

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 4 December 2003

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 4 December 2003

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:30*]

Scottish Parliament (Financial Powers)

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S2M-697, in the name of Mr John Swinney, on financial powers of the Parliament, and three amendments to the motion.

09:30

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): This morning's debate reflects a wider critical debate that is taking place among the peoples and nations of Europe. That wider debate is a re-examination of the very purpose and powers of national Governments and national Parliaments in the face of great pressure from global forces. In that global context, the 15 full members of the European Union and the 10 accession states are making decisions about which powers should be held by the EU and which should be held by national Parliaments. It is a debate that we cannot afford to ignore. We cannot leave it to others; we must show leadership, ambition and self-confidence if we are to make our voice heard on such big and vital subjects.

The powers that we hold go to the heart of what we can achieve as a Parliament and how we see ourselves and our country. Do we see ourselves as decision makers, equals and participants and as a people and a Parliament with a contribution to make to the wider world, or are we satisfied with passing responsibility for our country to someone else?

Every member of the Scottish National Party joins our party because, first and foremost and above all else, we believe passionately in Scottish independence. We believe that only with independence can we deliver the prosperity necessary to defeat the evil of child poverty and to deliver social justice. Two other parties in the Parliament now share that aspiration, but others who are not convinced about independence recognise the need for change, and I warmly welcome that movement.

The debate on the powers of the Parliament is dynamic; it is indeed a process. The purpose of this debate is to establish how much consensus exists in the Parliament on moving on from the clear limits of devolution, which, week by week, are becoming apparent to the people of Scotland.

The points of the debate are set out in the amendments before us today. Mr Kerr's amendment is the status quo—there is nothing wrong; everything in the garden is rosy. Tell that to the families who live in poverty, to the young people who have to leave Scotland to find work and to more than one third of adults in Glasgow who cannot find work. Things in the garden are not rosy.

Mr McLetchie's amendment is the classic fudge. He believes that there is a need for financial powers in the Parliament, but he cannot quite bring himself to say so. Although the terms of Mr Sheridan's amendment are correct, it does not address the point of this debate, which is to seek out where consensus exists on moving on from devolution. I take the view that we should not reject any additional powers for the Parliament just because we cannot get all the remainder at the one time.

Presiding Officer, your predecessor, Sir David Steel, said recently:

"No self-respecting Parliament should expect to exist permanently on 100 per cent hand-outs determined by another Parliament. Nor should it be responsible for massive public expenditure without any responsibility for raising revenue in a manner accountable to its electorate."

He is 100 per cent correct. Those comments are far from isolated, as members of the Conservative and Labour parties have argued similar points of view. Mike Rumbles for the Liberal Democrats goes even further. According to Mr Rumbles:

"The current situation is completely untenable. A Parliament isn't a Parliament if it isn't responsible for raising the money it spends."

I welcome those contributions to the debate.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Is it not disingenuous of the SNP to put forward the policy of independence, which, as Mr Swinney said rightly, it believes in, to try to get support for what is effectively a federalist position? Is that his position or does he stick with the position of independence for Scotland?

Mr Swinney: I do not know whether Mr Brown was in the chamber for the start of my speech, so I will remind him what I just said. I said that the SNP believes that only with independence can we deliver the prosperity necessary to defeat the evils of child poverty and to deliver social justice. I have just delivered a paragraph in which I said that the purpose of the debate is to establish how much consensus exists in the Parliament on moving on from the clear limitations of devolution. I will be totally clear about the point: I believe in independence and I think that the Parliament should have the full powers of an independent Parliament. However, I accept that other people believe that we should move on from devolution,

and the purpose of the debate is to examine whether there is an opportunity for a genuine debate in the Parliament among all the parties about how far people are prepared to travel on that road. My position has always been clear: I will never close the door on additional powers for the Parliament short of independence. My membership card of the Scottish National Party says that I have two objectives: one is to deliver independence for Scotland and the second is to further all Scottish interests, which is exactly what we are trying to do today.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the member for that quite clear explanation in response to Mr Brown's question. If giving the Parliament more financial powers resulted in its working more effectively and more responsibly—as the member puts it—and therefore strengthened the union, would that really take us further down the road towards independence?

Mr Swinney: That is a point of great debate. Devolution was supposed to strengthen the United Kingdom, but it has exposed some real practical issues and problems—which I will come on to talk about in a few moments—particularly in relation to university top-up fees. I know that Mr Monteith has taken a keen interest in that subject over the years and I am sure that he will be interested in what I have to say on that point.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): Will the member give way?

Mr Swinney: I had better make progress, as I have taken two interventions already.

The Deputy First Minister made a speech the other week to the Universities Scotland conference, but he would have been better served listening to Mr Rumbles before he did so. During his speech he lambasted universities for lacking imagination about how to raise revenue. He said that they had to find money from sources other than Government. That must have been a puzzling experience for university principals: there was the Executive, which refuses to raise any of its own money, delivering an economics lecture to organisations that raise hundreds of millions of pounds every year. The issue of university funding has injected urgency into the debate on the financial powers of the Parliament.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Swinney: Given that I have mentioned the Liberal Democrats, I will take an intervention.

George Lyon: Is it not true that we raise 15 per cent of our revenue here in Scotland through Scottish taxes, so we do not rely completely on a direct grant from England and Wales?

Mr Swinney: The last time I looked, all we had was the council tax, which passes the burden to local authorities and they get all the stick for it, so Mr Lyon's argument does not stand up to much scrutiny.

The issue of university funding and top-up fees exposes the fatal flaws of the devolution settlement. A clear majority in the Parliament is opposed to top-up fees for students in Scotland; every party is opposed to them—except, of course, the Labour Party. The majority of us agree that rejecting top-up fees must not lead to an erosion of Scottish universities' competitive edge. That majority on policy and intent counts for nothing if the Parliament lacks the financial muscle to put the policy into practice. If top-up fees are introduced—and there is every likelihood that they will be introduced—a number of eminent experts have made it clear that there will be serious consequences for Scotland's public funds. Professor Arthur Midwinter said:

“there would be no Barnett consequential for those fees, and there would be a funding gap between the Scottish and English universities.”—[*Official Report, Enterprise and Culture Committee*, 28 September 2003; c 28.]

The lesson of all that is clear: when decisions that impact on Scotland are made at Westminster or in Brussels or Washington, we must have the means to respond. We cannot leave it to someone else to sort out; this is the national Parliament of Scotland and we must have responsibility for the national well-being of the people of Scotland.

At present, the Parliament's funding powers are among the most limited of any Parliament in the world. The Executive can allocate the tax base that it receives to different departments, but it has little or no power to expand that base by growing the economy and, for example, providing the universities with the funding they need to secure and maintain a competitive edge. To do that, we need full economic powers. For example, we need the ability to vary business taxes and incentives, such as corporation tax and research-and-development credits. Those powers are essential for any successful economy. How do we know that? We know that because both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer tell us so regularly. The Prime Minister wrote recently in a joint article with his Estonian counterpart:

“making everybody follow the same tax rules would quickly diminish Europe's competitiveness by killing jobs and stifling growth.”

The Prime Minister is absolutely right, but today he forces Scotland to follow the same tax rules as England, the result of which has been the loss of 50,000 manufacturing jobs over the past five years and one of the lowest growth rates in Europe.

George Lyon rose—

Mr Swinney: It is astonishing that while the Prime Minister is fighting tooth and nail to protect Estonia's right to set its own taxes, he is fighting even harder to prevent Scotland from enjoying that self-same right.

If Mr Lyon wants to intervene, he is welcome to do so now.

George Lyon: Week after week, Mr Swinney's party comes to the chamber and complains vociferously about the varying rates of business taxation north and south of the border. We already have a system in which we can vary tax rates north and south of the border.

Mr Swinney: Absolutely. The Executive has made business taxation higher in Scotland than it is south of the border. No wonder it is killing jobs in Scotland.

The chancellor never makes a speech without highlighting the crucial role of tax competition. With full powers over taxation, the SNP would reduce corporation tax to a level below that of the rest of the UK in order to counter the huge gravitational pull of London, which sucks in Scottish jobs and investment. We know from the experience of small independent countries that that course of action will boost public expenditure. The examples of Ireland, Finland and Denmark prove that such a policy increases the tax contribution that business makes to the exchequer. That approach is an example of the healthy tax competition that the Labour Government advocates for everyone else, but not for Scotland.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): In relation to the lower corporation tax rates that Mr Swinney envisages for Scotland, what would be the marginal tax rates for the well-off?

Mr Swinney: I want the power to set taxation to lie with the Scottish Parliament. I am coming to a section of my speech that will address personal taxation.

The power to vary business taxation is an essential component of creating wealth and growing the Scottish economy, but it is not the economy alone that drives our belief that this Parliament should have the power to decide fiscal policy—it is the basic Scottish principle of fairness that drives the agenda. We want control over business taxation to give our wealth creators a competitive edge. We want control over personal taxation to restore fairness and the progressive principle to the tax system.

The amount that people pay in tax should take full account of ability to pay, but successive Labour and Conservative Governments have favoured indirect over direct taxation. The Executive's own "Scottish Economic Statistics"

report for 2002 says that the UK tax system has created a Scotland with one of the highest rates of inequality and child poverty in the developed world. Westminster tax policy has hit the poor to help the rich. If this Parliament does not have the power to tackle such deep unfairness, what on earth are we all doing here?

The old scare stories that are wheeled out to justify London control of Scotland—we have heard a few of them already today, and I am sure that we will be treated to a few more in the course of the debate—are losing their lustre as arguments. In truth, they crumble when confronted by the facts. Five of the six wealthiest nations on earth have populations similar to or smaller than that of Scotland. If countries as varied as Luxembourg, Norway, Ireland, Switzerland and Denmark can lead the world in living standards, why not Scotland, with all our talent and potential?

Despite the appalling publicity that has sometimes engulfed the Parliament since 1999, the people still want this Parliament to have more influence over their lives than Westminster has, but they know that, today, that is not the case. Let us display the self-confidence in ourselves that we all say we want to instil in the people, and take on the powers to meet the people's ambitions.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises that, in order to be properly accountable to the electorate, it should be responsible for raising its revenue as well as spending public money and agrees that making every country follow the same tax rules diminishes competitiveness by killing jobs and stifling growth.

09:44

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Services (Tavish Scott): Fiscal autonomy is a topic for which some members of the Opposition seem to have extraordinary fascination. They make it out to be their silver bullet for solving all Scotland's problems, short of independence—which Mr Swinney mentioned—when we will all live in eternal bliss. Unfortunately, despite all their fascination—obsession, even—Parliament today is no clearer about whether fiscal autonomy is a silver bullet, because Opposition members never tell Parliament or the people of Scotland how they will fire it. They talk about all the new taxes that they would excitedly get their hands on, but they do not tell us what they would do with those taxes. The questions that they need to answer—which Mr Swinney did not answer this morning—are what changes, how much and who pays.

Fiscal autonomy—or fiscal independence—would mean that the Executive had full power over all taxes that currently are levied by the UK. The main aim is to set up a different tax structure, as Mr Swinney alluded to, from that in the rest of the

UK in order to spur economic growth. At least, that is what is promised. The Executive fully agrees that we should do everything possible to foster economic growth, but there is no reason to believe that fiscal autonomy can deliver the goods that the Opposition promises it will.

First, we already have full autonomy in our spending decisions. That is a fact that the Opposition conveniently forgets to mention. We can allocate funds according to the needs and wishes of the Scottish people. In the partnership agreement we committed ourselves to increase economic growth in Scotland. That is our primary aim, and our policies reflect that.

Secondly, we receive more funds through the block grant than we would be able to raise ourselves. Those spending levels hugely benefit our citizens and enterprises. We can have a debate about how we spend the resources, but that is the position. As we all know, Scotland's circumstances make higher spending levels necessary.

We support the present funding arrangement to deliver the stability that is needed for this new Parliament. Stability has delivered, but not for the SNP. Its official policy—agreed by the party in 2000—is to gain independence by the incremental accumulation of powers, which is stealth independence, if you will. However, the SNP needs to answer key questions about that policy—what changes, who pays and how much.

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
rose—

Tavish Scott: Let me finish this point, because I know that Mr Mather will be interested in it.

In his recent lecture in Edinburgh, the eminent economist Paul Krugman advised against a tax-cutting policy to encourage growth. He believes that the costs outweigh the benefits. Evidence suggests that tax cuts work in such a cyclical way that they destabilise the economy. His advice is to build on our Scottish advantages and embrace Scotland's attractiveness as a place to invest and innovate in by capitalising on our universities, our cultural heritage and our infrastructure.

Mr Swinney: Would Mr Scott care to address the point that I raised about the university sector in Scotland? With the onset of top-up fees—these are not my words, but Professor Arthur Midwinter's—it is quite clear that there will be a funding shortfall for Scottish universities because of a lack of Barnett consequentials. What will the Executive do within its fixed financial settlement to close that funding gap, because already the university principals are up in arms about the lack of funding from the Executive?

