international, so many of the solutions must also be international. That is why we have argued strongly at successive EU councils for effective EU action: short-term measures that not only look at helping people, but actually deliver that help. It also means taking medium-term action such as mandatory country-of-origin labelling and decisive action on supply chains across Europe.

The clear message today, which I hope other parties in the chamber echo, is that there is much more that we can do at home in Scotland and throughout these islands. All parts of the supply chain must play their part—in particular, our food service sector and our retailers, which together account for around £200 billion of sales in the UK.

Let me make that real with an example. Many parts of the retail and food service sectors are booming—none more so than coffee shops on our high streets, with exponential growth forecast to continue for years to come. We spend £80,000 a day on coffee. However, consumers will be shocked to learn that when they buy their coffee at Costa on Princes Street or at Starbucks in Dumfries, the milk in their caffè lattes or cappuccinos will have been sourced from outside Scotland. That is a missed opportunity, when many Scottish dairy farmers face enormous challenges and need support in their hour of need. In addition, consumers will have been shocked to see New Zealand products on Tesco shelves advertised as “Scottish lamb in season”. Those things must and will be put right.

All is not doom and gloom. We are making real progress. This morning, I visited an Aroma cafe at the Western infirmary—one of 25 hospital branches that the national health service owns—to acknowledge Aroma’s policy of sourcing 100 per cent of its milk from Scotland.

Our hard work with catering companies and the retail sector is beginning to pay dividends. I was delighted that last week Brakes announced its commitment to double its sourcing of Scottish products. In due course, that could be worth

hundreds of millions of pounds to the Scottish economy. I have heard similarly positive noises from another food service and catering business, 3663. In addition, I say “Well done” to the Crerar hotel chain, which has just committed to sourcing 100 per cent of its meat from Scotland. I could go on.

There is much more to do, but the tide is turning. The backdrop that we must not lose sight of is the booming food and drink industry. It is now at record levels, with a £14.3 billion turnover in 2013—up a staggering 28 per cent. The industry is growing at twice the rate of its counterparts elsewhere in the UK. A recent Bank of Scotland report predicted that the sector will create 14,000 new jobs, and producers forecast an average turnover growth of 19 per cent by 2020. It is a phenomenal success story, and we will do a lot more in the coming months and years to keep up that level of success.

However, there would be no record-breaking figures without the producers—those who produce the raw materials, take the risks, tend our landscapes and build our reputation—and they need to see profit shared across the supply chain. That is why I have been setting the pace with my UK counterparts in creating a fairer framework for farming. At the summit on 17 August, which I and NFU Scotland called for, I stressed that we have an unprecedented opportunity to stand shoulder to shoulder with our farmers. We can speak with one voice and put our case and our demands to the rest of the supply chain, especially UK retailers and food service companies. We need clearer labelling, more Scottish and British sourcing, commitments to develop local sourcing and real attempts to develop long-term relations with local suppliers.

I repeated those calls when I wrote to Liz Truss and at a further summit in Brussels. I am still waiting for her to step up to the plate and join ministers of the devolved Governments and farming leaders in a joint approach to the retail sector, so that we can combine our influence and send a powerful message, in what would be an unprecedented show of solidarity with our farmers.

That is key way forward to help our primary producers in this country. If ministers of the devolved Governments and the farming leaders are up for it, I hope that Liz Truss, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, will also be up for it. If she is, we can transform sourcing in Scotland and throughout the UK. That will help the whole supply chain, but particularly our farmers—our primary producers—without whom we would not have a food and drink industry or food on our tables.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the hard work and dedication of the men and women working in Scottish agriculture but recognises the current challenges facing the sector; notes the Scottish Government's commitment to deliver 2015 CAP Pillar 1 payments as soon as it is able to do so, following the payment window opening on 1 December 2015; calls on the UK Government to allocate Scotland a fair share of Europe's new €500 million market support package; further calls on the UK Government to revisit its decision not to allocate Scotland the full £190 million convergence uplift provided to the UK as a result of Scotland's low payments, and for an urgent resolution to the negotiations with the UK to repatriate the industry's red meat levies to Scotland; acknowledges the record growth in Scottish food and drink and calls on all parts of the supply chain to benefit, and welcomes the Scottish Government's call for UK and Scottish ministers, along with farming leaders, to jointly approach UK retailers and food service companies to secure a fair deal for farming.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I advise members that they must take interventions within their time, because we really are tight for time.

14:55

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I definitely agree with the cabinet secretary that this has been an incredibly difficult year for our farming communities. The NFUS describes it as a "crisis", because of the dairy crisis, the weather this summer, price volatility not just for dairy but for grain, and the nervousness and concern about farm payments and potential delays. The viability of some of our farms is at stake, so we really need the Scottish Government to do more to support the industry. Our amendment sets out some key areas where we think that we need change and action.

At the top of my comments, I re-emphasise our support for our farming sector and what it does to assist us with food security—not in the way that happened at the end of the second world war, but in the 21st century, with climate uncertainty and changes around the world, economic instability that is caused by dysfunctional supply chains not just in Scotland but all round the world, and the vulnerability of farmers who are having to borrow large sums of money to invest in modern farming equipment. We can see the strains in the industry. Our supply chains are long and remote, can be lacking in transparency and are, as the NFUS says, sometimes completely dysfunctional.

However, as the cabinet secretary said, there is success in the industry, too, and we should celebrate it. We should acknowledge the record food and drink exports. I hear from the industry that the figures have been boosted by particularly strong performance in the drinks sector, although there are good headlines in some parts of the food-supply sector as well.

As an economic sector, farming and agriculture provide a bedrock in many of our rural communities, with jobs, incomes and livelihoods

being delivered by farmers and farm workers, so I want to keep the beginning of the SNP motion and to note their "hard work and dedication". However, I also want to ensure that we reward that hard work, which is why Labour members believe that it is vital that we retain the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board, given its positive impact on rural livelihoods and its representation of farm workers, who might be only one or two people on a farm. In another industry, they might be one of 50, 100 or 1,000 people. Farming is a very different industry—the isolation can be severe, so such staff need support. We are therefore disappointed that the SNP Government is consulting again on abolishing the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board. That would be a retrograde step at this time of uncertainty.

During the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's visit to Islay and Jura this week, the importance of agriculture was stressed by one of the tenant farmers. He highlighted the importance of farming and crofting in supporting the whole livelihoods of rural communities. We must not take that for granted, so we need to capture better the benefits for those who work in the industry, for those who lead it and for our rural communities.

We believe that use of co-operatives is underdeveloped in Scotland. They are a key way for small producers in particular to secure value from farming and crofting produce. We see co-operatives in other European countries, but we do not see them on the same scale here.

Our amendment also highlights the importance of farming and of farmers as stewards of our land. They have a key role in supporting biodiversity, and a distinct contribution is being made by the organic farming sector. That role is also important for the long-term health of our soils and for capturing the economic benefit of marketing our high-quality, well-renowned produce. The challenge is to design support mechanisms that help farmers to deliver those aspirations in practice. Anyone who visits a farm will find that if not the first thing, then the second or certainly the third thing that the farmer will mention is what they sometimes regard as the daftness with which regulations are applied.

We need to do much more to support the transition on emissions and to enable farming to make its contribution to alleviating climate change. Farmers are doing key work on taking advantage of renewables—especially wind and, I hear, solar—but the step back from the UK Government in relation to renewables obligation certificates and the feed-in tariff is creating short-term obstacles. Much more can be done in relation to farming as a whole. At the Royal Highland Show I saw for myself the research that Scotland's Rural College

is doing, which could be applied if we had the right transition plan in place. The cabinet secretary needs to be doing much more work on that. Every other sector in the Scottish economy is looking at how to play its part. The issue needs political and ministerial leadership, and it will get support in the Parliament.

The terms “agroecology” and “agroecology” are being used by Scottish Environment LINK. We need a broader discussion among all stakeholders about how to innovate and develop good practice. However, a key threat is the economics. I mentioned global price fluctuations and the weather, which are huge threats to our farmers’ day-to-day work.

The milk and dairy industry is massively vulnerable at the moment, and there is not enough urgency in the Scottish Government’s dairy action plan. I wrote to the minister more than a month ago with positive suggestions on product development, marketing, public procurement and support for catering in the private sector, but I am still waiting for a reply.

When the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee visited Orkney in the summer, we saw the impact of positive support from local government for our farming communities. The minister should explore that.

There is consensus on some areas, including on fairer prices for farmers and shorter supply chains, but work is needed from the minister in that regard. We need an overhaul of supply chains if we are to deliver fairer prices. Some members in this Parliament have campaigned for fair trade abroad, and we have had an impact on trading relationships. This summer I was shocked by the level of dairy prices in this country.

Over the past decade, there has been cross-party work in the Parliament, particularly in its rural affairs committees, on the importance of fairness and transparency in contracts and prices. However, when I visited a farm this summer and commented on the impressive mound of potatoes in a barn, I was shocked to be told that the potatoes would not be sent into the retail chain, because the contract had been pooled. The farmer was, rather than wasting them, using the potatoes to feed his livestock. That was the best that he could do. There is still a power imbalance in the industry. Supermarkets and the retail industry are not in a fair relationship with farmers, particularly smaller farmers, although the randomness of the impact of contracts on bigger suppliers can be shocking, too. Shorter supply chains should be part of a better picture in which we would have more accountability and certainty. They would also save on logistics costs.

As the cabinet secretary said, we need a new drive on public procurement. When I talk to my local government colleagues I think that more could be done at national and local levels. We would like new targets and a fresh approach to promoting co-operatives and joint supply locally. It is crucial to target hospitality in the commercial sector.

The minister has been in his position for eight and a half years. Some of the things that he has announced today are welcome, but it should not have taken eight and a half years and a crisis to get to this point. As we said in debates on the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill, standards are high and the quality of our environment, animal welfare and producers is impressive and something to be proud of. Politicians could act on local sourcing and procurement in Scotland to ensure greater value right across the food chain.

I emphasise our support for the cabinet secretary in his work in the EU and with the other UK Governments to support agriculture and investment in our environment. We need to get the right mechanisms, which need to be fair and fit for purpose. I understand that this morning the Public Audit Committee interrogated Scottish Government officials about CAP payments. It would be helpful if the cabinet secretary could guarantee that payments will be delivered by December. It is astonishing that banks are beginning to put in place special measures to get farmers through the winter. That is a crisis that should not be happening. The cabinet secretary needs to take his share of responsibility for the mismanagement of the programme.

We need to do better for our farmers. We need to ensure that they are properly supported, because they support a raft of jobs in our rural communities and because of the vital money that farming brings into our economy.

We need more on country-of-origin labelling. There is cross-party support for the food sector in Scotland, but we are perhaps not applying it effectively enough. At the end of the day, the Scottish Government could do more. Our amendment calls for action and urgency. It puts on the agenda issues that are not in the Government’s motion.

There should not have to be special arrangements for loans; we need support for our industry that works and will keep it going through the winter.

The debate should send a clear message to the Scottish Government, the UK Government and our retail sector that we need a better deal for our farmers and our farming communities. This is about the role of Government in supporting industry, looking at dysfunctional food chains and

persuading consumers to buy differently. There is a role for us and the retail sector, so let us do it together.

I move amendment S4M-14327.3, to leave out from “but” to end and insert:

“; recognises and celebrates the importance of the agriculture sector to Scotland’s rural economies and its international reputation as a producer of quality food and drink; notes the importance of the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board to securing workers’ wellbeing and livelihoods; believes that the sector can deliver greater social justice and economic benefit to rural communities through the promotion of cooperatives, greater biodiversity, organic food production and land conservation to aid the continued stewardship of Scotland’s land; notes the new opportunities presented by agro-ecology; further notes the significant potential of the sector to deliver sustainable and effective action to meet the Scottish Government’s climate change targets, for example from on-farm action and community-owned renewable energy; recognises the damaging impact that global price fluctuations caused in summer 2015, particularly in the dairy sector; calls on the Scottish Government to accelerate the implementation of the Dairy Action Plan; further calls on it to facilitate and enable the overhaul of the sector’s supply chains to deliver fairer prices for farmers and shorter supply chains, enhance product development to add value to quality raw materials and to promote diversification within the sector; considers that new targets should be set for the Scottish Government to improve the procurement of Scottish produce across the public and private sectors in Scotland; urges the Scottish Government to clarify the delivery of 2015 CAP Pillar 1 payments before the payment window opening on 1 December 2015 and to press the UK Government to allocate Scotland a fair share of Europe’s new €500 million market support package, and recognises the failure of the UK Government to allocate the £190 million convergence uplift and to deliver the most appropriate arrangements for the Scottish agricultural sector red meat levies.”

15:05

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Like other members, I very much welcome the debate. It is needed, if for no other reason than that I have never known so many farmers in my part of Scotland who are genuinely wondering what the future holds for them. In some cases, they are wondering whether they have a future in agriculture at all. I do not think that that is just down to the serious drops—tough as they are—in commodity prices, which have affected milk, lamb and cereals in particular, or to other factors such as the exchange rate, which the cabinet secretary mentioned. There is palpable uncertainty about the future.

In recent years, we have grown used to farms changing hands incredibly quickly when they are put on the market. Recently, however, in my part of Scotland, farms have been noticeably slow to sell, if they have sold at all. To me, that is as sure a sign as there can be that all is not well in the sector and that the confidence of recent years no longer exists. What has happened to bring about

that change and what, if anything, can we do about it?

I am in no doubt that the biggest single factor has been the move away from a CAP support system that was based on productivity, to one that is based on the area that is farmed. I acknowledge that there was no choice in the matter and that the Scottish Government had an extremely difficult task in delivering the new system. However, with the best will in the world, it is difficult to look back and heap praise on how it was introduced—from the apparent reluctance to model new systems at an early stage, through a pretty inadequate and hideously expensive information technology system that required 50 changes to the guidance between the opening day on 1 March and the extended mid-June deadline for applications, to the current inspection and verification process, the outcome of which we do not know. All that has been to deliver a pillar 1 payment the amount of which will probably remain unknown to those who will receive it until they receive it. That process was never going to instil a great deal of confidence, and it has failed to do so.

I agree with Sarah Boyack that one thing that the cabinet secretary could do that would go some way towards rectifying the situation is ensure that the basic payment is paid fully in December, which is what all the amendments seek. The motion says that the Government will make the payments

“as soon as it is able to do so”,

and the cabinet secretary has hinted at interim payments—I understand that more was said about those at the Public Audit Committee this morning. However, the fact is that Governments are elected to make things happen. The CAP support system is the sole responsibility of the cabinet secretary, and the measure of his grip on it will be basic payments being made to all primary producers from day 1 of the December window. He can, and I believe he should, make that happen.

The motion also makes much of what the Scottish Government thinks the UK Government should do—no surprise there—but does very little to suggest anything positive that the Scottish Government can do in bringing back confidence to the sector. Maybe that is no surprise, considering that one of the cabinet secretary’s latest actions—the banning of genetically modified crops—has provoked a pretty adverse reaction not just from the farming sector, but from the science sector. I appreciate that there will be different opinions about the issue around the chamber, but it almost defies belief that a Government that never misses an opportunity to back up any controversial proposal by assuring us that it is acting on the best available scientific advice has not bothered to seek such advice in this instance. Instead, the cabinet secretary talks about protecting the purity

and quality of Scottish produce by banning the growing of GM crops; yet, he is denying any potential to grow those crops without the use of chemical pesticides and fungicides that are in common use today. Plant and animal breeding and cross-breeding have been going on since time immemorial, and GM technology is really just an extension of that science.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): If Alex Fergusson is concerned about the Scottish Government not waiting for scientific advice, how can he be so positive about the biotechnology industry? GM crops could have serious ramifications across Scotland.

Alex Fergusson: I want the scientific evidence on the table to back up the ban that has been put in place by the cabinet secretary. We have no such evidence.

GM crops have the potential—I only use the word “potential”—to provide an exciting new future for agriculture, of which the principal purpose must surely always be to feed an ever-increasing world population. We will forget that—as I think the cabinet secretary has, in this instance—at our peril.

I will move on to a more positive note. I think that we all agree on the need to include the retail sector in our thinking and discussions on making the most of our home-grown products. The success of Scotland’s food and drink is fantastic, but until the fruits of that success are fed back down to the primary producer, it is only a partial success.