Tavish Scott: It strikes me that Mr Swinney was

near to advocating a tax increase to cover the situation. However, as we do not know yet what the proposals are—obviously, we are in contact with the relevant departments in London—we will monitor the effects closely and—*[Interruption.]* I will tell members about the other side to the issue. Why is it that Alex Salmond is today launching a bill at Westminster to stop Scottish MPs voting on the very measures that Mr Swinney is so concerned about? MPs from parties on the Executive benches will do something about the measures, unlike MPs from Mr Swinney's party.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): Does the minister agree with me—

Members: Yes.

Christine May: Thank you, gentlemen—when you are ready.

Does the minister agree that the Enterprise and Culture Committee's Scottish solutions inquiry obtained evidence from people other than Arthur Midwinter that there would be beneficial Barnett consequentials from the potential imposition of top-up fees in England, and that the committee should consider in its report what might be made of such consequentials to support the sector?

Tavish Scott: Christine May will forgive me for saying, as I did to Mr Swinney, that we do not know what the exact outcome will be, but there may or may not be Barnett consequentials—*[Interruption.]* Members may not like it, but neither I nor the Executive will prejudge the outcome—although I see that Mr Swinney is happy to do so.

Given those warnings from Professor Krugman, I am surprised that the SNP has embraced tax cuts with such enthusiasm. Apparently, the SNP will cut tax for almost everyone. Business rates will be cut. Corporation tax will be cut. Fuel duty will be cut. Whisky duty will be cut. Income tax for low earners will be cut. Indeed, the SNP even proposes a tax cut on do-it-yourself. I see SNP backbenchers behind Mr Swinney nodding in agreement with those tax cuts. All of us would like to live in a world without taxes and still receive the benefits of excellent public services, but even the SNP used to recognise that cutting tax and cutting public services go hand in hand.

John Scott might remember the Ayr by-election when Alex Salmond had a go at the Tories:

"They can't have it both ways. You simply can't have tax cuts and keep public services going."

Jim Mather: Does Mr Scott agree that we are not talking about a zero-sum game and that the stability that he offers us—low growth and population decline—is a real shame on the Parliament? Perhaps he will answer the question that Paul Krugman could not answer: to which state in the United States' union would he

recommend the Scottish model?

Tavish Scott: I will not mention any state in the United States' union. Instead, I will quote from some of Mr Mather's fans. The SNP should re-read SNP Saltire paper 1 by the party's favourite economists, Jim and Margaret Cuthbert. According to that paper, fiscal independence

"poses an essential discipline on SNP policy ... SNP policy must avoid simply being a wish list of all the desirable things money could buy."

How the Cuthberts must be squirming now. Yet in the elections, we heard nothing but spending pledges from the SNP.

The wish list keeps growing. In the past couple of months we have had north-east nationalists wanting affordable housing, a Fife nationalist demanding more money to recruit more police officers and a Highland nationalist demanding a Dornoch rail crossing, but my personal favourite—and he is here today—is Mr Crawford's wish. Bruce Crawford wrote in the *Stirling Observer* on 20 August:

"The national park ... litter bins are not being emptied on a regular enough basis."

He continued:

"I would like to see a very small percentage of the Executive underspend being given to Stirling Council."

The bit I liked best, however, says a lot about the SNP's budgeting:

"Last year the Scottish Executive was left with an underspend of £500,000 million."

He claims—and it is here in black and white—that there was £500,000 million spare. That is £500 billion—nearly the half the gross domestic product for the entire United Kingdom.

We get many confused messages from the SNP. It wants to cut tax and increase spending, even though its advisers say that it cannot promise either.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Tavish Scott: I want to make progress.

Even SNP members have been begging their leadership for answers. In *Snapshot*, another well-thumbed periodical that I am sure we all take to bed with us every night, is a picture of Andrew Wilson with an abacus—that makes a difference from the calculator that was used before—and I see that there is a picture of Mr Mather with an abacus on the next page. The magazine asks:

"Would financial independence mean taxes would go up or down?"

The answer is:

"Financial independence doesn't automatically mean an

increase or decrease in taxes".

So that is clear. However, SNP members did not like that answer, so they asked a more precise question in *Talking Independence*:

"Will my taxes go up?"

The answer was:

"An independent Scotland ... will be more than able to maintain ... the current level of services within the overall level of taxation."

That is as clear as mud as well.

At the start of my speech, I mentioned how the SNP verges on getting overexcited about fiscal independence. For a moment earlier this week, we shared that excitement. On Monday, when Mr Swinney announced the start of his winter campaign, he said that he would tell us what powers we need and how he would use them. Today is one of the warmest winter days for a long time and Mr Swinney's is one of the shortest winter campaigns, even for serial relaunchers such as the SNP. His winter campaign has melted away already because he has not spelled out how he would use any new powers. He has failed to answer any of the questions posed. What change, how much and who pays? Despite having asked all the questions and having read all the pamphlets, we are left with John Swinney as the Howard—from the HBOS advertisements—of Scottish politics, telling us that taxes might go up as well as down under fiscal independence. That is not good enough.

This partnership Administration is determined to build on the stability that we have and to invest in public services, in growing the Scottish economy and in real solutions for the people of Scotland. I invite Parliament to contrast the approach of the partnership with that of the Opposition.

I move amendment S2M-697.3, to leave out from second "that" to end and insert:

"the significant benefit that Scotland gains from being part of the United Kingdom and notes that public expenditure in Scotland is at record levels and that this is helping to deliver the commitments in the Partnership Agreement to growing Scotland's economy; delivering excellent public services; supporting stronger, safer communities; and developing a confident, democratic Scotland."

09:54

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): I am delighted to have the opportunity that has been presented by the Scottish National Party to discuss the financial powers of the Parliament. However, although that is a perennial topic for debate among the political chattering classes, it is far from being the most important issue that faces the Parliament today and it is certainly not a subject of pressing interest or concern to the vast

majority of our voters.

The public are overwhelmingly concerned about the state of our schools and hospitals and the crime that blights far too many neighbourhoods in Scotland. The Parliament does not need any new powers to improve our public services or to take measures to tackle crime. That is why I will set out tonight how we Conservatives will seek to achieve those aims and why we will devote the whole of our business time next week to debating the reform and improvement of public services in Scotland.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): The member talks about improving public services, but is not the whole thesis of his argument that he wants to take people out of the national health service with his passport out of the NHS?

David McLetchie: We want to improve the national health service by extending choice and increasing investment in health services generally, in line with many models that are found to be highly successful on the continent of Europe. If the member wishes to learn more, he is welcome to come along to the debate next week.

I would not expect the Scottish National Party to do the same as us, because that would merely expose the poverty and limitations of its agenda. Instead of the fundamental reforms that are needed, all that the SNP can offer is the forlorn hope that it will run those failing systems of public services better than Labour and the Liberal Democrats can. At the end of the day, the Scottish National Party is a self-proclaimed left-of-centre, social democratic party, just like Labour and just like the Liberal Democrats. Theirs is hardly a recipe for the brave new Scotland that SNP members constantly talk about creating.

The SNP organises debates about what it could do if only it had the powers to hide the fact that it is a Potemkin party—a painted facade with nothing behind it.

Mike Rumbles: Potemkin?

David McLetchie: Members will have to get a bit more intelligent to participate in debates. We will send the explanation to Mr Rumbles in our press release.

When the SNP talks about extending the financial powers of the Parliament, the proposition cannot be treated as a genuine attempt to strengthen the devolution settlement because we all know that the SNP wishes to destroy that settlement. For the Scottish National Party, extending the financial powers of the Parliament is all about splitting up the United Kingdom. As members might expect, as a unionist, I reject the SNP desire to bring about independence, just as I

object to the view that the Scotland Act 1998 is some kind of holy writ inscribed on tablets of stone. It is not—it is a piece of legislation, albeit important constitutional legislation. Like all such legislation, however, it will no doubt require review, amendment and consideration over time. My view has always been that we should introduce any changes only in the light of experience of how the new devolved settlement has worked in practice.

We must dismiss the two extreme positions of, on the one hand, seeking full financial powers—that is a Trojan horse for independence—and, on the other hand, the equally daft idea that we cannot touch the Scotland Act 1998, even if that idea flies in the face of all the evidence that suggests it would be desirable to make some adjustments.

There are perfectly good arguments for having a better balance between the Scottish Parliament's spending and its revenue raising. If we are honest, as Mr Swinney pointed out fairly, we know that there are members of all parties who are concerned that the current virtual reliance on a block grant from Westminster is not a healthy state of affairs. As a Conservative who believes in prudent, responsible and limited government, I fear that that encourages a spend, spend, spend mentality that is holding Scotland back. Sir Donald Mackay pointed that out in his excellent presentation to the cross-party group on the Scottish economy when he highlighted the imbalance between the private and the public sectors in Scotland.

We need to conduct further analysis of the implications of giving the Parliament the responsibility to raise more of its own revenue, particularly when we bear it in mind that our councils already raise a much higher share of their revenue. As part of that process, "Paying our Way"—the excellent Policy Institute document by Ross Harper and Iain Stewart—highlights the fact that countries such as Australia, Canada and Spain operate middle-way systems in which devolved administrations have revenue-raising powers that are greater than those that the Scottish Parliament has at present, but which stop well short of fiscal and financial independence. That demonstrates to me that it is perfectly possible to have greater financial devolution without undermining the integrity of the United Kingdom.

Mr Swinney: Will Mr McLetchie be a bit more specific about the areas in which he would see the Parliament acquiring greater financial responsibility and about the areas of policy and taxation to which that might be applied? Can he inform us how far along that road he is travelling?

David McLetchie: No, I cannot, because I think

that that is something that should be investigated by a royal commission or some other independent body that would take evidence from all shades of opinion in Scotland. Mr Swinney must acknowledge that the structure of the Scotland Act 1998 was established in the Scottish Constitutional Convention, in which neither his party nor mine participated, and that things have moved on. Nor was there any significant input to that process from the Scottish business community.

Mike Rumbles: Shame.

David McLetchie: Members may cry, "Shame," but that is a fact, and that is how the present structure arose. Many other people have a valid contribution to make to the debate, and I invite them to do so.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Will Mr McLetchie give way?

David McLetchie: I am sorry, but I must move on.

The problem with giving the Parliament greater financial responsibility is that most people believe that more tax-raising powers will inevitably lead to higher taxes, and we have had quite enough of them already, courtesy of Gordon Brown. One can hardly blame people for believing that, when all the other parties in Scotland believe that higher spending is the answer to all our problems.

The Scottish Executive has hardly helped, in that respect, by using the powers that it already possesses to increase taxes on people in Scotland. We have heard about business rates, but the Executive has also increased taxes in some remarkably stealthy manners; for example, it has introduced new taxes under a variety of deceitful disguises such as graduate endowments and congestion charges. The truth is that a tax is a tax by any other name, whether it is called a fee, charge, toll, levy or endowment. People are now expected to pay for things that were previously provided out of general taxation, without any offsetting reduction in the level of that taxation.

Iain Smith: Will Mr McLetchie give way?

David McLetchie: I would like to finish this point.

Equally, some services that are now provided out of general taxation—personal care and concessionary travel, for example—were not thus provided in the past. That demonstrates that the issue of financial powers and revenue raising is far more complicated than many people imagine. That is why we have argued consistently that we need to review the relationship between this Parliament and Westminster, and their respective powers and responsibilities, in a way that is sensible and can strengthen the United Kingdom.

Tommy Sheridan: I want to simplify the complex process of revenue-raising powers. Will Mr McLetchie join his colleague Malcolm Rifkind in apologising to the people of Scotland for imposing the poll tax on them?

David McLetchie: No, I will not. As Mr Sheridan knows, we introduced the community charge when we were in government. We recognised that it was not working successfully—

Mike Rumbles: Was that a tax?

David McLetchie: Yes, of course it was a tax. We then substituted the council tax, which most parties in this chamber—or the majority of parties in the chamber—think is a perfectly satisfactory alternative.

Mr Swinney: Mr McLetchie mentioned that there should be a royal commission or some such organisation to look at those issues. Does not he think that there is a role for the Scottish Parliament to form a view among its members about the powers that the Parliament requires? Is not that an issue for the elected representatives of the people of Scotland?

David McLetchie: The people of Scotland have various sets of elected representatives. They have many representatives in Scotland's other Parliament at Westminster, just as they have representatives in this Parliament here on the Mound, and in future at Holyrood. Parties in this Parliament, or this Parliament itself, can by all means make submissions, consider aspects of the matter through our committee system and come to conclusions. Of course they can—that would be perfectly sensible. The issue is whether now is the appropriate time for them to do so, and I think that that debate is premature. We should be focusing our energies on the delivery of Scottish public services, which are badly in need of repair, rather than talking about the taxing-and-spending arguments that Mr Swinney wants to highlight but which I think miss the mark in relation to what the public are interested in at present.

As the amendment in my name makes clear, we think that there is a need for a review, in time, of the relationship. That review should be conducted by an independent body such as a royal commission, which can consider all the implications. That is a sensible and rational course of action, which everyone in this Parliament should support.