As some members know, I recently reviewed the voluntary code of practice between dairy farmers and milk processors. It became obvious early in the review that the retail sector is the missing link in the chain; for the code to be effective, the retail sector has to be part of it. We will back any moves, wherever they come from, to enhance that relationship. We also fully back moves to further empower the Groceries Code Adjudicator. Well-known supermarkets are selling New Zealand lamb under “Scottish lamb” signage. That is not on—until we reverse the thinking that encourages retailers to do that, the challenges will remain.

The motion rightly notes the hard work and dedication of the people who work in agriculture. They always have been hard working and dedicated and they always will be. Give them back the confidence that is declining and they will not let this country down.

I move amendment S4M-14327.1, to leave out from second “notes” to “repatriate the industry’s” and insert:

“regrets the Scottish Government’s decision to rule out

the cultivation of GM crops without having taken any scientific advice or debate on the potential benefits of biotechnology; notes the critical importance to farmers’ cash-flow of CAP funding being delivered on time; urges the Scottish Government to ensure prompt CAP Pillar 1 payments in December 2015; recognises the UK Government’s commitment to discuss the allocation of its €36.1 million European support package with devolved administrations as a matter of urgency; welcomes the UK Government’s confirmation that it is committed to review the intra-UK CAP budget allocation in 2016-17; seeks an early resolution to ongoing negotiations over the reallocation of”.

15:11

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): It would be unfair to blame Mr Lochhead for the rain, and nor could he in any way be blamed for global weather. However, if the sun had been shining all summer, I wonder whether the Government would perhaps have tried to take the credit.

It is important to concentrate on the aspects of agricultural policy and the changes that we need that are the responsibility of the Scottish Government and its agencies. As the cabinet secretary rightly recognised, Scottish farmers and crofters are under pressure. Dairy farmers have told many of us that they are being paid less than the cost of production; the cabinet secretary recognised that implicitly in his speech.

Lamb prices are at a seven-year low and the wet summer has created higher costs for bought-in fodder, notably in the far-flung areas such as Orkney. Last night, Jamie Leslie, who is a farming pal of mine from Shetland, phoned to tell me about the price of straw. The cabinet secretary will know well from his constituency that straw costs £20 a bale in Aberdeenshire. Once it is trucked to Aberdeen and then to the farm in Shetland, another £20 is added to the cost. NorthLink’s freight rate adds £28.20 for shipping alone. Therefore, it costs £68.20 to bring essential fodder to a Shetland farm. The farmer would not normally need to buy that, but he has to because of the summer that we have had. The Orkney weekend freight rate per bale is around £15, so that is certainly helping.

The local NFU and I have been pressing the Government to assist Shetland producers. I have raised the matter with the cabinet secretary previously and I ask him to consider their needs again. That is a practical example of how different parts of our agricultural industry could be assisted at this time. Alan Bowie, the president of the NFUS, made the argument to me last night about the need to help different parts of Scotland in recognition of the challenges that we face.

The Government’s statistics show that agriculture is contracting. Its “State of the Economy” report, which was published last month,

shows annual growth in agriculture falling by 5.3 per cent. In addition, cattle numbers fell by 11 per cent between 2004 and 2014, and there has been an 18 per cent fall in breeding ewe numbers over the same period. If we want to grow the food and drink industry—or the food industry in particular, given Sarah Boyack’s accurate observation about whisky—we need the trend in primary livestock production, far from falling, to go the other way. There is a significant challenge for the Government, as much as for the industry, in recognising the reality of livestock numbers across Scotland.

As Scottish Environment LINK mentioned in its briefing for the debate, the Government environmental adviser, Scottish Natural Heritage, says that more priority farmland habitats are deteriorating than improving. The UK national ecosystem assessment says that 44 per cent of Scottish habitats are in decline. Therefore, from a production and an environmental perspective, the trends are in the wrong direction.

How are we to meet the growth targets for the Scottish food industry that we all aspire to meet when there are fewer cattle and sheep? Scotland’s environment is being impaired, but environmental change cannot be happening as a result of farming when our farming is becoming less intensive. Scotland’s natural beauty, which is at the core of our tourism product, is under some challenge.

What can the Government do? I listened carefully to what the cabinet secretary said about CAP payments. If I got him right, I think that he said that they would be paid by the end of December; I do not know whether that means by the week beginning Monday 28 December. The industry will be disappointed by that, because it has argued very strongly—as Allan Bowie said to me last night—that the payments need to be made in the first two weeks of December. I will not rehearse all the arguments on why that is the case, because Richard Lochhead knows them very well—he has heard them for eight years; in fact, the arguments on the payment timescale have been made since long before then.

At this morning’s meeting of the Public Audit Committee, the cabinet secretary’s officials were commendably fair about all this. They explained the challenges, but at no time did they say that it was impossible for the payments to be made in the first two weeks of December, so I hope that the Government will listen carefully to the industry and to Parliament and ensure that the payments are paid out to a great extent if not in full—we understand how the system works; payments are made in instalments—in the early part of December rather than after Christmas day.

The cabinet secretary will share my concern about the fact that Scotland is having to spend £178 million on an information technology system to allocate £400 million every year to 21,000 farmers. That cannot be a good use of Mr Richard Lochhead’s budget; it is certainly not a good use of public money. An IT system that is 111 per cent over budget, as Audit Scotland has said, must be questioned from first principles. The Government has no choice, in that it must implement a system that is EU-compliant, but we are in a world of madness when it is necessary to spend that amount of public money on a clever computer to properly allocate money to agriculture across Scotland.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Very briefly, please.

Bruce Crawford: Does Tavish Scott accept that the European auditors have said exactly the same about almost every country in Europe? There is a common denominator here regarding the way in which the EU has brought this system into being.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you must close, Mr Scott.

Tavish Scott: I agree with that to an extent, but I am concerned about how the approach that the European Commission takes when it meets farming ministers in Brussels is implemented in other European countries. I would not wish to name names, but we all know that other countries take different approaches.

My final point is to agree with Alex Fergusson, Sarah Boyack and the cabinet secretary on public sector procurement. I think that there is a great deal more that we could do on that, not least because of the scale of Government spend on food and drink in the round across Scotland, which amounts to £160 million every year. The cabinet secretary was right to emphasise the importance of tackling the retail sector and bringing it up to the mark. We need to ensure that our public procurement is not run by huge multinational conglomerates but is much more local and therefore much more applicable to local farmers and crofters.

I move amendment S4M-14327, to leave out from second “notes” to end and insert:

“considers that Scottish agriculture, in particular the dairy and sheep sectors, is experiencing a financial crisis; recognises the importance of the new CAP Pillar 1 payments to crofters and farmers and calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that these are fully paid in December 2015; welcomes the cross-party support that exists for a fairer allocation of the £190 million convergence uplift provided to the UK as a result of Scotland’s below average area payment rates and commends NFU Scotland for consistently making this case; believes that the Scottish

Government should explore how it can use its significant public sector procurement powers to promote the use of Scottish produce; calls on the Scottish Government to work with the UK Government to further strengthen the powers of the Groceries Code Adjudicator, championed by Liberal Democrats in the last UK administration, to enable the adjudicator to investigate the supply chain from farm gate to dinner plate; welcomes the record growth in Scottish food and drink, but calls on the Scottish Government to ensure a fair deal for all farmers and all parts of the supply chain.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the open debate. I am afraid that we are extremely short of time. Speeches should be of less than six minutes.

15:18

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): What is agriculture for? Well, we must try to feed Scots. It has been suggested that we must have an agriculture that tries to feed the world, but the world wastes so much food that I think that we should give closer consideration to the issue of what agriculture should be doing and how it should be doing it.

I am extremely concerned about the fact that, in their motion, the Conservatives mention

“the Scottish Government’s decision to rule out the cultivation of GM crops without having taken any scientific advice or debate on the potential benefits of biotechnology”.

There is scientific knowledge—significant bodies of research raise large question marks about the long-term effects of genetically modified organisms. Eighty per cent of the crops that are currently approved rely on glyphosate, which is a non-selective pesticide that the World Health Organization regards as a probable carcinogen. Another piece of evidence that we should not ignore is the fact that GM farmers in America face problems as a result of weeds becoming more prevalent, with the result that they need to spend more and more on different types of GM crops.

Vast amounts of research are funded by big agri-chemical businesses. Many in the scientific community rely on money from large GM firms to carry out the research that they want to do. They are doing that research not for the benefit of Scotland but because they know that GM firms are a large source of money. I suggest that that does not necessarily make for the best science.

Why, for example, are GM supporters spending hundreds of millions of pounds in America at present to prevent the labelling of food containing GM ingredients? What are they trying to hide? The examples that I have given all highlight scientific probes of the way in which the argument for GM has been laid before us.

Scotland has been joined by Germany, France, Lithuania, Northern Ireland, Latvia, Greece and—just today—Austria in wanting to have clean green production. Those countries are not ignoring the science: they all know about the science.

I will focus on two groups of people who are looking closely at the science. Waitrose, in its conditions for feed in its protein divisions, states:

“the inclusion of vegetable protein ingredients must be of a non GMO origin and inclusion rates must not compromise animal welfare or the eating quality and nutritional value of the final raw product.”

The German Minister for Food and Agriculture was in South America recently, trying to find sources of non-GM soya. Waitrose has managed to do that, and the Germans are now looking for a source. Why are all the other supermarkets in Britain not taking the lead?

Sárpo potatoes are produced in a small trust—the Sárvári Research Trust—in north Wales. They are an excellent example of non-GM blight-resistant potatoes, and are available to gardeners. They have a high yield, deep rooting for good drought tolerance and vigorous weed-smothering foliage. Their carbon footprint is very low because they do not require all the dressings that other types of potatoes require. Does the trust get the cash from Monsanto and the like to develop the crop on a farm scale? No, it does not. That supports the argument that the science that backs GM very often involves—as the website foodtank.com said recently—“Dirty Money” supporting “Dirty Science”.

Becoming a good food nation is one of the major planks of the Government’s approach. Going back to my first question about what agriculture is for, it must be to ensure that people can get the food that they need to eat and be healthy, and to promote a healthy culture. Is that compatible with companies making big profits, given that genetic modification is seen as a means to do just that? I question that fundamentally.

There is no going back if GM crops are allowed into the ecosystem. It has been said before that GM, like nuclear power and fracking, is a short-term fix with long-term implications. The problems that we face at present must be addressed by looking at what we need to eat and what can be usefully sent to other people in a nutritious form that helps their health as well.

I urge members to reject the Tory amendment; to support the cabinet secretary’s motion; and to recognise that the GM bogey must be dismissed out of hand.

15:23

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I think that we all agree that the agricultural sector is facing extremely challenging times. Crofters and farmers in the Highlands and Islands were already facing challenges, and the weather this summer has made those even worse. Feedstuff cannot be grown, which means that it needs to be bought in. The poor season has affected growing all over Scotland, which means that feed will be expensive and in short supply. As we have heard, for people who live in the islands, the shipping cost of feed is prohibitive.

Breeding has been affected by a lack of grass. Lambs are smaller, and there have been fewer multiple births, which again impacts on profitability. All that is happening when the sector debt is extremely high and has increased by more than 4 per cent in the past year.

Agriculture is very important in the Highlands and Islands. Crofting has kept people in our remote and rural communities, but that is now threatened because of the difficulties of making a living from agriculture in the area. Crofting law has been reformed to tackle those difficulties, but that seems to involve tinkering around the edges rather than making a lasting difference.

The bottom line is the need to make a living. If changes in the law do not make it easier to make a living, they are absolutely useless. The Government remains deaf to the real issues that face crofting. If young people cannot see a future, they will not stay in their communities. Last week, crofters in Sutherland called on the cabinet secretary to look at the funding of crofting and hill farms and asked for it to be on a level playing field with funding in the rest of the UK, where farmers in the sector receive over 12 times more in subsidy payments.

Richard Lochhead: Does the member accept that one of the reasons—in fact, the key reason—why farmers elsewhere in the UK receive much more per hectare in farm payments than those in Scotland is that previous Labour and Conservative Governments failed to negotiate a proper budget for Scotland? Does she accept that we have an unfair share of the overall European farming budget because of a lack of political will from UK Governments?

Rhoda Grant: I would always argue for more money to come to Scotland. However, I am talking about the Scottish Government's distribution of the money. I am asking for that to be done more fairly and in a way that funds those who farm on the periphery, in conditions that are much worse than those elsewhere. The Scottish Government needs to distribute the money that it gets in a more equitable fashion. The subsidies come from

Europe to create a level playing field but, in Scotland, we use them to do the exact opposite.

The Highland clearances leave a long shadow over much of the Highlands and Islands. Villages were cleared and left to return to the wild. The Scottish Government should make it a priority to resettle the areas that were cleared by Scottish landowners in the past. It should find ways of encouraging people back into those abandoned villages, which often have the best ground in the Highland crofting counties. Instead, the Government is presiding over further clearances by making farming and crofting in our remote rural communities uncompetitive and impossible. I would like the Government to seriously consider how we repopulate the Highlands and Islands. People made and shaped those communities, but they are fast becoming the endangered species there.

The cabinet secretary talked about the dairy sector. In Argyll, much of the sector has gone and it will disappear altogether if the Scottish Government does not act. We have seen milk prices plummet, as the cabinet secretary acknowledged, and dairy farmers are facing bankruptcy. The creamery in Campbeltown needs to be put on a secure footing financially and through diversifying the products that it produces, to build on its name and reputation. It would be desperately sad if, because of the Government's inaction, the creamery closed, as so many in the area have done, and its premium products disappeared. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Rhoda Grant: It is really disappointing that the current consultation on the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board does not allow for the status quo. All the options would water down the board's role. They range from total abolition to a power grab by the Scottish Government, and we have seen how those worked out in the past.

We need only look at England to see that the options will have a detrimental impact. Almost half the workers who were previously covered by the equivalent board there have not had a wage rise since its abolition, and those who have received a wage rise have received much less than the average increases for the country. It would be revealing if the Scottish National Party Government were to follow the actions of a Conservative Government in England.

Agriculture is dispersed and collective bargaining is not an option, given the multiple employers, so the board provides much-needed protection for workers. I firmly believe that it should be retained and, indeed, have its role enhanced. There is an opportunity for the board to take on the role of promoting safety in the industry.

Sadly, we know that the sector has some of the most dangerous workplaces in Scotland and, for too long, we appear to have accepted that. The board should be tasked with enhancing safety in the agriculture industry.

As members have said, marketing must play a part in agriculture in Scotland. In the Highlands and Islands, we have premium products rather than mass-produced commodities. Assistance must be given to market those products and have them used locally. This summer, I saw the plans for the Portree microslaughterhouse, which will enable producers to slaughter animals locally to sell to hotels and restaurants and will allow people to access local produce close to home.

For too long, crofters in the Highlands have been at the bottom of the production ladder and had their profits squeezed by a long supply chain between farm and plate. Shortening that chain would allow the primary producer to retain a larger share of the profit. Given the shape of the industry, there needs to be co-ordination and effort, which the Government needs to take a lead on. Crofters and farmers in my region need more than warm words from the cabinet secretary—they need commitment and action.

15:29

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): We have just to take a quick flick through the farming press to see a mixture of headlines: some good, some bad, some dramatic and some extremely worrying. This debate would go on for hours if we were to do justice to each and every issue. There is no doubt that Scottish farmers and crofters are facing more challenges than any of us would prefer to see. Although most sectors in the agriculture industry can take the rough with the smooth and struggle through when times are hard, sections of the industry are close to becoming simply not viable any more.

As we know, the dairy industry is on its knees. I grew up on a dairy farm in the 1960s and 70s, and my heart goes out to the dairy farmers, who must be wondering whether the situation can possibly get any worse. It is hard to envisage a worse scenario than the nightmare that dairy farmers find themselves in, but we see announcement after announcement from the processors that lower the prices even further. We know that our dairy industry is at the mercy of the global dairy markets, which are experiencing significant volatility. Milk supply continues to outstrip demand globally, partly because improvements in technology are making production more efficient, and we are hearing reports that dairy farms in Scotland were losing on average of around £200 a day in August.

When the European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Phil Hogan, called in for a chat with our Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee before going to the Royal Highland Show in the summer, my colleague Mike Russell and I asked him about European Union intervention on the milk price. During the discussion, Commissioner Hogan stated:

“I have tools such as export refunds and private storage aid that I can use to intervene.”—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee*, 18 June 2015; c 15.]

Thankfully, there is now talk of intervention, but we must wait and see whether the European Commission is willing to go that extra kilometre to help ensure that our dairy farmers survive. Each and every one of us can intervene by doing our own wee bit—for example, by demanding that coffee chains such as Costa and Starbucks use Scottish milk. As the cabinet secretary mentioned, they do not do so at the moment.

I am grateful to the NFUS for providing in advance of the debate a briefing that raises some salient points. However, its disappointment about the Scottish Government's stance on GM food cannot and should not go unchallenged. In that regard, I note that Alex Fergusson's amendment on behalf of the Conservatives

“regrets the Scottish Government's decision to rule out the cultivation of GM crops.”

I therefore make no apology for concentrating on GM, despite it being covered by previous speakers. It is clear to me that the Scottish Government's sole objective in banning GM crops is to protect Scotland's clean, green status. I am glad that the First Minister and the cabinet secretary took the decision in August to restate our Government's precautionary approach to the cultivation of GM crops in Scotland.

Our reputation for producing high-quality, natural food and drink has resulted in Scotland's food and drink sector being worth over £14 billion. Allowing GM crops to be grown in Scotland would jeopardise the integrity of our world-class brand and gamble with its future. Our policy on GM crops must be based on what is best for our environment, Scottish agriculture and the wider Scottish economy. I hope that we can have a parliamentary debate on the GM crop ban at some point in the not too distant future, but I challenge now Alex Fergusson's assertion that the decision on the GM crop ban was made without taking any scientific advice.

We do not have to look far in the press or on the internet to find grand claims being made for genetically modified crops. We are told that they increase yields and profits for farmers, decrease

reliance on agrichemicals and improve human and animal nutrition and healthcare, and that they could coexist happily with organic and other GM-free crops. We are assured time and again that GM crops have been proven safe, often to the point where anyone who dares oppose them can be vilified for impoverishing farmers and starving the hungry.

However, when those claims are scrutinised, a very different picture emerges. A study commissioned by the United States Department of Agriculture found that the impacts of the adoption of GM crops on farm finances in the US were mixed and in some cases even negative. In the developing world, away from the energy and chemical-intensive inputs that typify the systems that GM crops were developed for, the picture is even bleaker. Yield reductions and outright crop failure caused by the inability of the GM crops to adapt to local conditions and agricultural practices have been coupled with the soaring cost of GM seed, which cannot be saved for replanting. There are also rising pesticide prices.

In addition, rather than reducing the farmers' reliance on pesticides, herbicide-tolerant plants increase the use of herbicides. The emergence and rapid spread of pesticide-tolerant weeds and pests has further increased herbicide use, with farmers having to rely on ever more complex, toxic and costly mixtures to control their weeds.

In 2009, a study of pesticide use during the first 13 years of GM crop commercialisation in the US reported that the emergence and rapid spread of glyphosate—Roundup—resistant weeds was the main driver behind a rapidly growing gulf in pesticide use between GM and conventional varieties. On average, fields that are sown with GM varieties require 26 per cent more pesticides.

In September 2013, I attended an event in Parliament hosted by my colleague Jean Urquhart MSP on a study by Professor Séralini into the chronic toxicity of genetically modified maize and pesticides. At that meeting was Danish pig farmer Ib Borup Pedersen, who switched from GMO-containing feed to GM-free feed in 2011 to see whether the health of his animals would improve. Overall he improved his profits by €69 per sow, despite GM-free feed costing more.

We will take no lectures from anyone on the requirement to take scientific advice. The proof is there. GMOs are not guaranteed to be safe.

15:36

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): As a novice in agriculture debates, I found it particularly useful to read "The Future of Scottish Agriculture: a Discussion Document", which addresses some of the key opportunities

and challenges that are facing the sector. It says that the sector must become more efficient and sustainable, given climate change imperatives. That necessitates closer working with farmers and the use of new technology as the CAP payments that make up 70 per cent of farmers' net profits are reduced in the coming year.

Turning unique, desirable and ethical Scottish produce into profit, based on an international and national reputation, is vital in the long term. We are told that, in Scotland, only 27 per cent of farmers have formal agricultural training—I was surprised to hear that—and many would benefit from a more diverse skill set when adapting to new demands.

In recognising the unique qualities of Scottish local and regional produce, farmers can make an impression on international markets; some of the figures for food and drink exports in recent years bear that out. That is why outcome 1 of the discussion document recommends that farmers should anticipate demand and meet consumers' expectations for quality and sustainability. The outcome also suggests that

"Farmers monitor their productivity, using benchmarking data and other tools to identify opportunities for improvement".

Will the minister comment on what extra training will be provided to assist farmers in getting to grips with such a formula for improvement?

I found a lot that was positive in the discussion document although, in the context of our amendment, it is unfortunate that the document did not mention the Agricultural Wages Board, which is so important for securing agricultural workers' wellbeing and livelihoods. I was most concerned to hear from Sarah Boyack and Rhoda Grant that it might well be abolished. It is important that that issue is addressed in the debate.

In recent months, the agricultural sector has been reacting to a number of economic shocks to the supply chain, which has served to illustrate the need for a more resilient strategy to support producers. To take the most obvious example that other members have mentioned, we are all aware of the challenges that dairy farmers face with production costs outweighing wholesale value, and severe price volatility and uncertainty over payments impacting on livelihoods. Sarah Boyack and our amendment emphasise the urgent need to accelerate the implementation of the dairy action plan and the overhaul of the sectoral supply chains to deliver fairer prices for farmers.

In the longer term, there needs to be a focus on Scottish dairy products as a brand and a concerted effort to gain local and international recognition for excellence in the food and drink sector. Welcome extra funding has been given to

the Scottish dairy growth board to develop a Scottish dairy brand and range of products. I look forward to hearing how those fare at showcasing Scotland's meet the buyers event next month.

On a more local level, the push to get more local products on the shelves in Scottish stores is also welcome and important. The plan had targeted doing that in May this year and I would be interested to hear whether there have been any discernible results from the measure, which stores took part, whether they reported figures and whether they will agree to continue making local products a top priority for promotion.

We certainly need to do everything possible to support local growing initiatives. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 provides a new framework for community growing and allotments where local residents can grow produce for personal consumption or for sale. In the past year alone, the number of local food projects has grown, with 150 new developments across Scotland. Those projects serve to change attitudes to food, increase awareness of the supply chain, encourage a sense of community endeavour and improve the environment.

The sector offers an opportunity for growth, with smaller firms being more productive per acre, according to the local food education group Nourish Scotland. They also have the capacity to reduce carbon from production. Around a fifth of Scottish greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture and the related land use sector.

In 2014, Nourish reported on the need to encourage consumers to choose local produce. Its "Growing the Local Food Economy in Scotland" report highlighted the fact that there is a considerable lack of public awareness of the socioeconomic and ecological importance of local food. Much of the rhetoric around buying local does not necessarily translate into buying decisions. Nourish suggests that a long-term partnership between the Government and the local food sector is essential for the sustainable growth and development of local food. Such an approach would help growers and small producers that are situated in urban environments, such as the Leith Community Crops in Pots organisation, to widen their market to local retailers who are looking to profit from the locally sourced brand. I was interested to see a new locally sourced food initiative that was launched this week, called Leith food assembly. Members can see information about that in a tweet that I posted on 20 September.

Sustainability and the success of the agriculture sector require a multifaceted approach that takes into account the diversity of food and drink production in Scotland. We must find a balance between promoting our brand in the competitive

globalised market and encouraging greater awareness of the vast benefits of local growing. A growing global population indicates a future of growing demand, but we must seek development within the boundaries of what is sustainable and not run up a debt of overexploitation and sky-high emissions that cannot be reversed.

15:42

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): The NFUS produced a detailed briefing for members on where it believes the problems that have created the present difficulties in the industry stem from and how it believes that they can be alleviated. It identifies as key causes volatility in key global markets, the impact of the Russian ban, poor growing conditions, a new common agricultural policy and food producers being burdened with regulations. Interestingly, at no point does it recognise even in the slightest way that the industry might, over the long term, have contributed to its difficulties.

Of course, if the causes of the problems lie elsewhere, it follows that the actions that must be taken to address them must be taken by others. A number of the things that the NFUS is highlighting or calling for are perfectly valid. Retailers are insulated from price volatility and too little of the profit that is generated by Scotland's food and drink sector is seen at the sharp end. Similarly, there is not enough sourcing of indigenous produce and, too often, inaccurate labelling means that consumers who believe that they are supporting Scottish produce actually are not. Widening the scope of the Groceries Code Adjudicator would be beneficial, and Scotland needs to take advantage of the extended promotional package that was announced in the EU's emergency measures.

However, let us consider the general thrust of some of the other items on the wish list: short to medium-term measures that can be taken by Governments to ease pressure on the sector; a fundamental shift in approach from Governments and the wider food chain; Governments taking every action they can to ease cash-flow difficulties and strengthen safety nets; cutting back on greening, regulation and cross-compliance; the Scottish Government strengthening investment, research and innovation in farming and farming infrastructure; and the ditching of the ban on GM crops. There are calls for Government to do things, but there is not a single mention of anything that the NFUS, as a representative body, or its members could or should be doing in the short, medium or even longer term to help themselves, to whatever degree. I do not think that that was an oversight

I believe absolutely in the need for direct support for food production. We, as individual consumers, cannot meet the true costs that are associated with growing food, which means that subsidy is absolutely necessary. At times of genuine crisis, the Government must of course lend a hand. However, this is an industry that, at least at a strategic level, seems to believe that the answer to its ills—whatever form they take and whenever they arise—is more public money and being left to farm as it believes is appropriate.

Tavish Scott: Would the member give way?

Graeme Dey: I would rather not, because I want to get through my speech.

That approach is being taken at a time when there is a shrinking public funding pot and the rest of us are being asked to do our bit to tackle the climate change that is manifesting itself in the bad weather that is, of course, dogging agriculture.

I compare and contrast the approach of the industry on this matter with that of the environmental lobby, which was articulated by Scottish Environment LINK in a measured and well-argued briefing that acknowledges the need for short-term support. However, in looking to the longer term, it talks of the need for a step change and not just kicking the can down the road. It is right. I also welcome Scottish Environment LINK's call for a new social contract between the public and the industry that would involve the people of Scotland supporting its farmers as part of a transformed food and farming system.

There is no doubt that Scottish agriculture is experiencing serious difficulties. The Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's inquiry into the dairy sector laid bare some pretty horrendous problems. The 2015 survey of Scottish bank advances to Scottish agriculture showed that Scottish farm debt rose by 4 per cent in the year to May. That is the sixth consecutive annual increase in agricultural debt, which is a concerning trend.

There is no denying the need for short-term support, which is being provided. The dairy action plan, the dairy brand and the £400,000 of support for the Campbeltown creamery are instances of that. Let us not forget that £47 million has been invested in buildings and equipment since 2007 through the food processing marketing and co-operation grants scheme, protecting an estimated 8,500 jobs.

However, against that backdrop, there is surely a need for the industry to look at itself and at how it operates—if not immediately, certainly in the medium to long term. Are we really saying that a sector that receives vast sums of money by way of support must be bailed out whenever it runs into trouble, without any expectation that it will take steps to reduce the risk of further foreseeable

problems arising, however limited they may be in the grand scheme of things?

Individual farmers are looking to secure more reliable income streams to protect their businesses and leave them less susceptible to the ravages of market conditions. Last night, two farmers from my constituency were in the Parliament promoting the high-end gin and vodka production that they have moved into using locally grown products. We need more of that kind of imaginative diversification from the industry. The NFUS should actively lead that and send out the message that, at the same time as seeking the help that is needed, agriculture is prepared to help itself in a meaningful way.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you for your brevity.

15:47

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I will carry on the discussion about farm payments, which several speakers mentioned. I echo Tavish Scott's kind comments about what happened at the Public Audit Committee this morning and commend the officials who came to the committee for their frank and helpful comments. We heard that there might not be a payment for every farmer in December, simply because there are some compliance issues to do with inspections.

I bring that fact to the cabinet secretary's attention and ask him what he can do—he might not immediately know the answer, of course—to ensure that inspections happen as quickly as possible. We all understand that cash flow is the life-blood of every business and a farm is, at the end of the day, a business. Therefore, it is really important that farmers who are entitled to a payment get it as soon as they can, even if it is only a partial payment and the rest of it comes along in due course.

I will consider briefly the regulations on the greening requirements for farm payments. Local landowners have brought it to my attention that the regulations on ecological focus areas seem to be particularly complicated, and I wonder whether there might be some scope for them to be simplified in future. EFAs have to be 5 per cent of the farm area for the farmer to get the 30 per cent of the farm payments that will come from greening. The regulations run to a large number of lines and take quite a lot of understanding. Might it be possible to make them rather simpler, given that the European regulations that they seem to follow are very simple?

To continue the point that Graeme Dey raised about the industry helping itself, I point out that there are many technical things that can be done and that farmers are aware of some of them but

probably not aware of others. I recently met a business from my constituency called SoilEssentials. At one level, what that company does is simple chemistry: it works out the pH of the soil and makes recommendations about what one might do with lime and other obvious chemicals to make the soil more productive over its total area. That is a simple part of what farmers can—and, I suggest, should—do with all their land, because the answer always lies in the soil. If that soil is not particularly productive because the farmer has not looked after the nutrients that need to be in there, it will be no surprise that it is not very effectively farmed.

There are demonstration farms, of course, which the Scottish Government has set up and funded. Those lessons are there to be learned. We do not have to just carry on farming as we always have. Therefore, I encourage the industry to do what it can to make use of the technologies and information available.

What we can all do is what I have been told to do over my lifetime—buy locally. Once upon a time, it was buy British. In this context, it is manifestly buy Scottish, but if people cannot buy Scottish, please buy British. If people can buy locally, please buy locally. Nobody can stop me from doing that and nobody can stop anybody from doing that who might be listening to what I am saying now, watching the debate online or—dare I say it—even reading the *Official Report* at some stage. It is a choice that we have to make. If it costs us a penny or two more, so be it—again, it is a choice that we can make. We can support our fellow countrymen in an industry on which we are going to be dependent over the long term just by changing what we do with our money.

On the issue of land reform, I will start with a comment that you made in committee a couple of weeks ago, Presiding Officer. You said that, over our lifetimes, what we have done with land reform has not been terribly effective one way or another, although it has always been done with good intentions. It has always been done, I suspect, from the philosophical point of view that we are trying to do the right things. It has always been done with a political willingness to make a change to help people to get access to the land.

I suspect that land reform has always failed because those intentions at a social level have not been matched by practicality at an economic level. Therefore, in the current land reform, we need to be mindful of the fact that if we set up new leases that are intended to help people to get in and out of the industry, we must ensure that the economic backdrop against which tenants and potential tenants are working is the right one to enable them to take advantage of the opportunities.

Frankly, if the money is not available to the tenants to take those opportunities, land reform will fail. The basic point is that we must not just think about what we are trying to do for tenanted land and for society as a whole; we have to put that in the economic context for it to work, because the lesson of history is that otherwise, it does not.

15:52

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): I am delighted to be taking part in the debate because the agricultural sector is vitally important to our economy and is often undervalued. If, like me, people were brought up in rural Angus and if, like me, they have attended the many receptions that are held for the food and drink sector in this Parliament, they will appreciate just how important the produce of our farms is to our economy, our reputation as a Scottish brand, and the growth of the many small businesses that use the produce of our farms. For instance, at the Scottish Craft Distillers Association reception last night, I met small gin, vodka and whisky distillers, many of whom rely on barley and other products grown in Scotland.

However, much more to the forefront of my mind is the plight of the dairy farmers. This summer, I saw dairy farmers in Ayrshire protesting in local supermarkets over the price of milk because they felt that no one was listening to them. When I spoke to dairy farmers in North Ayrshire, they told me that producing milk is a loss-making business at present.

The cost to dairy farmers of producing a litre of milk is higher than the price that is paid by the supermarkets and the gap is widening. Their livelihoods are at risk and many of them told me that they have been selling their dairy cows at below market value—at a substantial loss—just to pay the bills to prevent them from going bankrupt. Anyone who knows dairy farmers will know how distressing it is for them to have to sell their dairy cows.

I understand that global factors are affecting the price of milk, but there is a need for action from both this Government and the UK Government. The current position is simply untenable and the industry needs greater support to secure a long-term, sustainable future. Although the Scottish Government's dairy action plan was launched in March, the crisis has deepened since then and it is vital that the Government implements the plan as soon as possible. I was therefore disappointed that it received no mention in the First Minister's programme for government speech earlier this month.