I move amendment S2M-697.2, to leave out from "recognises" to end and insert:

"notes that it will only regain the confidence of the people of Scotland if it addresses the issues of most concern to them and that we must therefore concentrate on improving our public services, strengthening our economy and tackling crime; recognises nevertheless that the relative responsibilities of the Parliament and Westminster,

including the financial relationship, should be the subject of review in light of experience; calls for such a review to be conducted within the context of making the devolved settlement work better and thereby strengthening the United Kingdom, and believes that the most appropriate mechanism for such a review would be a Royal Commission or similar independent inquiry appointed by the UK government."

10:05

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Last Sunday, I had the great pleasure of attending Eastwood cemetery to speak on the 80th anniversary of the death of the great Clydeside socialist, John MacLean, who had a vision for Scotland of a Scottish workers' republic. Many in the SNP used to share that vision, and some still do, but that banner and that vision are now clearly carried in this chamber by the Scottish Socialist Party. We feel that it is absolutely necessary not just to establish an independent country and to take our place alongside the other 190 independent states in our world, but for us to have democratic and public control of the vast resources and revenues that are available to this country to tackle the grinding poverty that is a scar that all of us should carry.

It would appear that the SNP, unfortunately, is less ambitious and less radical than it once was. In his speech, John Swinney said that the debate goes to the very heart of what we can achieve as a Parliament. I ask the SNP to consider making full use of even the limited powers of this Parliament before it assembles arguments for greater power. We have the power, for instance, to change the local tax system and to scrap the unfair council tax. On that subject, David McLetchie's arithmetic is sadly lacking. Only two parties in this chamber—the old Tories and the new Tories—support the council tax system, whereas five parties want to change it.

We could use our powers to improve the minimum wage for public sector workers, or to create a national railway company, publicly owned and controlled, to improve the safety and delivery of our railway services. However, even if we used those powers to the full, they would not be enough to tackle the scourge of one in three of our children being brought up in poverty or the shame of many of our pensioners and pensioner households struggling to make ends meet. The fact is that the biggest growth area in this country is poverty among the working poor. Such is the shame of low wages.

That is why we have to address the need for a new Scotland in which we would assume the full powers and responsibilities of any independent nation. The shadow that falls over this debate is the Holyrood inquiry into the fiasco of decisions that were made—before there was even a

democratic mandate in this chamber—to commit the Parliament to a building project and a blank cheque that now shows a total of more than £400 million. The irony is that that lavish and luxurious building will house a Parliament that does not even have the powers that we would expect of any small, independent nation in the world. In fact, it will house a Parliament that has even fewer powers than Clackmannanshire Council.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): In the light of his comments on the Scottish Parliament building, will Tommy Sheridan remind me whether he joined the SNP, the Labour Party and the Liberal party in the pro-Scottish Parliament referendum, when they all advocated the provision of a parliament building costing £40 million?

Tommy Sheridan: The pro-referendum campaign was about delivering the idea of a Scottish Parliament; there was no publicity then about a building costing £4 million, £40 million or £400 million. As Phil Gallie has been here for four and a half years, I am sure that he realises that, as far as I am concerned, the Parliament should not have been sited in Edinburgh in the first place: it should have been in Glasgow, the centre of Scotland's population. If we had used the great city chambers of Glasgow, we would have had a parliament building that was unmatched anywhere in the world.

David McLetchie talked about the Scottish Constitutional Convention. Is it not a pity that the motion calls, in effect, for a return to the Scottish Constitutional Convention's proposals? Many members forget that the Scottish Constitutional Convention's original proposal, to which the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, the trade union movement and civic Scotland signed up, was for a parliament of assigned revenues—a parliament that would be responsible for its revenues—but the Labour Party in Westminster watered that down to a mere block grant system, which removed any fiscal autonomy from us in Scotland. However, fiscal autonomy in and of itself will not solve our problems.

David McLetchie: A system of assigned revenues would not give the Parliament the power to set tax rates—it would merely assign to Scotland the revenues that are collected in Scotland from taxes that are set at Westminster—so there is no point in Mr Sheridan preaching the virtues of assigned revenues if he wants a Parliament with tax-raising powers. He is barking up the wrong tree.

Tommy Sheridan: I merely pointed out that what we have ended up with is even feebler than what was proposed in the Scottish Constitutional Convention's original plans. It would be better if we in Scotland were to decide how we allocate the revenue that is raised in Scotland than for

Westminster to decide that for us.

At the end of the day, fiscal autonomy will have no effect on whether Scottish troops are committed to the killing fields of Iraq, whether we can close Dungavel children's prison or whether we can remove the scourge of nuclear weapons from the Clyde. We need full, independent powers. Those are what must be fought for. The consensus that John Swinney seeks in the Parliament is not evident, because those in the Parliament who oppose independence do not have the courage to live up to the responsibilities of an adult country in an adult world. It is time that we lived up to those responsibilities and fought for not only an independent Scotland, but an independent, socialist Scotland.

I move amendment S2M-697.1, to leave out from "making" to end and insert:

"acquiring additional powers to tax as well as spend would allow the Parliament to make the Scottish taxation structure much more progressive, begin the process of tackling the inequalities of wealth in Scotland and ending poverty; recognises, however, that fiscal autonomy alone would not overcome the serious distortions of the Scottish economy caused by our being part of the United Kingdom and will not allow the Parliament to stop the profligate expenditure of the UK government on immoral and illegal wars against the wishes of its people, nor the ongoing expenditure on weapons of mass destruction as typified by nuclear weapons at Faslane, and that it would still have insufficient fiscal powers to broaden its tax base and invigorate its economy and culture by adopting a policy of welcoming to Scotland the asylum seekers and other immigrants whom it requires, and further agrees that only an independent Scotland will give the Parliament the powers to tackle these economic and social issues."

10:13

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I do not know what persuaded Mr Swinney to knit together into his motion quotations from Sir David Steel and a newspaper article jointly authored by the Prime Minister of Estonia and Tony Blair. No doubt it seemed like a clever idea at the time, but for those who sit in the Parliament week in, week out, it simply underlines the threadbare nature of Scottish National Party thinking. What price originality, if even the SNP's soundbites are borrowed from their political opponents? If Mr Swinney wants to get to be debater of the year, perhaps he should borrow some of Mr McLetchie's soundbites.

The Blair article makes two points: it suggests that flexibility and freedom to innovate are critical elements in enhancing competitiveness, and it underlines the fact that Britain and Estonia are opposed to the extension of qualified majority voting to taxation and the imposition of tax harmonisation throughout Europe. The position that Mr Blair sets out is entirely consistent with the approach that the United Kingdom Government

has adopted in deferring entry to the European monetary system. Our Government accepts that there are advantages to further economic and monetary integration where it will lead to better functioning of the single market, which covers 500 million consumers, but until there is convincing evidence that the UK economy passes the five economic tests that the chancellor set, the Government is not prepared to risk destabilising the British economy or jeopardising levels of growth that, since 1999, have been 16 per cent above the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average, 16 per cent above the European Union average, 20 per cent above the eurozone average and 29 per cent higher than the G7 average.

According to the SNP, talented people, intellectual property rights and fledgling companies have been leaving Scotland in droves in search of more competitive, higher-growth areas, but the data on the economic performance of the UK and Scotland within the UK show that, contrary to the gloom and doom that the SNP peddles, Scotland is performing well by most indicators. UK unemployment is 36 per cent lower than the G7 average, 44 per cent lower than the OECD average, and 60 per cent lower than the EU average. Scotland's unemployment is lower than it has been for generations, and we have witnessed the most rapid growth in incomes and wealth creation in our history. Public services are receiving record levels of funding; standards of health, education and housing are being transformed; and we are making much more use of our people's creative capacities.

Jim Mather: Des McNulty paints a glorious picture, but the registrar general for Scotland said in July this year that population decline was symptomatic of economic decline and a further spiral of decline. How does Des McNulty answer that and how does he respond to the fact that, if we applied the Chancellor's five tests to our joining sterling, we would not fulfil their criteria?

Des McNulty: Jim Mather is aware that I do not believe that constitutional change is the key determinant of birth rates. If he wants to move beyond the SNP stork theory about how babies are made, I would be happy to have a word with him afterwards.

Only in nationalist never-never land could the figures that I have cited be presented as failure. Mr Swinney is correct to point out that Scottish economic performance has not quite kept pace with the most dynamic regions of the UK, but that scarcely helps his case, because those are among the fastest-growing areas of Europe.

George Lyon: Is Mr McNulty aware that, as John McLaren pointed out in his excellent article in the June 2003 Fraser of Allander institute's

economic commentary, if we look at Scotland's economic performance on a per-capita basis, which the OECD recognises as the best measure of an economy's success in raising individual living standards, Scotland has outperformed the UK over the past 40 years?

Des McNulty: Scotland has the great advantage of being an integral part of the UK economy, which has enjoyed the most consistent growth performance in western Europe in the past 10 years. There are no barriers—whether in economic regulation, welfare systems, citizenship rights or political institutions—between us and the most important market for our goods. The rest of the UK is overwhelmingly the main export market for Scottish food and drink, chemicals, engineering products and other goods. I do not object to Mr Swinney trying to argue for independence on the basis of political ideology, but even a rudimentary examination of economics shows that the pursuit of a secessionist strategy would be extremely damaging to the Scottish economy.

There is, as Mr McLetchie pointed out, a real debate to be had on the balance of powers between the Scottish Parliament and the UK Parliament. Provided that a reasonable case can be made, there is no reason in principle why the Scottish Parliament should not be given additional powers. However, in considering that question, we must determine whether those additional powers would be to Scotland's advantage, and the level of debate that we have had from the SNP is thoroughly inadequate. In my view, the SNP's slogan "independence in Europe" is simply an oxymoron. The idea—voiced by the ex-leader of the SNP—that Scotland could opt out of the common fisheries policy as a condition of entry to the EU following secession is simply laughable.

Tavish Scott highlighted the comments of the eminent economist Paul Klugman, who demonstrated why reducing corporation and business taxes in the context of independence would not work to Scotland's advantage: beggar my neighbour is hardly a coherent strategy when our neighbour is bigger than us, his policy decisions will inevitably have more impact on us than ours will on him and our reliance on access to his market is much greater than his reliance to access on ours. It is naive to think that European Governments within the eurozone would be any more tolerant if Scotland, after secession, failed to adhere to economic disciplines when other states are painfully adapting to the surrender of precisely the fiscal freedoms that Mr Swinney claims are crucial to future economic success.

Perhaps the best way of assessing Scotland's prospects outside the UK is to return to the five economic tests that Gordon Brown has set out. I find it impossible to see what advantage there

could be to Scottish companies in our complicating their relationships with suppliers, customers and Government by introducing different taxation arrangements, regulatory frameworks and other extraneous pressures when harmonisation has already been achieved in the UK marketplace. If convergence is a goal, secession is a backward step.

Is there sufficient flexibility to cope with economic change? Professor Klugman's suggestion that breaking economic links with the rest of the UK would not be in Scotland's interest is to me far more persuasive than the SNP's arguments.

There is a safety net in common welfare systems, which cover us in times of adversity and provide a springboard towards economic growth. Do Scottish pensioners, Scottish companies or Scottish patients want to put their sustainable circumstances at risk?

I think that the arguments that are advanced by the SNP fall apart as soon as they are subjected to any serious level of scrutiny and, to be honest, I think that some SNP members think so too.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): We are 14 minutes behind the clock—that will impact on members who expect to speak in the open debate, which begins now.

10:20

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): There are two main arguments in this debate on financial independence. The first of those arguments is about self-respect and responsibility, which—I suspect—a large number of members recognise are things that a normal Parliament should have. The second argument is about opportunity. Would financial independence provide greater opportunity than the status quo? I think that it would, although I acknowledge that not all members would agree.

I was disappointed by Tavish Scott's speech. He has been known to be erudite and intelligent, but he stooped to some schoolboy comments today. Perhaps the speech was his penance for daring to speak up for the Scottish fishermen earlier in the year.

Although there is a genuine argument in this chamber for federalism, it is yet to find its voice because the Liberal Democrats do not have the confidence to put it forward. That creates a vacuum in the debate.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member give way?

Fiona Hyslop: I will not take an intervention. The Liberal Democrats had the opportunity to lodge an amendment to state their case but they failed to do so.

In Scotland, we have low wages, low growth, widening inequality and high emigration. Most worrying of all, our number of births is the lowest ever recorded. Unfortunately, Des McNulty has rudely left the chamber following his speech—

Members: He is here.

Fiona Hyslop: I am sorry. He has moved seats.

I say to Des McNulty that this is an extremely serious issue; it should not be treated as a standing joke.

I will argue the case for the Parliament's aspirations to grow, because we need that growth to happen for the benefit of Scotland's families. We need it for Scotland's children who are going to university, for Scotland's children who are at school and for Scotland's children who face poverty.

George Lyon: How will constitutional change increase the birth rate in Scotland?

Fiona Hyslop: If we have a growing, exciting and dynamic economy, people will want to stay instead of leave.