One part of the plan that needs to be progressed is the development of the Scottish dairy brand. The First Minister joined her rural affairs secretary to launch the brand logo in June, but to date the launch has failed to improve the position of dairy farmers in my region. It seems to me that the Scottish Government must take immediate steps to roll out the logo to allow consumers to choose local dairy products and support our dairy farmers.

Richard Lochhead: I should clarify that the new dairy brand, which has been developed in partnership with the industry, was broadly welcomed by everyone with an interest in the dairy sector's future when it was unveiled at the Royal Highland Show. However, it will be launched next month at the Anuga exhibition in Cologne, because it is a brand for the international market.

Margaret McDougall: I thank the cabinet secretary for that clarification.

The cabinet secretary mentioned a few businesses that have committed to using Scottish dairy produce. However, although I welcome that, the Scottish Government should use its procurement powers to ensure that the public sector procures its fresh milk and other dairy products from Scottish dairy farmers. Such a move would give a boost to the industry.

As a whole, we need to support our dairy farming industry in its attempts to add value to the high-quality produce that we create in this country. For example, on a recent visit to the Isle of Arran, I was informed that the island's dairy farmers no longer produce milk to be sold directly to consumers; instead, they sell their milk to cheese and ice cream manufacturers on the island, which makes production more financially viable but leaves Arran reliant on transporting milk for domestic consumption over from the mainland. That could give cause for concern at times when the ferry service is not operational, but it is clearly a decision that dairy farmers on Arran have made in order to add value to their product. It is also an option that other dairy farmers in Scotland should consider, particularly with regard to products such as yoghurt and soft cheese that are not commonly produced in this country, and the Scottish Government should support dairy farmers who wish to diversify into new markets that could add value to their business.

We must ensure that money that is provided by the European Commission to support farmers in these difficult times reaches those farmers as soon as possible. They need support now to protect their livelihoods and sustain the agricultural sector, and I urge the Scottish Government to discuss these matters with UK Government ministers. I also ask the cabinet secretary today to clarify the Scottish Government's position, in

consultation with the NFUS, on using the ability to allow from 16 October an advance of 70 per cent of common agricultural policy payments, as has been permitted by the Commission.

Dairy farmers clearly face cash-flow problems and are at risk of losing their businesses and livelihoods. Given that we are at risk of losing the dairy industry in Scotland, it is time that they were given a helping hand.

15:58

Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to take part in a debate on an issue that is important not just to my constituents but to the whole country.

I want to start a trifle unconventionally by wishing a happy 70th birthday to my constituent and friend Robert MacIntyre, who is a councillor for Bute and a farmer of immense experience and wisdom. Indeed, the cabinet secretary knows Mr MacIntyre, and his name is known through Scotland's farming sector.

I have learned more about agriculture from Robert MacIntyre and other working farmers than I ever learned from briefings that I received as an environment minister and much more than I thought I could learn from attending, as I did on a couple of occasions, the agricultural council of the European Union. Robert has been chief among my tutors, although I must also mention, with some sadness, the late Bert Leask of Mull, who passed away in July and whose deep knowledge and ready wit were always generously put at the disposal of not just his local MSP but the cabinet secretary.

I mention Robert MacIntyre not just because he has reached the biblical age of three score years and 10 but because he is a dairy farmer on the island of Bute. At a time when he has a right to be experiencing a more comfortable and less stressful life—though he remains a member of Argyll and Bute Council—he faces an immensely worrying and very pressured future.

Last year, Robert's son, Robert, came home from a successful career in England because he wanted to take over the farm. The price of milk was good and the prospects for the industry were promising. That was last year. Earlier this year, the price of milk plummeted, as members know only too well, and the price has gone on falling. The two Roberts at Dunallan are producing milk for a First Milk price that is some 10p or more per litre below the cost of production. They are pouring their money into a tanker and off the island, and they cannot do that for ever.

The reasons for the collapse of the price of milk are many and various. There was undoubtedly an

oversupply of milk, with greater efficiency producing more milk from fewer cows. There has been increased competition from other countries, there has been loss leading in the retail sector, and the closure of the Russian market because of sanctions has meant that milk powder, which First Milk was producing, could not be sold there.

There are other, more local, factors, too. First Milk has been a disastrously run company. Last year, it lost over £20 million after a series of bad decisions and failed projects. Its incoming chief executive, Mike Gallacher, has admitted as much, and he gave compelling evidence to the Parliament's Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee in March about his plans to turn the company around. The committee and the agricultural sector have supported those plans.

The problems of that company do not affect just the 13 dairy farmers on Bute. There are First Milk dairy farmers in other parts of Scotland, in England and particularly in Wales. In my constituency, there are also some 36 or so dairy farmers in Kintyre and Gigha who are similarly challenged by rock-bottom prices and a scheme of retention of payments—capital retention—that First Milk has used to avoid insolvency.

The farmers in Kintyre and Gigha supply to a creamery in Campbeltown that requires substantial upgrading if it is to be competitive. I thank Richard Lochhead for helping to fund that work, which has at least started. However, First Milk's previous management compounded the problems of the area by an inappropriate and ineffective sales and marketing agreement with an external company, which has led to huge amounts of premium Mull of Kintyre cheddar being sold on the mass market as bulk cheddar and returning very little profit. The farmers and their families are trying to rectify that with their own campaign for Campbeltown cheese.

It is no exaggeration to say that the future of the dairy industry in my constituency—in Kintyre, and on Gigha and Bute—hangs on a knife edge. If there is not a significant price rise or significant intervention before the winter sets in, with increased feeding costs, many of those who are presently in the sector will leave it, no matter the cost to them.

It is with great regret that I have to tell members that First Milk is now making the situation even worse. Tesco has agreed to pay full premium price for the milk that goes into cheese at the First Milk plant at Haverfordwest in Wales. As that is being paid to a co-operative across the UK, the expectation of all the members of that co-operative was that each one would benefit. However, First Milk announced last week that that would not be the case. Those who supply the Haverfordwest plant will get a huge boost in payments, but all the

other members, whose money has gone to equip and run it over the years, will get nothing. When is a co-operative not a co-operative? The answer is when it is run by First Milk.

I appeal to First Milk to rescind that decision to help all its members to survive, not just some. The members of First Milk have much money tied up in the company and they want it to succeed, but if First Milk turns its back on them just when they need it most, it will forfeit all right to respect and continuing support.

Other parts of the agriculture sector also face hard times, of course—we have heard about sheep and beef prices—but the dairy sector is a special case. Its very future is in doubt in my constituency at least. More help must be given now, as I think the cabinet secretary knows. Help must be given over and above the worthwhile but longer-term aims of the cabinet secretary's dairy action plan.

I do not want to finish on a gloomy note. In early August, I took my friend Robert MacIntyre to the Kintyre show. Wandering around an agricultural event with him is a slow process. He knows everybody, and he has a story for everyone and a story about everyone. Many of his stories are immensely entertaining, and many of them could not be told in the chamber.

There was a sense of camaraderie and comradeship, and indications of innovation and new thinking. There was enthusiasm for the jobs that had to be done, which many young people wanted to be involved in.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Draw to a close, please.

Michael Russell: Our food industries are flourishing thanks to the cabinet secretary. In Scottish farming and society there is a determination to overcome difficulties. Robert MacIntyre has spent his life in farming. He will tell you that despite the difficulties it has been a good life, in which he believes he has done good for his island and his community. Fortunately he is not unique.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close.

Michael Russell: We should be helping farmers—and getting the European payments on time is the first thing that we should do. I commend the motion and the Government's work in that regard.

16:05

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): The food industry is certainly flourishing, which we all welcome, but the fact is that the producers are not

reaping their share of the rewards. In many areas in Scotland, farming is in crisis.

What we have heard today sums up a lack of leadership. There are plenty of warm words and plenty of rhetoric, but Graeme Dey basically attacked NFU Scotland and said that farmers need to take responsibility and do more themselves. The Government highlighted what the UK Government needs to do, but it did not offer many answers. We live in a global economy, in which there is increasing pressure from competition. However, in this country there is much more that we can do. We need leadership from the Scottish Government, rather than just warm words.

I will highlight the plight of workers in the farming sector. The Scottish Government has embarked on yet another consultation on the future of the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board. In its briefing, the trade union Unite contests that options presented by the Government

“are designed to deliberately constrain the opportunities to genuinely consider the future of the SAWB by excluding a specific question in the consultation on how the work of the board could be enhanced and improved, and, for the Orders to promote a living wage through the board, despite this being a stated aim of the Scottish Government.”

It also says:

“Unite has the strong impression that the relevant Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment has launched this latest ‘periodic review’ of the SAWB with a view to seeking to abolish it. We also believe that the previous consultation in 2008 was specifically designed to achieve this objective.”

Will the cabinet secretary confirm that that is not the case?

Richard Lochhead: I make a plea to the member not to conflate a review of the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board with a proposal to scrap it. The Labour Government carried out its own review of the board a few years ago, when it was in power.

Alex Rowley: I remember that, during the 2008 review, my local authority, Fife Council, made the case for the continuation of the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board.

In 2013, the Tory Government abolished the Agricultural Wages Board in England, which left many workers in the ridiculous situation of having to negotiate their own wages face to face with their employers. The UK Government’s own figures estimate that farm workers in England will lose more than £250 million ever 10 years in lost pay, sick pay and holiday entitlement. We cannot want farm workers and agricultural workers in Scotland to be treated in that way.

Only 56 per cent of respondents to a survey conducted in England by Unite said that they had had a pay rise since 1 October 2013, when the

board was abolished. I say to the cabinet secretary that we have seen the lessons of what happened when the Conservative Government abolished the Agricultural Wages Board in England. When he sums up today, he could give assurance by removing that threat and making it absolutely clear that he has no intention of abolishing the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board.

I have read the NFU Scotland briefing, which was fairly reasonable. However, it says that there are points where Scottish Government could intervene, and it asks it to do so. For example, it says:

“Scotland is part of an ambitious and forward-looking agriculture sector in the UK, and the Scottish Government should strengthen investments in farming, research and innovation in order for Scotland to become more resilient and competitive. Investment in processing infrastructure is lacking in Scotland, which leaves Scotland far behind other global exporters. This support is essential in increasing the Scottish agricultural industry’s competitiveness with neighbouring exporters.”

It points out some practical things that we can do to bring about investment that would make our industry more competitive and support farmers, and it makes a number of recommendations that seem to me to be not unreasonable. The cabinet secretary might want to say what further work he is going to do to see that type of investment come in.

Scottish Environment LINK’s briefing is also good. Again, it cries out for there to be leadership. It talks about what can be achieved if we have procurement processes in place that allow people to buy locally. Local authorities and public sector organisations should be able to buy locally and support local farmers.

If we are serious about buying locally and getting people to buy Scottish produce, we need leadership. There are a lot of warm words from the Government and the minister, but let us actually turn them into something and start to have action that supports our farming industry and our agriculture sector, which is important for everyone in Scotland.

16:11

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Alex Rowley has just asked for leadership and he asked us what we can do. I echo Nigel Don’s remark that we, as consumers, have a responsibility to ensure that we do our bit to protect our farming industry.

Let us look in detail at the fairer framework for farming. We need to look at how produce leaves the farm and the producers and gets to market and to the plate for consumption. Just last month—I think that it was on 17 August—our cabinet secretary had a meeting with the other UK

ministers and the supermarket industry to look at how we can support the industry and get the supermarkets to sign up to the fair work deal. I do not know how many have signed up, but we know that there are supermarkets that are trying to dupe the consumer.

Alex Fergusson mentioned that lamb is branded as Scottish in supermarkets but when people pick up the pack and look closely they see that it is New Zealand lamb. Alex Fergusson is right—that has to stop. However, it is not the job of the cabinet secretary to ensure that it does. It is the job of the supermarkets and those who manage them to ensure that branding and labelling are such that the industry ensures that the consumer gets what they are looking for.

In my constituency, we have seen some diversity from our farmers and within the industry. For example, more of our farmers are participating in farmers markets. Just a few weeks ago, I was buying local produce at the farmers market in Huntly, and many people there were doing the same. They said that they go to the farmers market because they are assured that what they are getting is local. Farmers markets support our local farmers, and shopping at them is something that we can do as consumers.

The Cambus O'May Cheese Company in my constituency produces premium cheese and it is sold as a premium retail product. Does it get the price that it requires? Probably not. Again, it is the retail market that takes the gain. Profitability in the food and drink industry is at a massive high, but are retailers passing it on to those who produce the goods? No. We need to ensure that we protect the source of the goods.

Our farmers require subsidy and a fair contract from the people to whom they sell their food. They also need long-term contracts, so that they are assured of their source of income, regardless of the weather. Retail needs to take some of the risk in the contracts, but that is not happening.

On diversity in the farming industry, more farm shops are opening. That is certainly the case in my constituency. In Finzean, there is a restaurant as well as a farm shop, which employs local people, brings the community together and attracts tourism—people might even come from as far as Aberdeen to taste the local produce. The community is extremely proud of what has been achieved.

Despite the hardship that the farming industry faces, it is doing what it can. There is no doubt that there are difficulties, because farmers are subject to things over which they have no control—the weather is probably the main hardship, but another is in connection with the subsidies that come from the European Union.

There has been a call for leadership. Let me suggest one approach in that regard. Let our cabinet secretary go to the top table in Europe and negotiate the payments for our farmers. We can support farmers in Scotland by enabling our cabinet secretary, who has eight years of experience in Government, to go to the top table in Europe and protect our farmers.

16:16

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): Most people in Lothian live in urban areas, but that does not mean that agriculture is not vitally important to them. Who produces our food and how is of interest to everyone.

Local people who are campaigning to save Damhead in Midlothian from the new A701 have proposed an alternative use for the green belt: an Edinburgh food belt, which would change our perceptions of the green belt. It is hoped that opportunities can be offered for people to start businesses on croft-sized areas of land, leading to short food chains. That resilient approach would be embedded in future development plans.

We need to shorten supply chains, reduce inputs and improve the environment if we are to have a sustainable food system. The authors of the Scottish Government's paper, "The Future of Scottish Agriculture: a Discussion Document", which was published in June, clearly get the challenge. The content is refreshingly clear for such a publication. Action is suggested on improved innovation, resource efficiency, skills and profitability. The need and opportunities for Scotland to be a world leader in green farming are recognised. Advice, training, education and demonstration farms are all proposed, to support farms to be "environmentally and commercially successful". In the not-so-long term, the two concepts are absolutely inseparable.

However, the Government's discussion document misses our food system's reliance on fossil fuels for transport, pesticides, fertilisers and much more. Breaking that link is one of our biggest challenges. We must ensure that we can sustain a system of affordable food production without fossil fuels. That will need innovative thinking and a willingness to try new techniques.

I ask members to imagine walking down a road with a field of crop on their left and natural woodland on their right. Which is more productive? The field gives us a uniform crop, but the woodland is layered with a vastly greater weight of plants and biomass, all without fossil fuel inputs. We still have many lessons to learn from nature.

As with so many industries, co-operation on innovation and the sharing of good ideas will be key to success. There are plenty of strong

communities in farming that can do that. Co-operative models are working to help farmers get the best deal and share resources, but our production numbers from co-operatives are very low compared with other EU countries.

CAP reform has finally got rid of some of the artefacts of the old system, but the wrong decision was made on allocating the convergence uplift uniformly across the UK. I support calls for the decision to be revisited. Across 521 businesses in the Lothian region, the new CAP is expected to deliver gains of €1.4 million and losses of €5.4 million—a net loss of €4 million.

The Government's motion also refers to the red meat levies, and I agree with it on that subject. However, the Scottish Government could take action right now by supporting new abattoirs in Scotland. That would solve the levies issue and improve animal welfare by reducing transport distances.

New farmers are faced with lots of barriers, including high land values. Land reform should be seen as a way of opening up more opportunities for farms of all sizes.

Many farmers now have renewables or use low-carbon energy, but there is always more to do to maximise the benefits to farmers and to wider community initiatives that need land for projects. The UK Government's attempts to pull the rug from under those initiatives demonstrate why Scotland needs much more influence on energy policy as well as in EU agriculture debates.

Broadband infrastructure is another issue for rural businesses. My colleague John Finnie will mention the importance of the Royal Mail's universal service obligation in his members' business debate tomorrow, but the same principle could be applied to broadband provision, so that rural businesses are not stuck with a loading page instead of the latest price data.