Some of George Lyon's constituents are young women who graduate with £15,000 of student debt. They cannot afford child care and they cannot afford to live in the country that they were brought up in. Is that an incentive for growth? Is that an incentive for our economy?

I will address three main areas: higher education, public services, and child care and poverty. *The Herald* today gives an interesting example of a situation in which Scottish students will lose out under the proposed tuition fees because they will have the worst of both worlds. Should the proposals in the English white paper go ahead, Scottish students would have to pay £9,000 up front, whereas if we were independent, we would be treated like any other EU country so the students would be treated the same and would be in the same position as English students. Unfortunately, Scottish students will have to pay £9,000 up front to study in England because we are not independent and we do not have our own powers.

There is disparity in funding. Regardless of whether England introduces tuition fees, we should ensure that we put our shoulder to the wheel to invest in higher education. We are competing not only with England, but with Europe and the wider world. It is extremely disappointing that Liberal Democrat ministers are sleepwalking into the situation, saying, "Let us wait and see what is in the higher education bill in England." Regardless of the contents of that bill, we should invest in Scotland so that we have a competitive edge.

Fiscal autonomy and financial independence would allow us to have more flexibility for investment in our higher education system; to look at the estates review; and to ensure that there is capital investment in our universities—we could do that cheaply under independence, because we would have the powers at our command.

Some people want a graduate tax to be used to help to finance education in Scotland. We need fiscal autonomy to do that. That is a clear example of why fiscal autonomy is needed, because it would give us flexibility and choice. We should consider what Quebec is doing as far as using taxation to invest in research and development is concerned.

Tavish Scott stated that we have "full autonomy in our spending."

I argue that with public-private partnerships we do not. Why are we the private finance initiative capital of Europe? Because Gordon Brown ensured that when investment was being made in public services, it was necessary to go through an excess private profit model, which is PPP. Tell the students in East Lothian, who are having to ask for special dispensation in relation to their exam results in their applications to the SQA, about the benefits of PPPs. That is happening because of the controversial situation that is created by a PPP when the private sector partner goes belly up; it is not the private sector, but the public sector that has the risk. It is the students who have to face going into their exams penalised because of the problems with PPP contracts. David McLetchie questioned whether this issue is about public services. It is—it is about the Edinburgh royal infirmary and PPPs in schools.

Another example of an area in which fiscal autonomy could be used creatively is child care. Fiscal autonomy could be used to tackle poverty in this country and to ensure that families can work. I do not think that the current system of child tax credits is acting properly in the interests of our families. We have a crisis in child care in our rural areas; there are mothers who cannot get into work because of a lack of child care. We should be thinking creatively about how we use our fiscal levers of power.

I will finish by quoting Nora Radcliffe, who is still in the chamber. She stated:

"We have power without accountability. It's demeaning in a way—it's as if you're being given a penny to spend without having to earn it first".

I agree with Nora Radcliffe. The danger is that, as people know, he who pays the piper calls the tune. It is about time that the Scottish people, through the Scottish Parliament, start calling the tune. I support the motion.

10:26

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): I welcome the debate. I have a long track record of discussing the options for financing a devolved Parliament—I published on the subject in the mid-1990s, when the SNP was still hoping that we would be free by '93. Since the independence argument has run into the buffers, SNP members have become Johnnys-come-lately to the fiscal devolution debate, rather as they were to devolution itself.

Fiscal autonomy is now apparently the SNP's flagship act, although it has to be said that it was not worth a line of explanation in its manifesto. Indeed, members will search in vain for any document that explains what fiscal autonomy means to the SNP. Therefore, the question for the Parliament is: what is fiscal autonomy? It means an awful lot of different things to an awful lot of different people. Is fiscal autonomy—or FA—more than a fancy acronym? Does it mean the fuller accountability that we have heard about? Is it just a foolish act, or—more than that—a false appearance? For years, fiscal autonomy was about false appearances for the SNP. Tommy Sheridan talked about the argument for full fiscal freedom, no link to the UK, independence by any other name and full-blooded finances.

However, the SNP has had a road-to-Damascus conversion, and now fiscal autonomy, its new flagship act, is not about false appearances; it just means fuller accountability. Many of us have spent years trying to resolve how to bring fuller accountability to Scottish spending. Of course, honesty demands that we recognise the price of feeling accountable and face the fact that Scotland currently raises 8 per cent and spends 10 per cent of the UK's taxes. Therefore, feeling accountable would slash 20 per cent from Scottish services overnight. One of Scotland's poor or vulnerable must fear that fiscal autonomy might be a foolish act. Whether it would be a foolish act or mean fuller accountability depends on the proposals.

I have some questions about the SNP's flagship act—the one on which there is no document. In each of the past five years, UK spending—and Scottish spending—has grown by more than 4 per cent in real terms, while Scottish growth has been less than 2 per cent. Are we saying that the Scottish poor should pay all the price of the restructuring of the international semiconductor market?

Let us ask another question, on pensions. Are pensions in or out of SNP-style fiscal autonomy? Scottish pensioners will want to know whether their pensions would rise with Scottish spending or with UK spending.

However, pensions are not the big issue—

Jim Mather: How does Wendy Alexander reconcile her comment about the poor state that Scotland would be in with her earlier comment that

“A convincing case can be made for matching constitutional federalism with more flexible fiscal arrangements”?

Ms Alexander: The fuller accountability that I am discussing is about how we can reconcile those two aspects without penalising Scotland's poor.

I come to the elephant in the room of fiscal autonomy, which is oil. In the five years of the Parliament, yearly oil revenues have varied from about £1 billion to more than £5 billion. The problem with the idea that the Scottish budget would float on oil is that oil revenues have nothing to do with the performance of the Scottish economy and everything to do with the ebb and flow of international oil prices. Here is a serious point: every single published SNP budget in the history of the party has rested on floating the Scottish budget on oil, even though not one advanced oil-rich jurisdiction is daft enough to take such action.

As the SNP has wanted to talk about oil for many years, its members should tell us about oil and fiscal autonomy and examine the budget. The yearly revenue from oil ricochets from £1 billion to £5 billion, which means that the entire value of the Scottish health service could be wiped out, depending on the oil price. I ask SNP members to say how they would use oil to balance the books. I believed John Swinney's promise that the SNP would not produce a single policy commitment that did not have a price tag or for which the party would not say how the money would be found.

Would fiscal autonomy be a foolish act or would it provide fairer and fuller accountability? It is a foolish act to have no plans for pensions and oil revenues and to make no comment on collection costs or transition arrangements. Fuller accountability means progressively extending fiscal federalism to match the sort of constitutional federalism that the coalition parties have brought about. Those parties are determined to do that in a way that means that the Scottish poor are not made to pay the price of international oil price volatility. We wait for the SNP's answer in a single document.

10:33

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to support my friend and colleague David McLetchie's amendment. Members from all parties will be aware of my many statements when I was finance spokesman for the Conservatives about the need to discuss fiscal autonomy at an early stage in this session of Parliament. I hoped that the debate would not take place on a petty ideological basis.

A business plan to deliver value for money and accessibility of public services on behalf of the Scottish people must be developed and scrutinised, but I have my doubts about the plan that has been proposed this morning. The proposition before us is simply an evasive charade that hides an SNP appeal to its erstwhile followers and to its deeply disillusioned and diminishing band of supporters, who, I suspect, constantly harass SNP members to mention independence in every phrase that they utter, even if the issue has no bearing on the subject that is being discussed.

In the past four years, in the chamber and in *Holyrood* magazine, I have called for a serious—not frivolous—debate on the responsibility that members should share in inflicting taxation and deciding on the priorities for spending our people's hard-earned money. I have been more than astonished by the antics of the Lib-Lab convention, which has been supported in a tokenistic and opportunistic manner by the late-departed Alex “inventor of the oil industry” Salmond. In their utterances, they have failed to recognise the need for accountability, responsibility and—if Gordon Brown will forgive me—a passionate relationship with prudence.

I would like a new beginning in this expensive chamber. I want all members to view every pound that is spent as if it were their own. They should look on every pound as if it comes from someone who is in the awful poverty trap, from someone who has started to work and pay tax or from somebody's pension or redundancy payment. They should treat the money as if it comes from somebody who has just started a family or somebody with a fledgling business who has a good idea but little resource other than ambition and hope.

I want all MSPs to take responsibility on behalf of those who give us money. They should stop cheerfully spending that money or throwing it into the bottomless hole of electoral promises that will never be delivered without a radical overhaul of the systems that clog up the processes of public services in Scotland. I want an end to gesture politics, in which the pledge for another initiative or consultation or for more targets is a substitute for action on, accessibility to and delivery of our shared and once-respected public services.

Executive politicians' horrific devaluation of the work of those in public service in the past four years is turning public opinion against public services. That is not public service workers' fault. Unfortunately, the forces of the left, which are manifest throughout the chamber—especially on my immediate left among the Liberal Democrats—are administering voluntary palliative care to prolong the life of a failed and diminishing Government and are destroying any credibility that the Parliament had.

The Parliament has failed in its duty to deliver a proper debate about the issues for which local government should be responsible and accountable to communities. I ask Jack McConnell and his micromanagement freaks to let local government go and to stop interfering. They should allow local government to be accountable to communities—that is what devolution should be about, not the silly nonsense that we have heard this morning. The Lib-Lab pact interferes in every opportunity for diversity, enterprise and ambition, and deprives young people of opportunities and businesses of the ability to make our economy sustainable.

SNP members want more powers, but will they explain why they assume that somewhere in the shrinking but once-proud Caledonian forest there is a Tolkien-inspired money tree of fiction, myth and mysticism? I inform Ms Alexander that I suspect that that is where the SNP gets its ideas from. In SNP members' eyes, the tree would produce a never-ending supply of money from the public sector, with no enterprise, profit, risk or even taxation.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): That is all very interesting, but will the member say whether he agrees with Mr Monteith and Mr Murdo Fraser that we should have full fiscal freedom, or with his leader, David McLetchie, who wants a royal commission to take minutes and waste years?

Mr Davidson: There is something to be said about all three positions. My two colleagues, one in front and one behind—I always like to know who is behind me—want responsibility to apply to tax-raising powers, but that will not be achieved under the present system. I fully support Mr McLetchie's idea of a royal commission, which would take the matter out of the grubby hands of party politics, consider the matter properly and bring back ideas to be debated in Parliament. As a Conservative, I can get the best of both worlds—there is no difficulty.

Why is it that we spend more per head on our people and get less for it than anywhere else in Europe? Given that the Parliament is in its fifth year, is it not time that we started to talk about value for money and what the people get? If we work back from that, we can review how the money is raised, but we also must play our part in a strong United Kingdom. The countries in the UK have a mutual responsibility and a lot in common. Under devolution, Scotland has its own agenda, but the Parliament should use devolution to give Scotland's institutions more opportunity to be accountable to the people whom they serve, instead of everything being held and micromanaged by the Executive.

We have not heard anything from the SNP that justifies a radical change; nor have we heard

anything from the Scottish Executive—although I am not sure which side Mr Scott is on today—about what it intends to do to rectify this painful situation.

10:39

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): In supporting John Swinney's motion, I will dwell on proper accountability to the electorate. At the outset of the May election campaign, the First Minister, Jack McConnell, was asked on television whether he would seek more powers for the Parliament in the coming four years. His answer was that it does not need more powers and that it must use the powers that it already has. That was predictable, for it was Jack McConnell who, as the voice of the Labour party, told the Scottish Constitutional Convention, "We have decided that you can't have control of personal income tax and VAT. We are going to stick with the block grant."

Is it any wonder that the "No change; no more power" message delivered Labour's lowest vote since 1931, with a record low turnout of 49 per cent of voters? It is no wonder that the Electoral Commission is concerned. The commission reported that voter participation in the May 2003 Scottish elections

"leaves all those concerned with elections and electoral processes with a serious challenge."

There is further evidence of disillusionment. In 1999, 41 per cent of voters believed that the Scottish Parliament

"had the most influence over the way Scotland is run."

That figure has fallen to 24 per cent. Indeed, 57 per cent of the electorate believe that the Parliament has made

"no difference to the way Scotland is governed."

Is not that evidence enough to support a review of this young Parliament's powers?

Yesterday evening, Patricia Ferguson rejected an SNP move to debate the European constitution—a crucial issue for our fisheries and energy policies and for much else. She claimed that the SNP always seeks to have debates about

"issues over which the Executive has absolutely no control."—[*Official Report*, 3 December 2003; c 3881.]

Five years into the life of this young Parliament, it seems that Patricia Ferguson is unworried that she and her Cabinet colleagues have discounted Donald Dewar's pledge at the Parliament's opening ceremony, when he said:

"We are fallible. We will make mistakes"—

who will ever admit those, I wonder?—

"But we will never lose sight of what brought us here: the striving to do right by the people of Scotland; to respect

their priorities; to better their lot; and to contribute to the commonweal."

If the majority of electors and the majority of members of the Scottish Parliament believe in their hearts and heads that we need full financial powers, when will Mr McConnell and company start to listen? Will they even heed their boss down south? Tony Blair told the Estonians:

"Making everyone follow the same tax rules would quickly diminish Europe's competitiveness by killing jobs and stifling growth."

Is that not what we are experiencing in Scotland?

We make the case again and again, because the emigration trail shows not only that our remote islands and Highlands are losing young people, but that the flight from the cities is blighting the nation's future. Those young people know—as do our farmers, fishermen and hospital patients—that the psychology of denial makes us pay a high price for an incomplete financial settlement.

Thousands of people turned out in Fort William to protest, and hundreds have already protested in Caithness, about the imminent downgrading of consultant-led hospitals. Those protesters are demanding that the underpowered Government wakes up. We need bigger levers—as that sensible Tory, Alex Johnstone, has put it—if we are to do anything about the situation, so that the modest medical demands in far-flung parts of the country can be met.

We need an end to the blame culture that our having partial powers creates. People say, "Oh, it's the quango's fault," or they say that it is the fault of the health board, Scottish Water or the European Union. No; it is the lack of financial clout, stupid.

This year we have been able to see how other countries use the flexibility of tax-raising, as well as tax-spending, powers. Let us consider the north of Norway. Norway is intent on retaining its population in the north and on ensuring that those people are supported so that they can have a vibrant way of life. Mothers receive higher child benefits and students who return to the area have their loans paid off more quickly. That tax flexibility to bring in such incentive taxation and targeted spend flows from having full financial powers.

In Scotland, our inflexible and shrinking block grant produces wooden responses. Just because it was decided in 1996 does not mean that it must stay that way forever—as Lord Robertson said at the time. When will the Executive wake up and listen to the people, who say that they want Scotland to have more powers? Frankly, it is time that the Executive started to answer that point.

It is a harsh judgment on the underpowered nature of the Executive and its stubborn refusal to

seek full financial powers that so many of our brightest seek a future elsewhere. It is a harsh judgment that fewer and fewer voters bother to turn out because they do not believe that to do so will make any difference.

Surely, we should consider the potential to push the levers full on. We should meet the people's real priorities and give this place full financial powers to decide Scotland's future. At present, all that we are left with is the opportunity to deal with the block grant. That is not a future for Scotland; it is the past. It must remain in the past and we must have a new future.

10:45

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): First of all, I apologise that I am unable to remain in the chamber until the end of the debate.

For much of last year, John Swinney travelled the country talking independence. In May, the country replied no, yet we are debating the constitution of Scotland yet again while the Parliament should be focusing on public services and the economy.

So far, the SNP's advocacy of full fiscal autonomy for Scotland has been a means by which to mask the call for independence. The SNP claims that full fiscal independence would allow Scotland to reap the rewards of North sea oil revenue, which, it says, will pull the Scottish economy out of fiscal debt and put it into fiscal surplus.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): On the suggestion that the Scottish people roundly said no to independence, does the member accept that there are more pro-independence members in the chamber than there were before the election?

Jeremy Purvis: Stealth independence arguments are not honest, and if a Green constituency candidate had stood in my constituency, that argument would have been tested. In fact, it was and I won. The argument—

Tricia Marwick: Will the member take an intervention?

Jeremy Purvis: Not yet.

The argument about oil, which masks the call for independence, hinges Scotland's fiscal stability to the cash-crop economy of the oil barrel. Yet again, we hear the argument about Scotland's fiscal surplus. Professor Midwinter, whom John Swinney quoted, has said:

"Personally, I know of no academic paper which supports the SNP's fiscal surplus position".

In 1998, oil prices crashed to \$10 a barrel. International forces can easily and almost

instantaneously bring oil prices to lows that would undermine the Scottish economy. In the 1998 situation, for example, an independent Scotland would have faced a budget deficit of £3.9 billion. The SNP would have Scotland's future prosperity literally over a barrel.

Both David Steel and the respected economist Donald MacRae are right to argue that there should be a closer connection between spending and raising revenue in Scotland. They are right to reject full fiscal autonomy. No industrialised country, not even a federal state, has opted for complete fiscal autonomy.

Tricia Marwick: Presumably, the member won his election on a Liberal Democrat platform. If the Parliament's financial powers are not part of the partnership agreement, why have the Liberal Democrats not lodged their own amendment, to argue their position?

Jeremy Purvis: The member is listening to my speech, in which I am espousing the Liberal Democrat position. I suggest that she should pay attention to it.

Alf Young, in *The Herald*, commented on the SNP's argument that compares Scotland to Malta, Cyprus, Latvia and Estonia. The SNP wants to take Scotland on a route to compete on tax with Shanghai and Bangalore. What Scotland's economy needs is a flexible, highly skilled work force and better infrastructure.

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jeremy Purvis: No, I will not.

Those needs are exactly what this party is focusing on: investment in public services and in growth, not the tax-cutting agenda that the SNP front bench espouses.

Countries such as Germany, Norway, Sweden and Denmark, and devolved regions such as Catalonia, have all adopted a three-tier system of taxation that combines—

Richard Lochhead: Will the member take an intervention?

Jeremy Purvis: No, I will not. I am sorry, but my time is limited.

The three-tier system of taxation combines a degree of fiscal flexibility for each region with some central grants, to provide a system of needs-based funding. Models such as that allow for stability and greater accountability. The public expects the Parliament, as an elected body, to represent accurately, officially promote and serve their interests. The political truism that nothing is easier than spending the public's money, which does not appear to belong to anybody, is the SNP's fiscal policy. The Parliament must shy away from the irresponsible spending of the public's tax

revenue and reject the making of irresponsible spending commitments, which the SNP is guilty of doing every time its members come to the chamber.

If there is to be a full debate about the future of public spending in Scotland, much clearer and more definitive information on the subject must be available to us all. It is right that the current constitutional settlement be reviewed after the next Scottish elections, as the Scottish Constitutional Convention and the consultative steering group both suggested. The Scottish Liberal Democrat policy commission on the constitution, under the chairmanship of Sir David Steel, which would feed into the work of a reconvened Constitutional Convention in Scotland, will thoroughly and objectively examine the granting of more fiscal powers to the Parliament within a federal United Kingdom, which will provide the public with a considered approach to the major questions for Scotland as part of an evolving federal UK.

Gone are the days when the public will swallow romantic separatist notions of independence. They want to see devolution work, with a Parliament that is empowered by a robust set of fiscal levels that allow it the flexibility to deliver high-quality public services—as mentioned in the Executive amendment—despite the current instability in global economics. I support enhanced fiscal powers for the Scottish Parliament, but I do not support a system whereby Scotland would be hamstrung at the first sign of a downturn in the global oil market. I do not support a system that would be unnecessarily complex and expensive to operate. I do not support the sentiments of the SNP.

10:51

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I welcome members to another groundhog day debate. This topic competes with the Scottish adjacent waters boundary and amnesic shellfish poisoning for the honour of the highest number of times that a subject has returned to the chamber. Yet again, the SNP has chosen to debate an issue for which the Parliament cannot legislate. Previous debates in the second session have been the same: on 12 June, we debated Europe—presumably, it was independence in, but common fisheries policy out, although I apologise to Tavish Scott for that reference; on 11 September, we had a debate on asylum seekers; and today we are debating fiscal autonomy and the number of Scottish seats in the European Parliament. Those might well be important matters, but they are all ones over which we have no legislative competence.

Richard Lochhead: Will the member explain why she once used a members' business debate in her name to debate a reserved matter?

Dr Murray: As I have just been reminded, that was four years ago. Members' business debates are somewhat different from party-political debates; there have been all manner of debates at members' business. Moreover, we do not actually—[*Interruption.*] Shut up!

We do not yet use the powers that we have. We already have tax-varying powers, and we have not yet used them. The tax that the UK Government raises from Scottish residents is redistributed and decisions on spending it in devolved areas are made by the Scottish Parliament.

It is perhaps instructive to consider the patterns of income and expenditure over the past four years. The figures I have used are from "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland"—GERS. The last available figures, which are for 2000-01, show that total expenditure in Scotland was £36.3 billion, with total receipts of £30.9 billion. North sea oil revenue, which Wendy Alexander mentioned, came to £4.3 billion and the deficit was £1.1 billion. In the previous year, £33.8 billion was expended; £28.9 billion came in; £2.5 billion was added from North sea oil revenues; and the deficit was £2.4 billion. I could go on, but the point is that the deficit over those four years ranged from £4 billion to £1 billion. The new GERS figures will be out within the next few weeks, but official figures show a continual deficit in the Scottish economy over the past four years.

Jim Mather: The reality is that the UK economy is in substantial deficit, which applies through to the next five years. That is a total deficit of £118 billion. Does that mean that the UK should not be independent?

Dr Murray: I do not think that anybody is offering to take over the UK at the moment. The Scottish economy has been in deficit over the past four years and we must confront the consequences of that. We must also bear in mind the fact that, like shares, oil prices can go down as well as up. Oil revenues were as high as £12 billion in 1984-85 but, only seven years later, they stood at only £1 billion. That is a very volatile basis on which to plan our services. Oil revenues accounted for 7.9 per cent of total revenues in 1999-2000 and 12.2 per cent a year later. Scotland's percentage of total expenditure is higher than our percentage of the population, of total receipts excluding oil revenues and of gross domestic product. Fiscal autonomy would mean cuts in Scottish services of between £1 billion and £4 billion each year, judging by the most recent figures, which I quoted.

Given the fuss the SNP made earlier this year about the £394 million of end-year flexibility funding, I am surprised that its members are so relaxed about a sum that could be 10 times that. In committee, Fergus Ewing often likes to refer to

such sums as the Holyrood factor. The Scottish Executive's total managed expenditure this year is £22.8 billion. We should bear in mind the fact that between 97 per cent and 98 per cent of that is fully committed, which leaves about £0.7 billion available for reallocation. Furthermore, 60 per cent of the budget goes directly to local councils and health boards. Would the SNP please advise us what it would cut?

The Tories often like to flirt with the idea of fiscal autonomy. I see that there is only one of them here, who will perhaps advise us on this, because their position is interesting. We know that Mr McLetchie is keen to expound the policies of his former leader, Iain Duncan Smith, so I presume that he, too, wishes to cut overall UK public expenditure by 20 per cent, which would necessitate a further £7 billion cut in the Scottish budget. With the Tories in power and with fiscal autonomy, Scottish expenditure would stand to be reduced by between £8 billion and £11 billion per annum.

Mr Monteith: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have one minute of your speech left, Dr Murray.

Dr Murray: Sorry—I am in my last minute.

Rather than dancing on pinheads, we need to assure the Scottish people of our competence in the areas that are currently devolved. The public do not consider that we are using our finances particularly well at the moment. They see us as the numpties who are spending 10 times what we were supposed to spend on a building, and I suspect that they would not take terribly kindly to being asked for more.

My view is that devolution is evolutionary, and that, in 100 years' time, the Scottish Parliament might be a very different beast from what it is now. I suspect that it might have further powers and that the English regions might have more powers. I also suspect that the European Union will be more integrated. However, I do not wish to gainsay the decisions of future generations. The Parliament should be concentrating on getting on with doing its current job as well as possible.

Tricia Marwick: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is it in order for Dr Elaine Murray to say to one of my colleagues, "Shut up"?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I did notice that comment. I think that most members took it as an impromptu remark, rather than a calculated discourtesy. I am sure that Dr Murray would be apologetic if any offence had been caused to anyone.

Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP): We accept her apology.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No—she did not apologise; I am diplomatically trying to get everybody out of this.

I am afraid that the clock has beaten us and that we must now go to closing speeches. My regrets go to the considerable number of members whose names were left on my screen.

10:58

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): I really cannot follow the previous speaker. There were more numbers than words in her speech; I will try to limit the number of numbers that I use in mine.

The contents of the SNP motion are revealing. I can understand the SNP wanting to put the other parties on the line with respect to fiscal autonomy, but I do not understand the emphasis that it places on increasing competitiveness. It seems that the SNP line is one of competition, not equality. In half an hour, we will start to talk about the number of burns on seats in the European Parliament, when we should be talking about poverty, inequality and what the Parliament cannot do.

I recently addressed a convention in British Columbia. The provinces of Canada have more powers and more financial autonomy than this so-called Parliament has. I will give members competition: the new, neo-liberal British Columbian Government's idea of competition means lower wages, increased privatisation, the massive sell-off of public utilities and tax cuts for the rich. I wonder seriously whether that is the SNP's vision of fiscal autonomy. Its emphasis on reducing corporation tax astounds me. Why does the SNP not emphasise redistributive taxes and moving wealth from rich to poor? That is something that the Scottish Parliament should be able to do and I would have hoped that the SNP would have the vision to do it.

Cutting corporation tax in Scotland would not end the spectre of multinationals locating their headquarters or offices here and paying corporation tax at lower rates here, but employing people elsewhere—whether in England, in Wales, in Northern Ireland or in India. That would do zilch for jobs, wages, pensions and so on.