The transatlantic trade and investment partnership is a risk to Scotland's reputation for quality, safe agriculture. I ask the Government to step up to the plate and to be clear in opposing it. It is not a trade deal; it is a corporate power grab that is bad for food.

In his welcome speech, Rob Gibson asked what agriculture is for. I agree that it is not about providing profits to huge monopolies but about ensuring that we all have enough to eat. We should remember that the right to food is established in international human rights law.

I received an email today from the Edinburgh central and Edinburgh north-west food bank, asking us all to watch "The Food Bank: Scotland's Hidden Hunger", which will air next week. Although we understand why there has, sadly,

been a rapid increase in the growth of food banks—I attribute it, in no small amount, to welfare reform at Westminster—let us listen to Nourish Scotland, which calls on us to eat more of what we produce here, and to produce more of what we eat here. We should listen to people such as Professor Elizabeth Dowler and Professor Graham Riches, who tell us that relying on corporate food waste—the waste from the same corporates that do not pay farmers a fair price for milk—is not an effective, sustainable or fair response to hunger. Perhaps if we used the Poverty Alliance's term "emergency food aid" rather than the term "food banks" we would better appreciate the urgent need to ensure that Scotland's food success story fully benefits local producers and local people.

I ask that we continue to strive for a stronger food culture that brings producers and consumers closer together. I enjoyed Malcolm Chisholm's speech, which focused on the right to grow and local initiatives, and I conclude by highlighting the fabulous Dig-In, here in Edinburgh, which is a community greengrocer that is making the most of local produce.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thanks very much. We now move to the closing speeches—I beg your pardon. I call Bruce Crawford, and we will then move to the closing speeches. Forgive me, Mr Crawford.

16:23

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): My time for making closing speeches as a minister is probably over, Presiding Officer.

I recognise the vital work that farmers across Scotland do for our nation on a daily basis. Our farmers, their families and their employees are the very backbone of our rural communities. They provide the food for our tables through countless hours of hard toil and commitment to the land.

In my constituency and across Scotland, we are all concerned about dairy farmers' plight, which we have heard about this afternoon. Earlier this year, I held a members' business debate to highlight issues around the labelling of dairy products and the need to introduce a "Made in Scotland" label for Scottish-produced dairy products. I was therefore pleased to note that such a brand was launched by the First Minister in June at the Royal Highland Show. I believe strongly that the Scottish dairy brand will assist consumers' understanding of where their food is being produced and should lead, over time, to greater sales of Scottish produce.

Although the recent focus has been on the dairy industry, it is not only that industry that faces challenges. Our arable farmers receive very low returns, the prices for our sheep farmers are

dropping and there are significant pressures on beef margins. That is why the matter of Scotland's receiving a fair share of Europe's new €500 million market support package is critical, particularly in the light of the UK Government's failure—as yet—to allocate the £190 million of convergence uplift that was provided to the UK as a direct result of low payments in Scotland. The money could provide hope to a hard-pressed sector. If we could get it into the system quickly enough, it could prevent at least some farm businesses from falling over.

The Scottish Government must play its part, too, by getting the 2015 CAP pillar 1 payments into farm business accounts at the earliest possible date. I welcome what the cabinet secretary has said about that, and I recognise the challenges.

I highlight the remarkable resilience of Scotland's farmers, particularly those in the tenanted sector. In many cases, tenant farmers own no property assets, and they face challenges in securing financial support from the banks, even in circumstances where lifelong, secure tenancies exist.

Farming infrastructure and machinery are expensive. To be able to invest in the best technology and the most up-to-date ways of working, tenant farmers need better access to capital. To that end, will the cabinet secretary say what discussions he has had with the banks to encourage them to be much more amenable to supporting the tenanted sector?

Those are some of the challenges—we have heard about others—but there are opportunities, too. Some of our farmers—certainly those in my constituency—have chosen diversification as a way of improving their businesses.

Diversification through agri-tourism not only works for the agriculture sector, but delivers greater sustainability for the whole of rural life. I have some great examples of that on my own patch. The Rodger family at Knockraich dairy farm in Fintry have diversified into the artisan dairy business. The Rodger family have been farming at Knockraich since 1947, and today have a milk herd of 60 British Friesians. They also run an exquisite soft furnishings company, a cafe and a creamery, all within the farm courtyard. The business is going from strength to strength selling award-winning hand-made dairy produce. We are aware that times are tough for our farmers in the current economic climate. Clearly, not all dairy farmers can do what the Rodger family have done, but that shows how diversification can help a farm's fortunes.

Another great example is the Inglis family, who have farmed at Briarlands for more than three generations. In 2006, they opened up the farm to

the public, creating family-friendly activities for children and adults to enjoy, such as fruit-picking experiences, as well as opening a new restaurant.

Mains Farm Wigwams is another fabulous example of where diversification has worked. Louise and Martyn have created a great wigwam site with 15 original wigwams. The wigwams are heated, double glazed and insulated—they even have electricity. Mains Farm Wigwams has created a glamping experience for those who might prefer home comforts over conventional camping.

I strongly believe that agri-tourism is a way to help the farming industry through some of the fluctuations in market prices from which it often suffers. It can also help to make our countryside an even more appealing place for people to visit. Will the cabinet secretary say what the more Scottish Government can do to help promote agri-tourism?

Every industry goes through its tough times. Our farmers are in a prolonged rough period, but they will come through it. Although agriculture faces many challenges, I say without doubt that farmers are some of the most resilient people I know. I very much agree with the NFUS when it says that the future can be bright for the farming industry.

Presiding Officer, when I got to my feet, Scotland was leading the rugby 45 points to 10. Obviously, our farmers are doing something right by feeding our rugby players. I hope that the score in the game finishes on the right side by the time that we get to full time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I confirm that that was, indeed, the full-time score. We move to the closing speeches.

16:29

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. I am pleased to see that you were watching your iPad like the rest of us.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: On a point of information—I received a note from our office.

Tavish Scott: Yeah—right.

It has been a very useful debate. I begin by making a couple of points about what other members have said. After having the temerity—as some would see it—to raise the issue of GM crops, Alex Fergusson was then landed on by a number of members from across the chamber. An argument needs to be had about the science behind GM crops. I have heard Rob Gibson make the speech that he made today a number of times over the years. He and other members are passionately against any dalliance with GM crops,

but I suspect that he and others would accept that, at the very least, the science and a full assessment of it need to be considered, not least because the Scottish Government is rightly having to follow exactly the same principle when it comes to fracking. I do not see how the Government can have a policy on fracking that involves looking at the science and all the environmental consequences and not take the same approach in principle to another issue in a different policy area.

In response to Graeme Dey's observations about the NFU—which he has every right to make—I say gently that over many years, particularly when his colleagues were in opposition, it was always the case that the Government was required to do more, especially when the NFU had made the argument. If I may say so, in opposition Richard Lochhead was particularly good at pressing that case when such luminaries as Jim Walker were shouting loudly from the pages of *The Scottish Farmer* and elsewhere.

I have a serious point to make about Rob Gibson's challenge on what agriculture is for. I did not disagree at all with his contentions about local food production and the principle of producing for the marketplace and the consumer, particularly in a local context, which I think is the argument that Sarah Boyack developed.

For me, the other fundamental—I make no apologies for this—is supporting rural communities. Many of us represent outlying and rural parts of Scotland. If it were not for agriculture, crofting and farming, there would be far fewer people there, which would mean that there would be fewer schools and shops, and fewer of the other ancillary industries that are wedded to agriculture and which give some parts of the country the flavour that makes them so attractive for tourists to visit, as Bruce Crawford said. He was right about crofters and farmers recognising what they do and diversifying their businesses. That is not for all, but it is certainly for some.

I agree with the assessment of the €500 million so-called emergency package. As far as I can tell, it will probably be spread very thinly across Europe, in which case I suspect that Mr Lochhead will be banging his head against a brick wall in trying to get anything out of it for Scotland. Particularly at this time of extreme pressure on primary producers not just in our country but in other parts of Europe, there might be more that could be done in relation to marketing and assisting in a different way. I leave that to people who are closer to that argument than I am.

I turn to Bruce Crawford's point about convergence funds. I thought that the parties in the Parliament had a solid and consistent line in support of the arguments on the issue that have

been made over the previous year or so. There is to be a mid-term review and other assessments in that area, and it is very important that that process continues and that it produces results for Scottish agriculture.

On CAP payments, I will not repeat the arguments that have been made about timing, but there is one other point that I want to make to the Government. For many of us who represent rural and island constituencies, if a move is being made towards complex forms being filled in online, that will need to go hand in hand with the provision of better broadband services around Scotland. The concept of superfast broadband is a bit of a joke in many parts of Scotland; they would just like some broadband service. I know that the Government is on that issue, as it were, but I am not sure that we are getting all that we might out of the current contract, given the huge investment that the Government is putting in. I feel that the programme is the wrong way round—we should target the hardest-to-reach areas before we target big towns, where the market will probably deliver anyway. I think that the contract is somewhat in BT's favour rather than people's favour.

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I am sure that Tavish Scott will be aware that the UK Government auctioned the 4G mobile spectrum last year and that the 5G spectrum is coming up for auction next year. The great thing about 4G and 5G is that broadband can piggyback on those technologies.

Would Tavish Scott support putting a clause in the contract at the next auction to insist that 95 per cent of the Highlands and Islands is covered by the masts that are going up in our rural areas?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have 45 seconds, Mr Scott.

Tavish Scott: I tell Mr Thompson that, although the principle is good, the remaining 5 per cent is the bit that I am worried about. Some of that 5 per cent is in my constituency—in fairness, some of it is probably in Dave Thompson's constituency too. When we say to those people, "You are not going to get any of this", that means that the policy is the wrong way round.

I will finish with two points on the pressure that agriculture is facing. First, I want the cabinet secretary to recognise Liam McArthur's point about breeding stock. Livestock production underpins all agriculture in Scotland, and I hope that the cabinet secretary will take very seriously Liam McArthur's point about Westray and the potential for losing stock as a result of the fodder problem.

Finally, with regard to sheep sales, the pressure on lamb prices is significant at present. I hope that, in the context of the cabinet secretary's

discussions with the supermarket trade, the market is being pushed as hard as it possibly can be.

16:36

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my farming interests in the register of members' interests. I am pleased to close today's debate, and I thank those organisations that provided briefings for it.

As members on all sides of the chamber have said, the debate is timely as our farming sector is facing a number of very tough challenges. Some of our farmers are under severe pressure and have significant cash-flow problems, and Scottish farming debt levels are at their highest since the late 1980s. Farmers and crofters are therefore looking to the Scottish Government—rightly—for support.

The challenges arise from a number of areas including volatility in global markets; low commodity and livestock prices; bad weather; the relative strength of the pound in comparison with the euro; and the implementation of the newly reformed common agricultural policy.

I want to pick up on a number of issues from the debate. Michael Russell was right to refer to the continuing crisis that is affecting dairy farmers in Kintyre, Bute and Gigha who supply First Milk, as they remain under huge financial pressure. The investment in Campbeltown creamery is welcome as that is a vital processing facility, but we need to continue to do more to promote Kintyre cheddar and ensure that Scottish dairy products are properly labelled and made from Scottish milk that is processed in Scotland.

The Scottish Government needs to look at what further support it can provide to our hard-working specialist dairy farmers to ensure that the industry gets through the current challenges. In that way we can ensure that we retain the producers and processing infrastructure so that the sector has the potential, with the right marketing and export support, and through building on Scotland's strong reputation for quality food, and when market conditions improve in the future, to be an area of growth for our rural economy.

Bad weather, which started with a cold, late spring followed by a very wet summer, has sadly been a feature this year for far too many of our farmers. I am aware that parts of Orkney have had their wettest summer for more than 100 years, and a combination of poor grass growth and a shortage of silage has been very difficult for many farmers, with some being forced to sell livestock far earlier than normal and at a loss. I know that the Scottish Government is looking at what additional assistance it can provide to those

farmers who are most affected by the adverse weather conditions that have prevailed this year, and I hope that any announcements can be made without further delay.

Lamb prices, which are currently at a seven-year low and 20 per cent lower than they were a year ago, are a source of real concern to many in the sheep sector. The price of breeding sheep has also fallen significantly. I support the NFUS in calling on every retailer to have British or Scottish lamb on its shelves so that the consumer has the choice of having local lamb or imported lamb, rather than only imported lamb being on sale.

In the longer term, we need to do more to encourage Scottish consumers to eat more lamb and mutton. We currently eat far less lamb and mutton than most other countries in Europe do; I simply do not know why that is the case.

Members have mentioned the new common agricultural policy system. Crofting constituents in my region, such as those in Kinlochbervie who were recently quoted on BBC Radio Scotland, continue to voice their disappointment at what they see as very low levels of support for poorer-quality rough grazing in Scotland, even when combined with the ewe hogg payment, when compared to support for equivalent land in England and especially Wales, where the support is many times higher. I am told that grade 3 land in Scotland receives £7 per hectare and that the equivalent ground in Wales receives £88 per hectare. That puts Welsh hill farmers at a considerable advantage and it puts our crofters and farmers at a very considerable disadvantage. Will the minister comment on that?

The greening element of the new common agricultural policy has meant extra regulations and cross-compliance. I support the NFUS in its call for the removal of gold plating and simpler guidance so that our primary producers are not disadvantaged. The simplification agenda at EU level should be seized on to deliver improvements to the greening regulations.

I want to touch on the Scottish Government's decision on GM crops. The vast majority of the farmers whom I have spoken to about the issue are aghast at the Government's decision, which was taken with no consultation with the industry or, it appears, the scientific community. The policy risks putting Scotland's farmers at a competitive disadvantage and can only do damage to our world-class research institutes. Ministers should look at the subject again and recognise that GM has a role to play in increasing food production and developing disease-resistant crops. The debate on the issue is about opportunities in the farming sector, rather than disadvantages, so it would be a travesty if ministers were to prevent farmers from benefiting from new technological

advances. I refer members to the comments of EU Commissioner Hogan at the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee that animal feed would be far more expensive for our farmers if GM was not accepted.

Given all the challenges that face the industry just now, I again emphasise the importance of our farmers and crofters receiving their support payments in December. I look to the minister to deal with that.

16:42

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): As many members have done, I pay respect to our farming communities across Scotland. As we have heard, they face many challenges. There is the eternal daily struggle in all weathers, the effect of poor weather on harvest, which has been particularly bad this year, and price uncertainty and volatility. The NFUS briefing for the debate states:

“this has forced many Scottish farmers to question their future viability.”

We need to acknowledge that that is a worrying and stressful position for farmers to be in. However, the NFUS also states:

“This is a crucial time for Scottish and UK farming but with a fundamental shift in approach from governments and the wider food chain, NFUS remains convinced there can be a bright future for the farming industry.”

The NFUS also highlights how essential it is that the Scottish Government engages with banks and lenders

“to clarify new measures and lending structures that will provide assistance to farmers who are dealing with price volatility.”

Dennis Robertson made the point well about how important it is for contracts to be longer for farmers. No business likes uncertainty. It is significant that the Bank of Scotland has already established a large fund of £500 million to help agricultural customers who are eligible to receive a basic payment and who might be adversely affected in the event of a delay in December. That will be free of any arrangement fee and will be in place for the time required until payment is received. However, as members from across the chamber have done, I emphasise the importance of the payments being made in December.

I wonder whether earlier payments might have been of use to Scottish farmers. I ask the cabinet secretary to comment on whether the reason that he is not taking up Commissioner Hogan's points on that is the fairly chaotic situation that developed earlier with applications.

It is clear, from examples in the US, that the development of farm credit co-operatives can

make a significant difference and contribution to investment and develop specialist knowledge for farming needs. Will the cabinet secretary consider supporting their development along the lines of credit unions?

The challenges for the dairy sector today symbolise the challenges that are faced by all sectors. In that respect, Margaret McDougall highlighted the plight of farmers in her region; we also heard from other members, including Michael Russell, on that issue. There are grave concerns about the challenges that farmers face. Development of the processing industry infrastructure, with support from Government, is vital for the longer term, but there are issues at the moment that cannot be resolved by that. Dairy farmers across Scotland, including those in my region, are turning to the Scottish Government with a plea for help.

Retail needs to take some of the risk, as Dennis Robertson said. Supermarkets need to be faced with their failure to give specific support and priority to Scottish produce. The Groceries Code Adjudicator gave evidence to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee earlier this year, but the adjudicator's role should be broadened, in the words of the NFUS, to receive

“complaints from indirect as well as direct suppliers”.