Mr Swinney spoke about business rates and corporation tax, which disappointed me. Labour's response is that we can manage the status quo. In other words, Labour members are happy to take the salaries, the status, the initials after their name, the Mondeos, the handouts and the strings attached to money from Westminster, but they are not prepared to take responsibility—either because they are frightened or because they have no illusions about their capabilities.

Alex Neil: Did the member note what Elaine Murray said about waiting 100 years for any change? Obviously, Labour's new slogan is "Free by 3003".

Carolyn Leckie: I do not disagree with Alex Neil's reference to Labour's wishy-washy politics.

Tavish Scott made it clear that the Executive does not want the powers, because it has no intention of radically changing society. That is managerialist politics—the Executive wants just to manage the status quo. He also said that we were subsidised, which was the theme of a number of speeches. Wait a wee minute, for goodness' sake. Let us consider London, where £304 million from UK taxes is spent on museums and art galleries, £3.5 billion was spent on the Jubilee tube line out of docklands, and £17.9 billion from UK taxes is spent on the civil service. Also, £296 million is spent on the Arts Council England. Tavish Scott should not talk to me about Scotland's being subsidised. He is ignoring a vast amount of economic subsidy that London receives.

At least David McLetchie is honest and is prepared to talk about fundamental reforms—the sort of fundamental reforms that his pals in British Columbia have been able to introduce in the past two years. I am sure that that is the sort of autonomy that he might consider. The only reason why he is perhaps not persuaded of the case for fiscal autonomy at this time is that he knows fine well that there is no support in Scotland for the rabid right-wing policies that he favours. If he had any confidence that the Tories would be changed from the rump that they are, perhaps he would support fiscal autonomy.

I have raised the issue of competition and must refer to the speech by Wendy Alexander. A couple of weeks ago, she reminded SSP members that 20 years ago they were socialists. Twenty years ago, she, too, was a socialist. Now it is clear that she is a bleeding-heart neo-liberal.

Ms Alexander: Will the member take an intervention?

Carolyn Leckie: No—I am coming to the end of my speech. Wendy Alexander did not accept any interventions and we have heard enough of her whingeing.

Where is the ideology and the vision? Where is the abolition of poverty? Will we have low or high wages under fiscal autonomy? Will we have public or private ownership? Those are concrete questions. Would the SNP use extra powers to settle the nursery nurses dispute? Would it reverse privatisation? What would the SNP be like in government? Would we have more of the same—more managerialist politics and more of the status quo? That is not for me. From the motion, it is clear that fiscal autonomy would not make a jot of difference.

The SNP cites the Policy Institute, a right-wing think tank, in its support.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The member must finish now.

Carolyn Leckie: I will.

This Parliament does not have the same powers as those of the Faroe Islands, Iceland or even the Isle of Man. Let us have some vision.

11:05

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): This has been an interesting debate, with many good speeches and some that were not quite so good. We received few answers from Opposition members on what they mean by fiscal autonomy.

The Liberal Democrats have no doubt that there are a number of strong arguments in favour of greater financial powers for the Parliament. As David Steel rightly pointed out, we need greater accountability and must take responsibility for raising the cash as well as spending it.

Richard Lochhead: George Lyon's colleague Jeremy Purvis suggested that he did not support full financial powers for the Parliament, only some financial powers. Which financial powers would George Lyon like to be transferred to the Parliament?

George Lyon: We are setting up the Steel commission to investigate these matters and to come up with answers to the very hard questions that we face before presenting our proposals.

Richard Lochhead: Will the member give way?

George Lyon: No, I would like to make some progress—I have only six months. [*Laughter.*] I mean six minutes—I wish that I had six months, although it feels as if I have.

The second strong argument for greater fiscal powers for the Parliament is that they would allow us to put even greater focus on the need to grow the Scottish economy and increase our productivity. That said, there are a number of very difficult questions that need to be answered before there can be consensus on this matter. There needs to be such consensus before we can make progress.

The first key question is what we mean by fiscal autonomy, which in the Parliament seems to mean all things to all people. Does it mean that we assign a percentage of taxes raised in Scotland to pay for the devolved services for which we are currently responsible? That is one model that we could examine. There is a second model—that all Scottish tax revenues should be kept in Scotland and a payment should be made to the UK Government for UK functions. The debate would

then shift and focus on the contribution to Westminster, rather than arguments about whether the Barnett formula is fair to Scotland.

There is a third model, which we have again heard proposed this morning. It is called the Trojan-horse model and is favoured by the SNP, which uses fiscal autonomy as a cloak for separation and divorce. The SNP knows that the language of separation scares off voters, so it uses fiscal autonomy as a cloak to hide its real policy, which is separation.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Does the member agree that as well as using fiscal autonomy to disguise the real policy, which is independence, the nationalists see it as creating a better environment for them? It would aggravate the constitutional settlement and create an annual round of bickering with Westminster that they hope would lead to greater discord and the break-up of the UK.

George Lyon: That is exactly right.

Other fundamental questions arise once we start to try to define fiscal autonomy. If it is a halfway house, how would Scotland maintain its current spending advantage, which enables us to spend 21 per cent more per capita on health, education, transport and all the services for which we are responsible. That is a big advantage over England and Wales. How would we preserve that advantage in any negotiation to change the current system?

Alex Neil: George Lyon gives examples from devolved areas but, in defence research, Scotland receives only 1 per cent of current expenditure. If we had fiscal autonomy, we would have far more research jobs in Scotland in the defence sector alone. That is not to mention the £400 million—our share of the nonsense in Iraq—that we could have saved.

George Lyon: I was just coming to that first point. If Scotland went for full fiscal autonomy, which the SNP has argued for this morning, we would be able to spend only what we raised here in Scotland. As GERS and Goudie have pointed out, over the past three economic cycles, the deficit between Scottish spend and what we raise is £4.2 billion. The last time that Scotland was in fiscal surplus was 1982. The question then arises: how do we bridge the gap? We need answers to that question. Do we put up taxes? Do we cut public spending? Or will Mr Swinney go to Westminster with the begging bowl to ask that Scotland can keep its current spending advantage?

In the commission that we are about to set up, we intend to examine such issues in detail and come forward with some rational answers to develop the debate. The nationalists will never

answer the questions that have been asked this morning. In their surreal world, Jim Mather proposes to outdo the Tories on tax cuts. At the same time, Kenny MacAskill promises to outspend the Executive on roads and rail and tourism—you name it, Kenny will spend more on it than we will.

Scotland currently raises 15 per cent of its own revenues here in Scotland, through business taxes and council tax. If the SNP wanted to give Scottish business a competitive advantage—and there are question marks over whether that is a good idea—cutting the business tax rates would give £1.7 billion back to Scottish industry. That would be a bigger advantage than Irish businesses have through their cuts in corporation tax. There is the answer to that question. However, the SNP would then have to tell us what it wanted to cut.

In summing up, Jim Mather should answer the questions that the minister rightly asked earlier. What changes will there be? How much will they cost? Who will pay? Let us hear the answers.

11:12

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am delighted to be able to take part in a debate today on fiscal autonomy—or whatever everybody has been calling it. I am rather surprised to find such a topic being used in Opposition time. I share my colleague David McLetchie's view that it is not exactly what the public are interested in the Parliament discussing. I noticed that Iain Macwhirter said at the weekend that the topics of debates are a real problem. Do we find health, education or crime during SNP Opposition time? No, members will have to come back next week to discuss public services in Opposition time, during the Conservatives' debate. Instead of that, we debate today the powers of the Parliament, although the public tell us that they have more respect for local councillors than they have for MSPs. Perhaps we should take note of what the public want to hear.

George Lyon is correct. This debate is an SNP mask to hide the division and confusion that still lie in the party's ranks. Is this SNP a national movement for independence?

Members: Yes.

Mr Monteith: Is it a left-of-centre party?

Members: Yes.

Mr Monteith: Is that the independence-lite of Jim Mather? Is it the independence-regular of John "regular guy" Swinney? Or is it the independence-max of Fiona Hyslop? The party does not quite know. It says yes to all of those things. Does the party, like "Braveheart", rely on a distorted view of Scottish history and believe that it is all England's fault? Or is the party like a 1970s

tribute band, stuck in a left-of-centre groove with only one song to sing—"Money, Money, Money"—which is the party's solution to everything? As Adam Ingram has asked, which cul-de-sac is the party going up?

Does the Parliament need more powers? Maybes yes, maybes naw. Does the Parliament deserve more powers? Well, after last week's debate on poverty, during which SNP members talked generally about, and extolled the virtues of, state intervention and spending more money, is it any surprise that many people—even including me—have doubts about the Parliament having more tax-raising powers.

Some scribes would tell us that the Parliament does not deserve more powers—just as they say, "Look at the Holyrood that it has made over Holyrood." Well, yes and no. I understand that line of argument, but I do not readily accept it. Politicians have to look beyond the length of their pencils. At times, we have to look 10, 20 or 30 years into the future and consider how the Parliament will work. The Parliament has to show that it is worthy of having more financial powers by being more restrained and by talking about tax cutting rather than just tax increases, but there is another side to the coin. I pose the question: would the MSPs who have spent £400 million—those who voted to spend that £400 million—have behaved more responsibly if we had had to raise the money ourselves for the devolved Scottish Parliament building?

Alex Neil: I accept Brian Monteith's criticism of the Holyrood cost, but is it not a fact that the poll tax cost the Scottish taxpayer twice or three times as much as even the Holyrood fiasco? And will he apologise for it?

Mr Monteith: I certainly will not apologise for it and I certainly will not apologise for voting against the £400 million every time.

As David McLetchie said at the outset, the Scotland Act 1998 can be changed. Indeed, the process has already started. Just as the bill was drafted to suit Labour and the Liberal Democrats, so too are the proposed changes being made to suit those two parties. The process exposes the fact that it is Westminster—not Holyrood—that will deliver any change to the Scotland Act 1998. That is why the SNP offers a false prospectus. The SNP will never deliver any form of financial devolution; it does not believe in it. It believes in independence—SNP members said yes to that. Even were we to suffer the misfortune of the SNP having enough power to be in a position where it could deliver some form of fiscal autonomy, it would also be in a position to deliver independence. It would be in power. What would the party choose? We all know the answer: it would choose independence. That is fair enough,

but why can the party not be honest now and say that it does not support fiscal autonomy but is the party of independence?

Carolyn Leckie: Will the member give way?

Mr Monteith: Yes, I will.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but you do not have time.

Carolyn Leckie: But he is letting me in.

Mr Monteith: Another time, another place.

Only the unionist parties can work within the devolution settlement to give more financial powers to this Parliament. So, in closing, I say to Jim Mather that he should come and join us. Jim sounds like a Tory pretty much 60 per cent of the time. His colleagues know that. If he comes with us, it is possible that we can build consensus and find a way of strengthening the devolution settlement by ensuring that the Parliament acts responsibly and prudently. However, if he believes in independence—run by Frankfurt and Brussels—he should stay where he is.

Let us be honest. The difference is clear. Independence is not fiscal autonomy and it is not financial devolution. That is a unionist cause.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Andy Kerr.

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): On a point of order.

11:18

The Minister for Finance and Public Services (Mr Andy Kerr): Brian Monteith has exposed many of the problems at the heart—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, Mr Kerr. There is a point of order.

Mr Kerr: Oh my goodness. Already!

John Swinburne: I have sat here and listened to at least two members from every party extolling the virtues of the status quo or fiscal autonomy. Our party has not been allowed to speak at all. There are a quarter of a million pensioners out there who live below the poverty line and no one seems to give a damn.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order, Mr Swinburne. I call speakers according to proportionality. Perhaps you can look at that later; you will find that it has been spot-on.

I call the minister.

Mr Kerr: As I was about to say, many members have exposed the big con at the heart of the big idea that John Swinney seeks to present to the chamber. There has been sound and fury in the debate, but a lack of detail on his idea. It is a con on ordinary taxpayers in Scotland. What he seeks

to deliver for them is, I presume, tax increases because, if he were reducing taxes in every way for businesses, someone would have to pick up the tab. Perhaps he would reduce spending on public services and impose even more cutbacks than would be necessary because of the fiscal deficit. That is the con that lies at the heart of much of what has been said this morning.

We need to know the detail. Many people have asked him, so I hope that Jim Mather will take the time to tell us which tax he would increase and when, for how long and by how much it would increase. Those matters are at the heart of the SNP strategy. I take the point that Mr Swinney made. He talked about purpose and power, leadership and ambition, and decision making. Let us have a decision from John Swinney. Which tax, when and how much?

Mr Swinney: The minister said that a country that runs a deficit is required to cut its public spending. Over the next five years, the United Kingdom's deficit will be £118 billion. Which services will he cut?

Mr Kerr: The deficit balances over the economic cycle. I think that we are in much safer hands with Gordon Brown than with Jim Mather or, indeed, Fergus Ewing—I needed to be reminded of him. I will let colleagues make the contrast for themselves.

As someone said—I cannot remember who it was—we come back to the fact that nobody has yet defined what fiscal autonomy is. Fiscal autonomy is everything to all people in Scotland. For the university vice-chancellor or principal, fiscal autonomy is about increasing taxation to fund higher education. For the business community, it is about reducing business taxation. Which do the nationalists say? That is the real question to which they are reluctant to give an answer because they do not have one. What would they do about the £5 billion-worth of public services that we would lose?

By contrast, look at the spending commitments in the nationalists' most recent manifesto. Indeed, look at those that they have made since that manifesto. They have been spending money hand over fist. I am sorry that Kenny MacAskill has not turned up this morning—perhaps he has been chained to a chair somewhere—because, every day of every session of this Parliament, Kenny the big spender comes into the chamber and seeks to spend more money. What is going on on the SNP benches?

More than anything, the debate is about John Swinney attempting yet again to reassert his leadership. He is now whispering independence while talking fiscal autonomy. However, as we have all recognised this morning, this is more

about the SNP's desire to try and lift the Scottish people's eyes above the SNP agenda of independence, separation and divorce, which the Scottish people have constantly rejected.

Tommy Sheridan: The minister referred to deficits. Does he believe that the deficit of a country is an indication of the financial ill health of that country?

Mr Kerr: No, it is part of the economic management of a country. We are part of a UK management structure that has delivered the lowest inflation rates and the highest employment levels in generations and the most stable economic environment for businesses to operate in for many generations.

John Swinney made many comments about taxation. As a share of GDP, taxation of the business community in Scotland is 7.2 per cent. The average in Europe is 10.2 per cent. Although our levels of taxation are higher than in Ireland or the US, they are probably comparable to those in Germany and the Netherlands and they are much lower than in many of the European countries and competitors that we seek to work with. The idea that Scotland is somehow an anti-business environment and that we are not creating the climate for economic growth is a myth that is propagated by the SNP, which constantly seeks to talk down Scotland's achievements. Many of my colleagues have sought to reverse some of that conversation during the debate.

It was ironic to hear from the Tories about fiscal prudence, given the pains that they put the Scottish economy and UK economy through over the years. I also found it somewhat ironic to hear David Davidson telling us to stop the micromanagement of local government. Under compulsory competitive tendering, the Tories used to tell us in which newspaper to advertise our contracts. In terms of micromanagement, I cannot think of anything worse than the ring fencing and capping that they used to impose.

Fiona Hyslop said that there was a vacuum in the debate. The vacuum is the lack of any detail on what exactly the SNP means by full fiscal autonomy and what that would mean for the delivery of public services in Scotland.

Tommy Sheridan made some interesting points in his speech. For instance, he raised the issue of a minimum wage for all public sector workers. Of course, that would cost the Scottish taxpayer £470 million per annum and would lead to reductions in public services. Those who are most in need of public services would receive less of them because of that strategy.

We also look forward to hearing the SNP's stock theory, which somehow relates fiscal autonomy to Scotland's birth rate. I find that somewhat odd, but

let me quote Alex Neil, who has been popping up and down like a madman this morning. He said:

"It is neither gradualist nor fundamentalist impulses that make me cautious about endorsing the as yet ill-defined calls for fiscal autonomy."

If Alex Neil is doubtful about fiscal autonomy, those of us on the partnership benches are extremely doubtful about such a strategy.

Fiscal autonomy will not deliver for Scottish business or the Scottish people. Full fiscal financial independence or economic independence or whatever people care to call it will not deliver the investments that we are making in transport, skills and communication structures. The support to businesses that we seek to provide will grow our economy effectively. That is what the economic indicators point to at this time.

Let us hear some detail about the SNP strategy. Jim Mather now has the opportunity to tell us which taxes would rise, when and for how long that would happen, and who would pay.

11:25

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): This important debate has exposed more negativity about our ability to manage our affairs than I have confronted in three years of presenting our economic case around the committees and boardrooms of Scotland.

In the months and years to come, people will trawl over what has been said today to see how members voted and to note the excuses of those who are willing to allow Scotland to sleepwalk into diminished competitiveness and decline. In particular, people will look at those who support Gordon Brown's opposition to European tax harmonisation while choosing to believe that UK tax harmonisation is a good thing for Scotland, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary. In fact, taxes here are higher, as we have higher business rates, water rates and council tax, the aggregates tax, a higher climate change levy and many other costs.

However, given the success of our analysis and of our arguments, I will not paint people into corners. I am here to show how we can co-operate and create a more competitive, more prosperous and fairer Scotland. I am also here to enjoy the moment, now that a majority of members privately or publicly accept the need for financial independence for the Parliament. We all acknowledge that Scotland can and must do better.

Mr Davidson: Will the member give way?

Jim Mather: I am time constrained because of the next debate, so I will crack on and answer some of the questions.

I draw comfort from the fact that we now have a critical mass of MSPs who recognise the folly of sticking with a settlement that does not deliver for the people of Scotland, although one might not recognise that from all the amendments. Some amendments show signs of promise and have made some movement towards consensus, but careful reading shows real flaws. There are escape clauses that highlight old tendencies and do not do enough to quieten legitimate concerns.

The Conservative amendment wants to strengthen our economy without immediate access to the powers needed to do that. The Conservatives propose a royal commission that would be called at the whim of a UK Government, at a time of that Government's choosing. That is reminiscent of the delaying tactics used by Alec Douglas-Home in 1979 and by John Major when he promised to take stock. Our verdict on the Conservative amendment must be that it is not good enough. We need more urgency and commitment, given the perpetual low growth and declining population that we face.

Mr Monteith: Will the member give way?

Jim Mather: I want to crack on because 11.30 approaches.

However, my benign tolerance runs pretty thin when I look at the partnership amendment. It shows no movement; it is a culpable straight bat. The amendment implies that, after 300 years in the union, Scotland does not have what it takes to match the performance of other successful small countries; some union—some nurturing—if that were true, but it is not.

We have a fantastic array of positive attributes and, given the necessary powers, we are well able to match the best in the planet. The issue is about growth, but I can tell George Lyon that it is not about zero-sum growth. I suppose that I should be grateful that he and his colleagues are not in charge of Scottish Enterprise or the Bank of Scotland for, if we were under that sort of direct management, no one would ever start their own business and we would have seen the last management buy-out.

The Executive amendment also implicitly rejoices in the fact that Scotland's private sector has now shrunk to about 50 per cent of our economy and fails to see that it may fall even further. The amendment is complacent about public sector performance. We all know that, with proper leadership, vision and involvement, public sector staff could achieve so much more for Scotland and for themselves. Worst, the amendment ignores our branch-economy status. It chooses to ignore the fact that Scotland is like a ship, sitting low and slow in the water, falling behind other ships, and dependent on the towrope

from stronger, more flexible economies to create the demand that will give us economic momentum. On this ship of state, our Executive has no plans to pump the bilges, build up steam or indeed change the currently charted course. Rather, the Executive tells us that it plans to lash the tiller to the old fixed course, hold on to the guardrail and hope that the towrope will be pulled taut and that we will lumber forward.

Mr Kerr: What the Executive is doing to tackle the bilges is to provide the highest ever spending on transport infrastructure and to complete the central Scotland motorway network. We are investing in rail, in skills and in higher education for the people of Scotland so as to provide the key things for business: a stable economic environment, a work force that is available and ready to work and a place in which to do business where quality of life is one of the key determinants. Do we want to compete with low-taxation economies in the Far East or are we going to compete at the higher end? What end of the economy does the SNP want to compete at?

Jim Mather: The minister can say all that, but at the bottom of the crucible, we have a declining population and have had 30 years of low growth. That is why we reject the Executive's strategy as one that will be satisfied with permanent second position. We reject the current philosophy that seems to class inertia and passivity as positive attributes.

George Lyon *rose*—

Jim Mather: I will come to George Lyon's points.

According to the registrar general for Scotland, the Executive's strategy risks tipping Scotland into an era of economic freefall, population decline, falling living standards and family fragmentation. So much for the constitutional stability that George Lyon wants to offer us; he cannot even offer us family stability.

The alternative is obvious and was clearly identified by the Irish author and academic Peadar Kirby on the BBC's programme "Good Morning Scotland" on 4 September 2002, when he said that dismissal of constitutional change ignored the fact that it was the increased powers of the Irish Parliament that transformed it, allowing it to set lower corporation tax rates, market Ireland effectively for the first time, and use its politicians and diplomats to win a disproportionate share of EU structural funds.

Ms Alexander: I invite Jim Mather to come back to the matter of fiscal autonomy. I am prepared to take him at his word when he says that that is the SNP's flagship policy, and that it is no longer seeking full fiscal freedom and is seeking simply fiscal federalism. I am willing to accept that road-

to-Damascus conversion. However, if it is the policy centrepiece of the entire party, why is there not a single published paragraph on how it will operate? When can we expect that?

Jim Mather: Wendy Alexander has not read Alex Salmond's document on the economic case for independence, which lays that out categorically and clearly. She should go and read that document.

Meanwhile, while we are advocating a way forward, Gordon Brown is properly advocating tax competition for the UK and Europe. He correctly rejects the idea of a one-size-fits-all tax policy for Europe that would prevent the so-called periphery from competing with the central area between Paris and Frankfurt. Tony Blair agrees with that, and recently said that there cannot be tax harmonisation. Making everyone follow the same tax rules would quickly diminish Europe's competitiveness by killing jobs and stifling growth. However, that is exactly what UK tax harmonisation has been doing for Scotland for generations. Contrast that with our objective for Scotland where, as with every state in the US union, we would restore our competitive edge. That includes having lower business taxes relative to the rest of the UK.

George Lyon: Jim Mather recently stood for election on a manifesto pledge to give businesses a competitive edge. Why did he not take that opportunity to say that he would do so by handing back £1.7 billion to businesses in Scotland?

Jim Mather: Because we aspire to a virtuous circle and a genuinely competitive Scotland. Scotland is still hamstrung; if we do something about business tax, we still have high water rates, aggregates tax, climate change levy, and high fuel and transport costs. George Lyon should look at what is happening in his constituency, where graduates are leaving in droves; 96 per cent of graduates from the Highlands have no future in their own part of the world. That is outrageous.

We want the strategy that helped Finland, Austria, Ireland and other nations with bigger neighbours to compete. That is the simple and obvious way forward. It is accepted by every fair-minded person we talk to, but not in the chamber. The people who are watching today's debate in the chamber and on television understand that when someone is in a hole, they should stop digging. The Executive does not understand that. The people also understand that when a strategy fails, it should be changed. We should change the strategy or change the Government. No football manager or chief executive would stand up and tell those who criticise that they are talking down the club or the business; the manager or chief executive would accept the reality that they should

change their mind and change their strategy, or go.

The good news is that, as Susan Deacon said, the debate is on and it will not go away. There is now a cross-party group on the economy and that will find more supportive arguments as it goes on. To be a member of that group, to review the options, to listen to the case studies and then to reject fiscal autonomy would be a bit like being a member of a cross-party group on cycling and understanding all the benefits of that sport but then denying the need for wheels.

Fiscal autonomy is the defining attribute of any economy. Without it, we have only a branch operation that depends on external influences and decisions. That is why the sad Executive does not have a target for Scottish economic growth. I urge members to support the motion.

European Parliament (Number of Seats)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-694, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on European Parliament seat numbers. There is one amendment to the motion.

11:35

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): This debate is short because there was a full discussion on the issue during a members' business debate last week, when a clear view was expressed that Parliament should have the opportunity to vote on the matter. I hope that the Parliament can take this opportunity to unite to protect Scotland's already limited influence in the European Union.

It is no secret that we in the SNP are nationalists. We want Scotland to be independent in Europe; we want to be represented in our own right on all the decision-making bodies of the EU. If that is good enough for tiny Malta, how on earth can it be wrong for Scotland? Surely we do not have to be nationalists to want Scotland to have as loud a voice and as big a say as possible in the EU. That is what the motion is all about.

On Tavish Scott's amendment, the SNP supports EU enlargement enthusiastically and unequivocally. The accession of the 10 new countries, most of which are former communist states, is the most significant development since the European Economic Community was founded in the 1950s. Of course, there will be consequences for those already in the EU. It is right that existing member states should be required to compromise and to make concessions to accommodate the accession countries. The cut in the number of United Kingdom seats in the European Parliament must be seen in that context.

However, I do not believe that Scotland should share the burden of that reduction and agree to lose one of our members of the European Parliament. The debate is not just about numbers; it is about a matter of principle. My objection should be the objection of every member of the Parliament. In arriving at the recommendation to reduce the number of Scotland's MEPs from eight to seven, the Electoral Commission has treated Scotland as though it were just the same as every other electoral region in the UK. That approach is fundamentally flawed. Scotland is not the same as every other electoral region in the UK. Scotland is not a region at all, electoral or otherwise. Scotland is a nation with a Parliament that has extensive

legislative powers in areas such as health, education, justice and fishing.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): Does the member accept that many other regions and nations in Europe, such as the German Länder, have far greater powers than the Scottish Parliament? Is she recommending that we should increase the number of seats for those? Would that not take us back to where we started?