Supermarkets need to be held to account. Dennis Robertson highlighted the value of farm shops and the role of farmers markets, which I know the Deputy Presiding Officer, John Scott, had a role in developing in their early days. They are an important way for consumers to connect with the industry.

The public sector procurement targets, which are highlighted in the Labour amendment, and the shorter supply chains that are highlighted by Nourish Scotland are vital, as are provenance and niche markets across the country. Scotland Food and Drink's excellence awards, which I attended with the cabinet secretary and many other members earlier this year, are a testimony to the success of our food and drink industry. From my region, there was recognition for Peelham Farm's platters of charcuterie; Galloway Chillies' soups and preserves; and Canape's curried Scottish goat, which I have not tried yet.

I turn to the contribution of co-operative models to agriculture. First Milk has been a bitter disappointment in its dealings with milk producers, which are as far away from the co-op spirit as one could imagine—Mike Russell explored that point. However, members of the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society Ltd and others have shown how effective and efficient co-operation can be, and SAOS has asked the Scottish Government

“to maintain a strong commitment to investing in farmer co-ops and their growth and development in both grants and specialist support”

and to

“step up its endorsements of”

co-ops.

Scottish agriculture is addressing many systemic challenges that relate to biodiversity, climate change and connectedness with communities, and there must be just transitions that support farmers. Last week, the Scottish Government published “Scotland’s Biodiversity—A Route Map to 2020”, which presents a number of direct challenges that agriculture must face, including acknowledging that agricultural pollution is a key pressure on biodiversity and that land use intensification reduces diversity and connectivity of habitat. Alison Johnstone raised that point.

Given the climate change challenge, farm-level carbon assessment must now be considered. It is important that farmers take up the opportunity of the new collaboration fund to address flooding and climate change solutions. The expectations of change through the new CAP payments robustly signal the need for a shift in farming approaches and the ultimate aim of fusing farm food production and greening into a future for Scottish agriculture.

Earlier in the summer, Sarah Boyack and I visited Whitmuir the Organic Place. In that regard, the cabinet secretary wrote to me recently and stressed that

“it is essential that our organic sector will be well placed to successfully compete in a growing European market.”

Scottish Environment LINK has highlighted the possibilities through agro-ecology and has called for

“a new social contract between farmers and citizens of Scotland, one of mutual benefit, respect and value.”

That needs serious consideration.

I also highlight education. The Royal Highland Education Trust makes a large contribution to schools and makes young people and children aware of the future. We have had apple day at Holyrood. We have heard from a range of members, from Bruce Crawford to Malcolm Chisholm, about initiatives for growing. All those will address some of the problems for the people who are faced with using food banks, especially if they can be involved with food co-ops and other similar initiatives. Of course, the main challenge for people who are faced with food banks is the UK Government’s approach.

I commend all those who work in agriculture and wish them well. We are determined to work with the Scottish Government to ensure a positive

future for Scottish agriculture and our rural communities from the Highlands to the south of Scotland.

16:50

Richard Lochhead: I begin by thanking members for their contributions. The debate has been a good opportunity to highlight and commend the contribution of many men and women to Scottish agriculture, to putting food on our tables, to looking after Scotland’s environment and to underpinning a large part of Scotland’s economy.

It has also been a good opportunity to follow in the footsteps of Michael Russell by wishing Robert MacIntyre a happy 70th birthday. He is certainly a stalwart of the dairy sector in Bute and he cares deeply about the future of agriculture in Scotland. I know Robert MacIntyre very well because I accidentally gave him my mobile phone number a few years ago. He is still a fine man.

There is a lot of agreement across the chamber on many of the key and serious issues that are facing Scottish agriculture and food production, as well as on the enormous achievements of our food and drink industry, which is underpinned by agriculture. Many good points are made in most of the Opposition amendments, but we cannot support them because we do not agree with everything and they would remove some of the good parts of the Scottish Government’s motion. We are not, therefore, able to support the amendments.

I will talk about the Tory party’s amendment in particular. We have severe reservations about its support for GM crops. I remind the Tories, as I have done many times before and will continue to do, that Scotland was able to opt out of the growing of GM crops because the EU changed its regulations and decision-making process. Therefore in the decision-making process, decisions on science have now been divorced from the social, economic and democratic factors. The Scottish Government was able to take the decision that we have taken only on the basis of those democratic, social and economic factors. The science is decided at EU level, the crops are authorised once they have gone through the scientific analysis at EU level, and then member states and their Governments are able to base decisions to opt out on other factors. It was those other factors, as well as our longstanding reservations about the wider debate, that led us to take the decision.

Alex Fergusson: Not for one minute do I question the Scottish Government’s right to take that decision, nor have I advocated anywhere today a compulsory requirement for all Scottish

farmers to take on GM cultivation. Will the cabinet secretary accept that my belief is that it is wrong to close the door to the potential benefits of the technology?

Richard Lochhead: The key point is that since we, as the Scottish Government, took the decision, our belief has been shared by Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Germany—Europe's biggest country—Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Northern Ireland, Poland and Slovenia. No one is seriously suggesting that any of those countries are anti-science or that they do not care about feeding the world.

When it comes to feeding people around the world in the future, the planet currently wastes 1.3 billion tonnes of food. That is one third of the agricultural output that is intended for human consumption on this planet. It is equivalent to using 28 per cent of the world's agricultural land on producing food that goes to waste. I suggest to the Tory party that the way to feed the world is not to use GM crops but to stop that waste.

I want to turn to issues that were raised by members, particularly on the Labour benches, about the future of the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board. We are not proposing to scrap the board. We consulted on the options for the future because when we had a similar consultation in 2008 we promised a further consultation in a few years. That approach is not novel. Also, I wish that Alex Rowley and other members would not conflate a consultation with a proposal for closure. The Labour Party had exactly the same kind of review in 2003, so I say gently that it is a touch of hypocrisy for the Labour Party to criticise the Government for having a review of the board, when that is what it did when it was in power in the Scottish Parliament. We will announce the outcome of that consultation in due course.

Claudia Beamish: Agricultural workers whom I know in the south of Scotland, as highlighted by Unite and the points that were made by Alex Rowley, are concerned about the abolition of the ability of isolated agricultural and horticultural workers to negotiate.

Richard Lochhead: As I said, we are listening carefully to responses to the consultation and we will announce the outcome in the coming weeks.

I want to turn to areas in which members who spoke in the debate feel that the Scottish Government should be taking action or doing more. The big issue was a request to help the industry with its cash-flow problems by getting the European support out of the door as quickly as possible once the payment window opens on 1 December. I remind members that, between now and 2019, more than £4 billion of European support will be delivered by the Scottish

Government to farmers the length and breadth of Scotland. I have already said that we are busting a gut to get the money out of the door—we hope, by the end of December. That is the policy position at the moment. We will keep the industry up to date as things become clearer. Of course, we have the option of paying the money out in two parts, with an initial payment followed by a later payment at some stage. We are seriously considering that option.

On administration and the complexity of the policy, we are investing in an IT system and in administration. The system is new and complex and the policy is radically different to the former one. It is based on area as opposed to past activity. The investment is equivalent to 4 per cent of the £4 billion that is going out of the door, but it is necessary investment. I agree with members that the policy is far too complex: it should have been simplified, as was promised by the European authorities and other politicians in other member states. The EU estimates that the cost of administering the new CAP will be between 15 per cent and 45 per cent higher than the cost of administering the previous programme. Quite clearly, the EU has failed in its objective of simplifying the programme. This programme is much more costly and complex than the last one was.

Would not it be great if we had more budget to get out the door? I listened to Rhoda Grant standing up there and criticising the Scottish Government for not having enough funds for Scotland's crofters. I remind her that we wish that we had bigger budgets to allocate to crofters and farmers. The 2013 average payment figure was €265 per hectare in England, €247 per hectare in Wales and €335 per hectare in Northern Ireland. In Scotland, thanks to poor negotiation by Labour and Conservative Governments, which ignored Scotland's pleas, the average payment figure in Scotland was €130 per hectare. When I hear Rhoda Grant say that it is terrible that farmers in England are getting more than farmers in Scotland, I ask this: where was the Labour Party in Scotland when the UK Labour Party was letting Scotland down in the budget negotiations?

Now, of course, the UK Government can help Scotland's crofters and farmers by putting right some of the big problems of the past year or two. Firstly, there is the CAP convergence budget money. Europe has acknowledged that Scotland's payments are an issue and that, therefore, Scotland should get more money. An extra £190 million was allocated to the UK because of Scotland's low payments. The UK qualified for that uplift only because of Scotland's payments, but the Tory Government kept the money and we have been denied £145 million that should have come to Scotland. I ask the Scottish Conservative

Party to ask the Conservative UK secretary of state to fix that wrong as quickly as possible and to help Scotland's farms and crofters now.

We also lose £1 million per year from red meat levies from animals that are reared in this country. Because of the current system's flaws, the money goes south of the border to promote produce from there, not produce from north of the border, where the income was generated. The UK Government could help our farmers by fixing that, as well.

Now, of course, the battle turns to the new EU aid package, which was given to the UK to help us to address some of those challenges. About €36million—not a huge amount of money—comes to the UK through the aid package and, of course, a modest amount will come to Scotland from that. However, it is really important that it is not third time unlucky and that we get our fair share of that €36 million. The decision on that aid was taken at a Luxembourg informal council, which Scotland was not allowed to attend, and where some of the money was decided upon based on weather conditions in some countries. There was no one there to speak for Scotland about the wet weather that we have had so that we could earn more of the emergency aid, but there was somebody there to speak for eastern European countries, which are getting more money because of the droughts that they have had. That is why Scotland should have its own voice at such negotiations.

The Scottish Government will continue to urge the UK Government, Europe, our retailers and food service companies to get behind, in their hour of need, the men and women who farm our land and put food on our table.

Business Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-14332, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 29 September 2015

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament (Amendment) Bill

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Inquiries into Deaths (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 30 September 2015

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Infrastructure, Investment and Cities;
Culture, Europe and External Affairs

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 1 October 2015

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Stage 3 Proceedings: Human Trafficking
and Exploitation (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 6 October 2015

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 7 October 2015

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
 Education and Lifelong Learning
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 8 October 2015

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
 12.30 pm Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of three business motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S4M-14333, S4M-14334 and S4M-14335, setting out stage 1 timetables for various bills.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Carers (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be extended to 6 November 2015.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Health (Tobacco, Nicotine etc. and Care) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 11 December 2015.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Inquiries into Deaths (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 2 October 2015.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motions agreed to.

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Sarah Boyack is agreed to, the amendments in the names of Alex Fergusson and Tavish Scott will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-14327.3, in the name of Sarah Boyack, which seeks to amend motion S4M-14327, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the agriculture sector, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)

Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)

White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 38, Against 78, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Alex Fergusson is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Tavish Scott will fall.

The question is, that amendment S4M-14327.1, in the name of Alex Fergusson, which seeks to amend motion S4M-14327, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the agriculture sector, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 14, Against 102, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-14327.2, in the name of Tavish Scott, which seeks to amend motion S4M-14327, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the agriculture sector, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 18, Against 97, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-14327, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the agriculture sector, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)

Abstentions

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 102, Against 1, Abstentions 13.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the hard work and dedication of the men and women working in Scottish agriculture but recognises the current challenges facing the sector; notes the Scottish Government's commitment to deliver 2015 CAP Pillar 1 payments as soon as it is able to do so, following the payment window opening on 1 December

2015; calls on the UK Government to allocate Scotland a fair share of Europe's new €500 million market support package; further calls on the UK Government to revisit its decision not to allocate Scotland the full £190 million convergence uplift provided to the UK as a result of Scotland's low payments, and for an urgent resolution to the negotiations with the UK to repatriate the industry's red meat levies to Scotland; acknowledges the record growth in Scottish food and drink and calls on all parts of the supply chain to benefit, and welcomes the Scottish Government's call for UK and Scottish ministers, along with farming leaders, to jointly approach UK retailers and food service companies to secure a fair deal for farming.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Marshall Islands (Nuclear Weapons)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-13558, in the name of Bill Kidd, on the non-proliferation treaty, the Marshall Islands, and the United Kingdom Government's failure to meet its obligations. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation on Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference met again at the United Nations in New York in April/May 2015; understands that the UK signed up to and ratified the NPT in 1968, including Article VI, which creates an obligation in good faith of cessation of the nuclear arms race and achievement of nuclear disarmament; commends the government of the Marshall Islands, whose people have, it understands, suffered grievous genetic injuries through nuclear weapons testing on their territory, for its courageous legal action against the UK Government on 24 April 2014 in the International Court of Justice for the failure of the UK Government to meet its duties under the NPT; recognises the spirit of the Marshall Islanders' actions under international law and the NPT Article VI, and notes calls for the complete removal of the Trident nuclear weapons system at Faslane from Scotland and for it not be relocated anywhere else in these islands in order to comply fully with the 1968 NPT obligations.

17:08

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): With your indulgence, Presiding Officer, I welcome the honourable Alexander Kmentt, Austrian disarmament ambassador and arms control person of the year 2014, to the gallery. We are all very grateful for his efforts over the years to reduce the threat to the world of nuclear weapons—including last year, when he won the award.

I also wish to thank all the MSPs who signed my motion on the non-proliferation treaty on nuclear weapons, the Marshall Islands, and the United Kingdom Government's failure to meet its international treaty obligations. The NPT review conference met again at the United Nations in the spring of this year. I say "again" because it meets every five years and has done so since 1970, so obviously it has not yet achieved its aims, which were set out in 1968.

The group was set up in 1968 to get countries to sign up to and ratify, as the UK did, the articles of the NPT. Article VI of the treaty creates an obligation to pursue "in good faith" the

"cessation of the nuclear arms race"

and the achievement of "nuclear disarmament". We have been waiting 47 years for that good faith to come to pass.

Where does the Republic of the Marshall Islands fit into the long-term future of the international obligations of those NPT signatories that still maintain nuclear weapons arsenals? The Marshall Islands is a small Pacific nation that, after the second world war, was placed under trust status by the United Nations for protection and development by the USA. I have to say that, when I hear the name "trust" attached to something, I do not have great hopes for it. Although the idea of trust might be taken for granted by most of us, it is not delivered by nations around the world when it becomes a matter of their own best interests and, tragically, the Marshall Islands and its occupants were between 1946 and 1958 used by the US as a nuclear weapon testing ground.

During those 12 years, a total of 67 nuclear tests were carried out in the Marshall Islands, notably at Bikini and Enewetak. The total explosive yield of those tests averages out at an incomprehensible equivalent of 1.6 Hiroshima-sized bombs every day for 12 years. As a result of the testing of those weapons, the people of the Marshall Islands have suffered catastrophic and irreparable damage, including genetic damage. However, the Government of the Marshall Islands does not seek financial compensation as reparation for the devastation wreaked upon its land and population. How could the problems that have been caused possibly be sorted out with money? That is too much the idea of western societies.

Instead, the Marshall Islands Government has filed nine separate applications at the International Court of Justice, one for each of the nine nuclear-armed states, as well as another lawsuit against the USA in the US Federal District Court for its actions during the trust status period. The lawsuits are intended to highlight breaches of existing international law—both article VI of the NPT and customary international law, which call for compliance with good-faith negotiations, an end to the nuclear arms race at an early date and nuclear disarmament after that. Three of the nine nuclear-armed nations—the UK, India and Pakistan—accept the ICJ's compulsory jurisdiction, and oral arguments are due to proceed in the court in March 2016.

I believe that, in the spirit of those courageous actions by the Marshall Islanders under the auspices of international law—and mindful of the duties placed on the UK Government as a result of signing and ratifying the 1968 NPT obligations, in particular the provisions of article VI—all parties must follow the example of the great majority of the world's Governments and pursue a non-nuclear weapons strategy of co-operation. That would include the UK Government halting the planned preparatory work for upgrading and replacing the Trident nuclear system at Faslane

and Coulport on the Clyde, prior to its dismantling and removal, and—crucially—ensuring that Trident is not relocated to anywhere else on these islands. By doing so, the UK Government would comply fully with the UK's obligations under the NPT.

I thank the foreign minister of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Hon Tony de Brum, for his friendship and support in providing an understanding of the background to this internationally important case. I express my sincere thanks for the support of the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands in welcoming this debate in the Scottish Parliament and—this is really what it is all about—I thank the people of the Marshall Islands for their vow to fight so that no one else on earth will ever again experience the atrocities that have been perpetrated on their territory and people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are tight for time this evening and a number of members wish to speak in the debate, so I am minded to accept a motion from Bill Kidd, under rule 8.14.3, that the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes. Mr Kidd?

Bill Kidd: I am sorry. I was being congratulated because I was so good, and I—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Would you care to move a motion that the debate be extended, Mr Kidd?

Bill Kidd: Yes, I would. Thank you.

Motion moved,

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

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I still ask members to keep to time, please. Several members have to leave early to go to other parliamentary events. I will try to accommodate them as best I can.

17:16

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): Presiding Officer, I give you and Bill Kidd my apologies, as I will not be able to stay until the end of the debate.

I congratulate Bill Kidd on lodging the motion and allowing us to debate a highly relevant issue. As a member of the Scottish Parliament, I strongly welcome the Scottish Government's stance on global nuclear disarmament. However, I would like to focus on two points. First, I want to speak about the disastrous effects of nuclear weapons testing. Secondly, I want to follow the motion's call for

“the complete removal of the Trident nuclear weapons system ... from Scotland”.

In launching a lawsuit at the International Court of Justice against the nine nuclear weapons states on 24 April 2014, the Republic of the Marshall Islands took an unprecedented but audacious step that marks a crucial step towards the abolition of nuclear weapons. If it is successful in its claim, the Government of the Marshall Islands will demand not financial compensation but the abolition of the nuclear arsenals of the countries in question.

In light of the history of the Marshall Islands, that is a commendable decision. The Pacific island state has been the site of 67 nuclear tests. On Bikini Atoll alone, 23 nuclear bombs were tested between 1946 and 1955. That includes the first launch of a hydrogen bomb in 1952 and corresponds to 7,000 times the force of the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima.

To remember the nuclear tests that were conducted on Bikini Atoll, the island was declared a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization world heritage site in 2010. In its decision, UNESCO highlighted the importance of remembering

“the displacement of inhabitants, and the human irradiation and contamination caused by radionuclides produced by the tests.”

Recalling the fate of the Marshallese is paramount, as it displays to us the destructive power of nuclear weapons. Death, ill-health effects, environmental damage and resettlement issues remain matters of great concern. As an example, Bikini Atoll's indigenous population, which was shipped out in 1946, has still not been able to resettle on its island.

I take this chance to recall once again the effects on British servicemen of nuclear weapons testing at Christmas Island in the Pacific Ocean. More than 20,000 soldiers were exposed to radiation. Later on, they suffered from severe ill health and early deaths. In fact, of the 2,500 British ex-servicemen who were surveyed by the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association in 1999, 30 per cent have since died. A majority passed away in their early 50s having suffered from cancer. Additionally, the veterans association has observed higher rates of miscarriages among veterans' wives, and veterans' children had a 10-times higher risk of experiencing defects at birth.

Veterans in my constituency of Kirkcaldy who were part of the nuclear testing programme have experienced the effects that I have mentioned. With their families and affected ex-servicemen across the country, they are fighting the Ministry of Defence in its negligence to take responsibility for the lasting health damages that they have endured. We need to actively question the Ministry of Defence's actions. It is about time that it started to fully support veterans' families. It is predicted

that they will face severe health problems for many generations to come.

The motion calls for the complete removal of the UK's nuclear weapons base at Faslane. Around half of all Scots have expressed their opposition to Trident. Trident's renewal will consume 20 to 30 per cent of the Ministry of Defence's budget, which will put it under significant constraints.

We simply cannot ignore the fact that the UK, as a signatory to the non-proliferation treaty, has an obligation to adhere to article VI. As the Scottish Government has acknowledged, international opinion is distancing itself more and more from the proliferation of nuclear weapons. There is also increasing interest in the truth about nuclear testing operations. We need to ask why the Ministry of Defence is reluctant to admit its past policies, while it insists on renewing Trident.

It is our responsibility in this chamber to put pressure on the UK Government with regards to its disarmament obligations and to press for uncovering the truth regarding nuclear testing operations, whether they have affected our own servicemen or the citizens of the Marshall Islands.

17:20

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I recognise Bill Kidd's efforts in bringing the debate to the chamber, and I recognise his tale of nuclear testing's horrific legacy. Unfortunately I must apologise to the chamber and the cabinet secretary, as I must leave the debate early because of a commitment in Fife.

The debate on Trident's replacement is complex, and I am glad that we can explore some of the issues. I understand those who make a clear commitment against renewal, which I know comes from a deep-seated desire to see the end of nuclear weapons and a belief that not renewing Trident is a step toward that. All of us in the chamber share the desire to see the end of nuclear weapons, but often the question is how best to achieve that. Although there will be disagreements among members during these debates, we must remember that we are all striving to reach the same goal.

It would seem counterintuitive to say that Trident's renewal would help to deliver fewer weapons, but there is an argument that the UK's international role and influence has contributed towards de-escalation of weapons, and that the UK's influence is partly dependent on maintaining Trident. The majority of members in the chamber are of the view that the UK and Scotland should remain in NATO and—although members may challenge this—it is argued that the UK's nuclear capacity is central to its membership.

There is the question of compliance with the NPT obligations. There is an argument that the replacement of Trident is a like-for-like replacement and so does not breach the treaty, but it could be said that it is not in the spirit of the treaty.

No one would deny that Britain and Scotland need defence forces, but is Trident part of our future? There is a strong argument that the world has changed dramatically since the cold war. The proposition is that the threat comes no longer from big nation states having a stand-off but from terrorism, which is more targeted and hidden. What does a country's nuclear capacity mean to a group that is attacking with no government, country or army behind it? That is the threat of the future on which our defence and intelligence community need to focus.

We are challenged to see into the future. The argument is made that work on a Trident replacement cannot be delayed, because the submarines alone could take up to 17 years to develop. We can prepare for our future defence needs only based on our understanding and predictions—there are no certainties. However, others see the opportunity to reduce our nuclear capacity as one that should not be missed.

In government, Labour reduced nuclear weapons and played an international role. The United Kingdom Government has signed up to gradual disarmament, negotiated in line with other nuclear nations. We would all like to see that achieved quickly, but if we are going to be fair during the debate we should recognise the steps that have been taken. The position that we are in now is quite different from that of 10 or 20 years ago. Since 1998, all of the UK's air-delivered nuclear weapons have been withdrawn and dismantled, and our nuclear forces have been reduced by more than 50 per cent since their cold-war peak. That is to be welcomed.

There are a range of views on Trident across the Labour Party. Kezia Dugdale and Jeremy Corbyn have both said that the party will have a debate before taking a conclusive position.

I grew up in the 1970s and 1980s. Campaigning against nuclear weapons was not my first political experience. I went to Communist Party jumble sales and I even appeared on the front page of the *Morning Star* with Arthur Scargill—I did grow up in Fife, after all.

When I was 12, I went on my first visit to London, to take part in a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament rally of more than 300,000 people, which ended in Hyde Park. The decision to go on the rally was my first real political act. I was the youngest person on an overnight bus that was full of Labour Party members, including Alex Falconer,

who was our MEP at the time; Communist Party members; political activists; and my family.

That day, there was a huge show of public rejection of the nuclear arms race, and that public movement is important to making a change in the UK and globally. I welcome the debate that Trident is generating on the choices that the UK faces.

17:25

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I congratulate Bill Kidd on securing time for this debate.

Ever since the dawn of the atomic age, nuclear weapons have been a dividing issue, and the spread of different weapons of mass destruction has, by and large, defined power politics for the past seven decades. The non-proliferation treaty is a cornerstone in the attempt to create a global regime to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and, by extension, a nuclear war.

The Marshall Islands were the testing ground for US nuclear weapons. Testing stopped in 1962, but the radioactive fall-out was significant and there has been an increase in cancer cases among the population, mainly involving cancer of the thyroid. The US subsequently paid significant sums of money in compensation to the people of the Marshall Islands. As the radiation from the tests dissipates, the dangers that are posed by the radioactive isotopes decreases. However, research shows that one of the main health concerns stems from the forceful displacement of the population and the uprooting of their culture. That has had a significant negative effect on the population, as has similarly been seen among the citizens of Pripyat, who were forcefully evacuated after the Chernobyl incident.

Last year, the Marshall Islands sued the UK and all other nuclear weapons powers for breaching their obligations—stipulated in article VI of the non-proliferation treaty—to “in good faith” negotiate an end to the nuclear arms race and engage in negotiations to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in the world. The UK Government announced a few years ago that it is continuing to cut down on warheads by another 45, thus slowly disarming according to the treaty. The case is continuing at the International Court of Justice and the outcome is uncertain. Any speculation regarding a ruling would be unwise, but the case yet again brings forward the debate about the existence of nuclear weapons.

The SNP has argued for a long time in favour of the UK unilaterally disarming itself by removing our strategic nuclear deterrent. Such a policy would not just be futile, it would also be dangerous. The common argument for unilateral disarmament, which was so often heard during the

referendum campaign, is that if the UK shows the way other states will follow as they will feel less threatened and thus more inclined to disarm as well. There is no evidence for that, and no evidence that Russia or China would embark on a quest of disarmament just because we decided to do that.

There are dangers lurking in the shadows due to disarmament policies. For the duration of the cold war, the doctrine of mutually assured destruction prevented a cataclysmic war between the free world and the eastern bloc. Our nuclear arsenal ensures that Scotland is kept safe in an increasingly turbulent and dangerous world. Some might argue that the enemies of today are terrorist groups such as Islamic State and that having nuclear weapons either way does not provide any protection from that. That is probably true, but the world is constantly shifting and new threats emerge continuously. We should not and must not remove our deterrent.

It is important that we note the effects of nuclear testing not only on the Marshall Islands but around the world. Since joining the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty in the 1990s, the UK has not tested any nuclear weapons and we have gradually decreased the size of the stockpile. The fact remains, however, that we live in an unstable world where nuclear weapons are providing safety for the people of the United Kingdom, and it would be folly to give them up.

I note that the motion calls for

“the complete removal of the Trident nuclear weapons”

that are stored at Faslane. That would also be detrimental to employment in Argyll and Bute, as Faslane sustains 7,000 jobs in the area, which is already threatened by depopulation.

17:29

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate Bill Kidd on lodging the motion, and I pay tribute to the courage and endurance of the people of the Marshall Islands after everything they have been through.

I apologise to Bill Kidd and the minister, because I must leave to chair the cross-party group on cancer, which is supposed to start now.

The motion considers Trident renewal from the point of view of the non-proliferation treaty. The non-proliferation treaty was a bargain: the nations without nuclear weapons promised not to develop them, and in exchange, nuclear weapons states promised to pursue negotiations towards nuclear disarmament. In the words of article VI, parties undertook to:

“pursue negotiations in good faith on ... cessation of the nuclear arms race ... and ... nuclear disarmament”.

It is on that basis that the people of the Marshall Islands have brought their case to the International Court of Justice. They say that the nuclear weapons states have failed to meet their obligations and are therefore in breach of international law.

Lord Murray, a former Lord Advocate as well as a former MP for Leith, has said:

"It is not obvious that the UK can offer a stateable defence".

Lord Bramall, a former chief of the defence staff, said in a debate in the House of Lords on 24 January 2007:

"it is difficult to see how the United Kingdom can exert any leadership and influence on the implementation of the non-proliferation treaty ... if we insist on a successor to Trident"—[*Official Report, House of Lords, 24 January 2007; Vol 688, c 1137.*]

We all know the moral objections to Trident, although not every member of this Parliament shares them. Trident would deliver death and destruction on an unprecedented and unimaginable scale. That is the core moral objection. We know, too, that money is diverted from more worthwhile causes to pay for Trident.

The motion highlights something else: the legal objections to Trident. There is a clear statement on the breach of the non-proliferation treaty. There was also a ruling of the International Court of Justice in 1996 that any use of nuclear weapons is of doubtful legality. My predecessor in Leith, Lord Murray, has argued strongly that that is also a central legal objection—indeed, a more fundamental legal objection to having nuclear weapons at all.

Those of us who want to build the case against Trident should emphasise all the dimensions of the matter—the moral arguments, the legal arguments and, increasingly, the arguments that relate to the strategic and security objectives. I quoted a former chief of the defence staff. Many people in the military object to Trident—although perhaps not all of them speak out—because they realise that there are far more useful ways to defend this country through conventional means.

Not just military people but people with a deep knowledge of the military object to Trident. Given the previous speaker, the main person to mention in that regard is the former Conservative defence secretary, Michael Portillo, who has made a strong and cogent strategic argument against the renewal of Trident.

I hope that we will have a great debate on Trident over the next few months, not just in the Labour Party but in the country, because we have never really had a meaningful debate about the issue and I think that most people still hold the views that they held 30 or 35 years ago—I am

pleased to say that I do. The issues should be brought into the open, and I hope that as that happens we will see a strong coalition against Trident, which can put forward the moral arguments, the legal arguments, which the motion highlights and, fundamental to persuading the majority of people, the security and strategic arguments against Trident.

17:34

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I commend Bill Kidd for lodging the motion, and I commend the people of the Marshall Islands for bringing their case to the International Court of Justice.

The accused are: the United States, Russia, China, France, India, Pakistan, Israel, North Korea and the UK. The plucky Marshall Islands, with a population of 70,000 people, are taking on the major military, political and economic powers. Some people have described what they are doing as a near-Quixotic venture. In my opinion, it is a brave attempt to safeguard all our futures and should never be compared to tilting at windmills.

The Marshall Islands know all about nuclear testing. As has been said, they suffered 67 United States nuclear tests in the 1940s and 1950s. The bomb that was exploded in one of those tests was 1,000 times greater than the Little Boy bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima. They know the consequences of nuclear testing.

The Marshall islanders deserve our respect and support for bringing their case to the international court in The Hague. Beyond that, the case should give every one of the Governments that I have mentioned time to think about what they are currently doing on nuclear weapons. In particular, the UK Government should think about what it is about to embark on. Spending £100 billion on new nuclear weapons in a time of austerity is abhorrent. Spending money on nuclear weapons at any time is abhorrent, but it is particularly so when money is being cut left, right and centre and when the poorest in our society are suffering greatly.

The might of the accused—the United States, China, India, Israel, Russia, France, Pakistan, North Korea and the UK—is being tackled by a small nation of 70,000 people. Their courage is absolutely immense. I hope that the courage and determination of the Marshall Islanders will prove that nuclear weapons are a complete and utter folly and that we begin to see disarmament on this small planet of ours. Hats off to the Marshall Islanders!

17:37

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I thank Bill Kidd for bringing the motion to the chamber.

I understand that the non-proliferation treaty represents the only binding multilateral treaty with the goal of disarmament that has been signed by the nuclear weapons states. Malcolm Chisholm read from it—it is quite a document, as we would all agree. The reality is that the treaty did not stop the arms race. We know that the major powers accumulated more and more nuclear hardware. However, it set in train the process of co-operation between nuclear and non-nuclear states to prevent proliferation, which was a huge step forward that we should be thankful for. Given the dangers that we see across the globe at the moment and the instability that we have seen since the treaty was signed—the border disputes, territorial disputes, religious wars, civil wars and regional conflicts—we must all be thankful that proliferation on a mass scale, bringing in new states, did not materialise. If it materialised, we would now be in an even more perilous position. The world is a dangerous enough place without a nuclear arms race and nuclear expansionism across a range of new states and within states.

Like many members, I have always been opposed to nuclear weapons. I am opposed to the renewal of Trident and I am glad that more and more people are coming to that point of view. I do not want to see Trident sail from the Clyde to the Thames, the Mersey, the Tyne, the Barrow or anywhere else in the UK. I want the UK to be free of nuclear weapons; I want the world to be free of nuclear weapons. I want a world of peace and justice. Many share that goal—not only among those who are in the chamber but among those who are not here.

Jamie McGrigor: Will the member take an intervention?

Neil Findlay: I know that Mr McGrigor does not share that goal, but I will take an intervention.

Jamie McGrigor: I share the member's desire for a nuclear-free world, but unilateral disarmament, when there are nuclear weapons elsewhere, is a foolish policy.

Neil Findlay: I am glad that Mr McGrigor has put that on the record. We can disagree on the tactics, but how we rid the world of nuclear weapons should be part of the debate. It is good that we start from the same position—I am pleased about that.

The Marshall Islands is a state that knows more than most. It can tell the world a lot about the impact of radiation, having been the site of the most powerful hydrogen bomb tests ever undertaken, as many members have mentioned.

Given all the dreadful consequences for the people and the environment there, they have a lot to teach the world. I understand and support the Marshall Islanders' desire to see the end of nuclear proliferation. That desire is shared by many.

I again thank Bill Kidd for securing the debate. I also thank him for the motion that he lodged yesterday in tribute to Dr Alan Mackinnon, who was a friend to many people in the peace movement, in the Communist Party and across the broad left of politics. He was a fantastic human being and his death is a great loss to progressive politics. It is up to us to keep up his work for a fair, just and more humane society that is free of nuclear weapons.

17:42

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I thank Bill Kidd for bringing this important debate to the chamber. The Marshall Islanders are to be commended for their strength of will and vision on the issue.

Bill Kidd mentioned that the Marshall Islands were put under trust status by the United Nations. That brought up an important word: trust. It is probably one of the most important words that we will hear in the debate. Where is the trust? Do we trust ourselves to live in a world without nuclear weapons? Do we trust our fellow nations to look to a future without nuclear weapons?

Malcolm Chisholm summed it up when he said that many of us have held the ideal of a nuclear-free world for 30-plus years. Like it did for Claire Baker, the debate started for me in the 1980s. We believed that, because of the cold war, ours would be the generation to end in nuclear Armageddon. That seems the distant past now, but teenagers had that fear in the 1980s. It was one of the reasons why I was attracted to the SNP. At the time, there was an argument over Polaris and Trident, and we are having the same debate now: should we go for the next generation of Trident? As Kevin Stewart said, it would be absolutely disgusting to spend £100 billion on such weapons when people are struggling in our nation.

I like to talk about people, because I believe that politics is about people. Today, I will talk about a man who is not from Paisley but who comes from Johnstone, which is next door. Ken McGinley was a soldier who went over to Christmas Island when Britain did its nuclear testing in the Pacific. He went across as a young man of 19—he had not been around the world before. He has become a close friend and someone whose opinion I respect. Ken told me that, when he went out there, he had never heard of the hydrogen bomb or the atomic bomb and was only vaguely aware of what had happened at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He

was there when Grapple Y, Britain's biggest ever nuclear test, took place. It involved the dropping of a 3 megaton monster. As the day of the test got closer, he knew that there were soldiers who were braver than he was who were starting to have doubts. As he sat on the beach on the day of the test, he became increasingly worried about all the "crazy thoughts"—those are his words, not mine—that were going through his mind. Ken has told me exactly how he felt on that day when the bomb was tested. He wore a white overall—that was all the protection that the soldiers were given—over khaki shorts. He said:

"Suddenly, before I could have any more misgivings, a voice came through the tannoy: 'This could be a live run,' it said dramatically. 'Five ... Four ... Three ... Two ... One ... Zero'".

Then it happened. He was told to cover his eyes as a 3 megaton bomb was unleashed in the vicinity. At that point, he put his hands over his eyes and he could see every part of the innards of his hands. He said that when the heat came, it was not as if someone had put on an electric fire behind him; it was as if 1,000 electric fires had gone right through him.

Like many others who found themselves in his position, Ken McGinley has not had his troubles to seek. He has had many health problems. When he came back to the UK, he had an undiagnosed ulcer that burst and he collapsed. He later discovered that he was infertile, and he has had skin complaints, cysts and other conditions. That has happened to many people who were there just doing their national service. The big thing for 19-year-old Ken was a stop-off in Hawaii on the way to Christmas Island.

The nations of the world must take responsibility when they are dealing with nuclear weapons. They must admit that they were wrong to do the tests in the Pacific islands. They must learn that we need to trust one another and work together to ensure that nothing like that ever happens again and that we can have a world that no longer has nuclear weapons.

17:47

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I join others in congratulating Bill Kidd on his motion. I also congratulate him on all the work that he does in the nuclear field, for which he is rightly respected around the world, and of which tonight's debate is just the latest manifestation.

The motion refers to

"an obligation in good faith".

I suggest that successive UK Governments have found such a course of conduct very challenging when it comes to military and, especially, nuclear matters.

The motion also talks about the "cessation of the nuclear arms race".

We know that, following the Chancellor of the Exchequer's recent visit, that is not going to happen. Money is no object if the objects in question are weapons of widespread and indiscriminate civilian slaughter, as Trident is. Trident must be decommissioned, and it is good to hear voices in support of that around the chamber.

Nuclear testing is responsible for vile impacts well short of slaughter, which we know have been visited on the Marshall Islands in particular. The islands were colonised in the second millennium BC by Micronesian colonists, who gradually settled there. Like many other parts of the world, the islands were exploited successively by the Spanish, the English, the Germans, the Japanese and by the great improvers—because every island needs nuclear testing—the Americans. As we have heard, in an obscene course of behaviour the US tested 67 nuclear weapons, the largest of which was Castle Bravo.

I respect the Marshall Islanders for taking legal action—that is worthy of the term "bravo". We know that by 1956 the US Atomic Energy Commission regarded the Marshall Islands as

"by far the most contaminated place in the world".

We know that claims are on-going. We also know that the health effects linger. We know, too, about project 4.1, which was a medical study by the US of the residents of Bikini Atoll who were exposed to the radioactive fallout. As we have seen elsewhere on the planet, the pernicious effects of the arms trade are often visited on the undeserving—not that there would ever be deserving recipients of that.

The relationships in question are about power and respect. The so-called developed countries have shown little respect to places such as the Republic of the Marshall Islands, which is worthy of our utmost respect, not least for its filing of an application for action at the International Court of Justice in 2014. The International Court of Justice is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations and its role is

"to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States."

I will not rehearse the names of the nine countries of shame, but I will say that they contribute little to the cause of humanity by their course of action.

Kevin Stewart: I think that we should name the accused nine as often as we can, so that people know about the perpetrators who used those weapons of mass destruction.

John Finnie: I take Kevin Stewart's point—he is right that we should name them. The debate is

time limited; nonetheless, I confirm that the nine countries are the United States, the United Kingdom—not in my name—and France, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea.

The court cases are founded on the unanimous conclusion of the International Court of Justice in 1996, in which it stated:

“There exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.”

It is important to say that the legal action is about ensuring that the opinion is not allowed to lie dormant or be ignored. It covers breaches such as refusing to commence multilateral negotiations; implementing policies that are contrary to the objective of nuclear disarmament, which—as we have heard—includes the likely replacement of Trident; and breaching the obligation

“to pursue negotiations in good faith”

relating to

“cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date.”

I cannot stress strongly enough the influence of the arms trade in that regard.

Our planet faces many challenges, not least climate change, which will require collaboration among nations if we are to tackle it. To my mind, it is the Republic of the Marshall Islands, rather than any one of the nine nuclear states, that demonstrably cares about humanity. I applaud the islanders’ actions and wish them every success, and I wish them well in making the world a better place.

17:51

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I also thank Bill Kidd for bringing to the chamber a debate on the UK’s obligations under the non-proliferation treaty and on the plight of the Marshall Islands.

Conferences to review the NPT take place every five years. At the most recent conference in 2010, the five major nuclear powers reaffirmed

“their unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament”.

They also committed to undertake

“further efforts to reduce and ultimately eliminate all types of nuclear weapons.”

Of course, progress since 2010 has been sporadic, to say the least.

There has been a growing focus on, and concern about, the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons from many non-nuclear states, the UN and other non-governmental organisations

throughout the world. The on-going refugee crises throughout Europe and in many other parts of the world underline the importance of bringing peace and stability to many areas of the world. Our energies and strategies and our international economic drivers should be guided towards creating political and socioeconomic landscapes that allow countries to thrive and their peoples to live in peace. Foreign policy mistakes over the years have created refugee situations in many parts of the world.

The 2013 UN conference, which was organised around the topic of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, was used by non-nuclear countries to push for development of a nuclear-weapons convention that would outlaw possession of such weapons as a first step towards their total elimination. That brings into the spotlight the UK’s position on its Trident successor programme, which will, if it is approved, replace the UK’s nuclear deterrent from 2018. The UK’s nuclear deterrent is thought to consist of approximately 225 nuclear warheads; the US has approximately 5,000 and Russia is believed to have the same amount.

The 2015 NPT conference gave the UK an opportunity to make a commitment regarding the undertaking that was made in 2010, which was—I repeat—an

“unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament”.

At Faslane in Scotland, we are—as we have heard today—hosts to the UK’s nuclear deterrent. It is only 25 miles from our biggest city, which has a population of 600,000. Only weeks ago, a 20-vehicle military convoy travelled across Scotland using specially built vehicles to transport nuclear weapons. John Ainslie, the co-ordinator of Scottish CND, referred to that convoy, noting that

“70 years ago Hiroshima was destroyed by an atomic bomb.”

What brought me to a belief in total nuclear disarmament was a book about Hiroshima by John Hersey. He wrote:

“There was no sound of planes. The morning was still; the place was cool and pleasant. Then a tremendous flash of light cut across the sky.”

Mr Tanimoto, the pastor of the Hiroshima Methodist church, said that

“It seemed a sheet of sun”

and that

“he lived a dozen lives and saw more death than he ever thought he would see.”

One hundred thousand people were killed. That is why it is right that we support the people of the

Marshall Islands in suing the nine countries at The Hague. It is, as they state, a “flagrant denial of human justice”.

When we consider that only one bomb, the Castle Bravo shot, was a 15 megaton bomb and was equivalent to 1,000 Hiroshima blasts, and if we then apply the figures from Hiroshima exponentially, we find that it would result in 100 million deaths, which is 20 times the population of Scotland.

We support the people of the Marshall Islands and wish them success. The people of Scotland do not want nuclear weapons. It is time that the UK took its obligation to the NPT seriously. Trident renewal will cost the UK £100 billion and Scotland might have to pay its share. Let Scotland confront that and let it be a beacon to the rest of the world as a country that wholly rejects nuclear weapons and takes its obligation to the NPT seriously.

17:56

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Keith Brown): I thank Bill Kidd for securing the debate. As John Finnie did, I acknowledge the wider work that Bill Kidd has done for a number of years in pursuit of the abolition of nuclear weapons. As has been mentioned, he has a growing international reputation for that. In my view, the Parliament is lucky to have him.

Bill Kidd’s debate has provided an opportunity for members from across the chamber to make clear their position on whether they believe that the UK Government is committed to nuclear disarmament and is doing all that it can to make it a reality. The Scottish Government has been consistent and steadfast in its opposition to the possession and the threat of nuclear weapons. We have called on the UK Government to lead by example on disarmament and, in light of the location and impact of Trident in Scotland, to work with us on its safe and complete withdrawal.

However, as George Osborne’s announcement of 31 August demonstrates, the UK Government continues to prepare the way for a new generation of Trident-carrying submarines operating from HM Naval Base Clyde into the second half of this century and potentially beyond. It is difficult for me, and I think for many others, to reconcile that stance with a genuine commitment towards nuclear disarmament.

Although the case that the Republic of the Marshall Islands is bringing against the UK Government is a matter for the International Court of Justice, the Scottish Government can certainly sympathise with the Marshall Islands on the issue of nuclear weapons. Our history of nuclear

weapons is of course different from that of the Marshall Islanders, as we have heard, but we share a common belief that there should be no place for nuclear weapons in our world today, and that there is an obligation on each and every nation to do all that it can to realise that vision.

We therefore recognise the frustration of the Marshall Islanders and the frustration of many nations, organisations and individuals, including some in the chamber and in the public gallery today, at the apparent lack of progress in the pursuit of nuclear disarmament. Although some members have mentioned the reduction in the number of warheads, there has been no mention of the increase in the capacity of those warheads that has occurred at the same time.

I would like to respond to the arguments that have been put forward in support of nuclear weapons, although they have been fairly rare tonight. We have heard a great deal of talk about the role of nuclear weapons in national and international security. I, and I think many members who are in the chamber, do not accept the suggestion that they are a necessary evil. Nuclear weapons do not make us more secure. As the UK and other states have unfortunately seen, the possession of nuclear weapons has not deterred terrorist acts. In fact, if we think about it for a second, the very presence of terrorist acts should make us more concerned about possession of nuclear weapons in the first place.

We had a kind of Orwellian use of language from Jamie McGrigor, when he said or implied that it is more dangerous not to have nuclear weapons than it is to have them. That is the kind of argument that we were led into during the nuclear arms race, and we should reject it.

As Malcolm Chisholm and others have said, some very high-level military and political figures have spoken out. Michael Portillo said that Trident has

“completely passed its sell-by date”.

He went on to say that it is a “waste of money” and is no deterrent to the Taliban.

Malcolm Chalmers, who is well known in defence circles, has said:

“Even if the MoD manages to secure the continuing 1% annual growth in total equipment spending to which this government has committed itself, sharp increases in spending on Trident renewal in the early 2020s seem set to mean further years of austerity for conventional equipment plans.”

It is worth bearing in mind that the cost of Trident is equivalent to a third of the capital budgets of all three armed services. I can tell members from my experience that many people in the services believe that it is a far worse deal to invest £100 billion in Trident than it is to invest in

the soldiers who have received P45s while serving on the front line or in conventional defence, in which there have been massive cuts.

Toby Fenwick, from CentreForum, has said:

“Replacing Trident is nonsensical. There is no current or medium term threat to the UK which justifies the huge costs involved.”

Even to get to a position of trying to justify Trident on security grounds, anyone who supports the purchase of Trident must have a moral case for it and accept that there must be circumstances in which it would be legitimate to use nuclear weapons. I think that most members in the chamber would reject that argument. There is no circumstance—none that I can think of—in which it would be justifiable to use nuclear weapons. The other side of the argument is that nobody can support having nuclear weapons if they do not at the same time support the view that there are circumstances in which it would be possible and acceptable to use them. However, unlike most conventional defences, Trident is utterly indiscriminate; it would destroy civilian populations, who may have played no part in the beginnings of a war but who would suffer hugely. The majority of casualties will be civilian casualties when any nuclear weapon is used.

As for the argument that nuclear weapons provide a security blanket against some unspecified future threat, what role do they have in responding to the real, long-term issues that we face, such as climate change, which was mentioned by John Finnie and others, sustainable economic development and mass migration? It is the Scottish Government’s view that the UK’s nuclear weapons are maintained, and would be renewed, at the expense of conventional defence equipment and personnel, which are capabilities that have far more utility in responding to current and future threats. It is therefore our position that HMNB Clyde has a valuable role to play as a conventional naval base. There is a range of political and economic reasons why the nuclear weapons states would not go to war with each other today or in the future. I, for one, do not believe that we can credibly argue that nuclear weapons are necessary for our security.

There have been many good speeches in the debate, such as Kevin Stewart’s on the nature of the fight that is being undertaken by the Marshall Islanders, who have been supported by most members who have spoken. I very much appreciated Malcolm Chisholm’s welcome for the debate because that has not always been the response that we have had when we have raised the issue of Trident in the chamber. As a number of members have mentioned, it is vitally important for Scotland that we have a debate on Trident.

As recent history has shown, so long as any country has nuclear weapons, other countries will want them. It is as well to point out the dilemma in trying to say to other countries, “No, you can’t have them. You’re not responsible but we are. We can have them because we are more responsible than you.” There is no moral force behind that argument. The consequences of a nuclear exchange, whether by accident or design—of course, there is always the potential for accidents or misunderstandings—would be unspeakable human suffering. We heard from Chic Brodie about the strength of some of the bombs that have been tested in the Marshall Islands, so we can imagine the level of human suffering that they would cause as well as the huge environmental damage, like what has been suffered in the Marshall Islands.

As we debated in the Parliament on 20 March 2013, the Scottish Government supports UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon’s five-point plan on nuclear disarmament as a framework for the UK and other nuclear weapons states to take serious and significant steps towards nuclear disarmament. We therefore call again on the UK Government to cancel plans to renew its Trident submarine fleet and to lead the way in both negotiations and actions towards nuclear disarmament.

A quote from the International Committee of the Red Cross puts into focus the threat of nuclear weapons and the responsibility that we share in pursuing their withdrawal:

“Nuclear weapons are unique in their destructive power, in the unspeakable human suffering they cause, in the impossibility of controlling their effects in space and time, and in the threat they pose to the environment, to future generations, and indeed to the survival of humanity.”

Some mention was made in the debate of how long we have held such views. I remember proposing a motion exactly on these lines to the first committee on disarmament in a model United Nations debate in the United Nations building in New York in 1986, which was passed. I would very much hope to see further success for that kind of motion and point of view at the United Nations in New York. The Scottish Government supports the aims of Bill Kidd’s motion.

Meeting closed at 18:04.

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