Nicola Sturgeon: Some of those regions have far more power than we do. For example, the Belgian regions have the opportunity to lead debates and discussions in the Council of Ministers. A similar ability would be in the interests of our fishing communities right now—

Irene Oldfather: Answer the question.

Nicola Sturgeon: Rather than shouting at me from a sedentary position, the member should perhaps reflect on what I have said.

We have legislative powers in those areas on which the EU also has powers to legislate. European laws in those areas are binding in Scotland. The Scottish Executive has to implement those laws, so it is vital that Scotland's voice is heard in the decision-making process. We must be able to protect our national interests when the EU is legislating on matters that affect our people and that are already the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament.

We all know how laws are made in the EU. They are initiated in the Commission, by and large, and enacted by the Council and the European Parliament. We have no commissioner. If Scotland were independent, we would have one, at least until 2009. We have no direct representation on the Council and we have no guarantee that the UK—

Irene Oldfather: Will the member take an intervention?

Nicola Sturgeon: No, I am in my last minute.

We have no guarantee that the UK vote will be cast in Scotland's interests. If we were independent, we would have seven votes in the Council, like Denmark, Ireland and Finland. Where we do have a direct say in the European Union is in the European Parliament. We have eight MEPs at present; to cut that representation will reduce the already limited influence that we have in the decision-making bodies of Europe. When the decisions that Europe takes affect so directly our areas of responsibility, it is not just irresponsible but politically wrong for the Parliament to agree to such a move.

I am delighted that the European and External Relations Committee has agreed unanimously that Scotland should retain eight MEPs. The

Parliament's duty is to unite behind that call and I ask members to do so today.

I move,

That the Parliament supports the European and External Relations Committee's unanimous call for Scotland to retain eight Members of the European Parliament.

11:41

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Services (Tavish Scott): It is important to reflect on Nicola Sturgeon's opening point about principle. The principle that she is engaged with concerns not the number of MEPs, but the matter that she went on about in three of the four minutes of her speech, which was an argument about independence. That is fair enough—I do not agree with what she said about that, but at least her position is clear. However, she should not use a large chunk of her speech suggesting that we are discussing a great matter of principle and then relate that to the number of MEPs.

The Scottish Executive is disappointed that the number of MEPs in Scotland will be reduced. All member states—

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member give way?

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP) *rose*—

Tavish Scott: I have only three minutes.

All member states have agreed to reduce their quota of MEPs to enable the accession states to be represented in the European Parliament on a similar and equitable footing. I accept the points made by Irene Oldfather, Christine May and others in the debate last Wednesday, particularly those that relate to rurality, peripherality and geography. Those arguments are entirely legitimate. I have read Bill Miller MEP's contribution to the European and External Relations Committee. The minutes of the meeting that he attended state:

"Members agreed also to write to the UK Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs to reiterate the Committee's views in respect of the number of MEPs".

As I said, the views on rurality and geography are important. However, we must start from the fact that Scotland is part of the UK. The UK is the member state and it has agreed to reduce its quota of MEPs for the 2004 European elections from 87 to 78 because of European Union enlargement. That point is agreed—at least I think that it is agreed—by all the parties in the chamber.

We hear the concerns that Scotland is different from other electoral regions. It is true that Scotland is different. We have the Parliament and we have a unique and separate legal system, but we also have specific advantages over other regions of the UK in relation to representation in the EU, through our direct links to the EU Government, to the UK

Government, to Brussels and to the Executive's EU office. Those are advantages that other European Parliament UK electoral regions do not have. As a result, rather than having less influence, we have enhanced influence.

Although Scotland's representation in the European Parliament will be reduced, our effective representation and influence in the other main EU decision-making body, the Council, is increasing in relation to the Nice provisions. Those points are important if we are to consider the matter in the round.

We have a strong group of MEPs, of all parties, who have worked persuasively and helpfully together on a range of important Scottish issues. However, in the context of a Parliament of 700 and of European enlargement, members of the Executive accept, in relation to the UK position, that the reduction will happen. The point is that Scotland enjoys the best of both worlds. We have the direct influence that we seek—and seek to enlarge on in relation to the intergovernmental conference—and we have an excellent and effective group of influential MEPs. I am sure that that will continue.

I move amendment S2M-694.1, to leave out from "supports" to end and insert:

"welcomes the accession of the 10 new member states of the European Union on 1 May 2004; notes that the elections to the European Parliament are a reserved matter; recognises that all 15 existing member states have agreed to reduce their quota of MEPs to enable the new member states to be represented on an equitable basis; notes the consequent reduction of United Kingdom seats in the European Parliament from 87 to 78, and considers that this is appropriate given the enlargement of the European Union."

11:44

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I have some difficulty in deciding how to vote, as I do not take exception to Nicola Sturgeon's motion; similarly, Tavish Scott's amendment meets the approval of Conservative members. Perhaps we are facing a relapse to my trade union past, when the solution might have been to have a composite motion.

My support for Nicola Sturgeon arises from Scotland's geographic and demographic make-up, which has been recognised in the UK Parliament over the past 300 years. Scotland's representation has been greater than that of other parts of the UK; the 72 members from Scotland represent constituencies of about 57,000 people, whereas members down south represent constituencies of about 70,000 people. That will be dealt with shortly, with the implementation of the relevant provision of the Scotland Act 1998. I support the reduction of the number of Scottish MPs, given the

fact that the Scottish Parliament now exists. However, reducing the number at Westminster is a different matter from reducing the number in the European Parliament.

I have a bit of difficulty with Tavish Scott's position, because the other day he disagreed with our arguing for the retention of eight MEPs from Scotland. The Scotland Act 1998 recognises geography and location. Tavish Scott is here because we have separate MSPs for Shetland and Orkney. I do not think that any of us would dispute the separate representation of Shetland and Orkney but, when Tavish Scott opposes Nicola Sturgeon's arguments, he is opposing the argument that has enabled him to be here.

Irrespective of the deliberations here or at Westminster, to some degree the final decision is out of our hands, because it depends on the European constitution—to which the matter is an addendum or attachment—being accepted. If the constitution is not accepted, I presume that the numbers of MEPs will stay at the existing levels; if the constitution fails, there will be no argument and we will retain our eight members.

I am rather disappointed in the make-up of the constitution, which relates to the issues that we are discussing now—the membership of the European Parliament and the number of votes that the country has on the European Council. However, enlargement means that changes are needed. The constitution is spoiled by the extent to which it enables Europe to absorb new powers, but that is an argument for another day.

Nicola Sturgeon rose—

Phil Gallie: I apologise, but I cannot give way.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): What about the business motion yesterday?

Phil Gallie: Bruce Crawford should check the *Official Report*.

Tavish Scott and the Scottish Executive should pay due regard to Nicola Sturgeon's motion. Every member of the European and External Relations Committee backed the view that the number of MEPs should continue to be eight, as did the Scottish MEPs who made representations. The Scottish Executive would be wise to support that position by making representations to the UK Government. The Conservatives welcome the enlargement of Europe, but I believe that, on this issue, a Scottish voice should be maintained.

11:49

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): My mother used to say about things that came round with

monotonous regularity, “If that had an air, you could sing it.” That is where we are on this issue.

As members will know by now, I am a committed Europhile and, as they can see, I have my Euro-anorak on today—it is black and white, unlike the position that I propose to adopt. I am delighted to have the opportunity to debate a European issue. I just regret that the scope and the nature of the debate engendered by the SNP is once again narrow and inward looking and takes no account of the many shades of opinion, potential solutions and co-operative working that are the reality of serious government.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member support the SNP’s position that the Executive should stage a full-scale debate on the European constitution before the UK Government moves to ratify it?

Christine May: No, I will not.

Of course, the wider the sphere of influence and geographical extent of a Government or a Parliament, the more complex and difficult are the solutions that it needs to arrive at in order to resolve the issues. So it is in this debate: the Executive amendment reflects the breadth and complexity of the issue with which we are faced.

As I said last week, I regret that the eventual outcome is the loss of one of our MEPs. I seek an assurance from the minister that the Executive will continue to put forward the arguments of geographical challenge, rurality and peripherality until the very last UK decision is taken. Although those are valid arguments, the SNP does not mention them. I can only assume that, in its desperate rush to flag up independence at every stage of every debate, it ignores the sensible, pragmatic and grown-up arguments that can be put forward.

Nicola Sturgeon welcomed enlargement but then expressed concern about Scotland’s limited influence. She did not talk about the difficult decisions that enlargement will bring. She said that Scotland was not the same as other electoral regions. However, in the current debate, we have to reflect the fact that we are a European Parliament electoral region; we should debate the issues on that basis.

The debate is complicated. We need a solution with which we can all live. I hope that, when the minister sums up at the end of this short debate, he will assure us that he will take forward the arguments until they are finally won or lost. We will be looking at what he says in his next meetings with his UK colleagues, to ensure that he does.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Because of shortness of time, I can call only one back bencher. In terms of proportionality, that will be a Labour member. I call Irene Oldfather.

11:52

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): Apart from Christine May’s anorak, there is a sense of déjà vu about the debate. I am still waiting for Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP to answer the question that I asked last week about the SNP’s proposal for regions with legislative powers, such as Scotland, to have more seats in the European Parliament. The SNP has not said whether its proposal should apply across Europe. If it did apply across Europe, we would be back to where we started, with the European Parliament having many more than 700 seats.

In the debate last week, Nicola Sturgeon said:

“I am a nationalist ... I believe that Scotland should be independent in Europe and represented in our own right in all the European Union’s decision-making bodies ... That is what the motion is about.”—[*Official Report*, 26 November 2003; c 3659.]

My worry is that that is what today’s motion is about, too.

The motion refers to the European and External Relations Committee. However, the committee has never discussed the principle of holding a debate in the chamber and committee members were not shown the courtesy of being asked whether we wanted the matter to be debated in the chamber. I know that Phil Gallie is considering his position on the matter. The grave danger, which should be resisted, is that the SNP is politicising the committees of the Parliament—that is completely wrong.

The European and External Relations Committee wrote to the Electoral Commission to make a plea on the basis of geography for eight MSPs to be retained. I note what the minister said about geography. Like Christine May, I seek an assurance that the minister will ensure that the issue is considered in the discussions with Westminster colleagues until the very last minute.

I would rather be represented by the UK’s 29 votes on the Council of Ministers than by Slovenia’s four. I would also rather be represented by the UK’s 78 votes in the European Parliament than by Slovenia’s seven. From the election results in May, it seems that so would the Scottish people.

11:54

Tavish Scott: Right at the outset, I say to Christine May, Irene Oldfather and others that the Executive—across the ministerial benches—will work closely with colleagues to ensure that representations continue to be made on the matter. I will not take sniping from Ms Sturgeon or anyone else on the sidelines about what we do or do not do.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the minister take an intervention?

Tavish Scott: No, I will not. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Tavish Scott: I have two minutes in which to try to deal with the points and SNP members just scream and shout like a bunch of wee bairns.

My ministerial colleagues and I will continue to work hard on the issue. As Mr Gallie requested, we will continue to make the appropriate representations in our discussions. I take on board the serious points that Christine May and Irene Oldfather made on rurality, geography and peripherality.

All the parties are agreed on the desirability of enlargement. The only debate that we have had this morning—including the one that started at 9.30 am—has been about independence. Stewart Stevenson said last week that the issue for the SNP is not about seven or eight members but about 14 members. I respect that position, although I disagree fundamentally with it.

It is important to separate the debate on the serious arguments in favour of Scotland making appropriate representations about the number of MEPs from the debate on independence. That is what our amendment seeks to do.

11:56

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): Although the debate has been short, it has been interesting. I will try to reply to the various points that members have raised.

I am sure that Phil Gallie has the draft European constitution off by heart—he must go to bed with it every night. I have heard many of his speeches on the subject. I appreciate the fact that he looked at the rationale of the argument that was so effectively propounded by my colleague Nicola Sturgeon. As a member of the European and External Relations Committee, Phil Gallie agreed that Scotland should retain eight MEPs and that we should not accept the proposed reduction.

Christine May said that she is a Europhile. However, she is not prepared to support the concept that Scotland should be as fully and as well represented in the European Union as possible. It is vital that we should have such representation.

Irene Oldfather, a colleague on the European and External Relations Committee, supported the committee's decision to continue to argue the case for eight MEPs. She seems to have difficulty with the basic language that is needed to define the difference between a region and a nation. As Nicola Sturgeon said clearly today and last week,

even if someone is not a nationalist, they should support the case and the arguments for Scotland's retention of eight MEPs.

Tavish Scott came in as number 73 in the elections under the Scotland Act 1998. I say to him that the UK Government does not have to accept the Electoral Commission's recommendations, as Lord Falconer confirmed in his letter to the European and External Relations Committee.

The Executive did not make a submission, although I accept that the Liberal Democrats made one. I wonder whether, in this case, the Executive decided to say nothing but allowed its members to make submissions through their political parties. Tavish Scott's arguments show that he has no real determination to argue the case from a Scottish Parliament point of view that the eight Scottish seats should be retained. I believe that it is fundamentally important that the Scottish Executive as a whole should argue the case that Nicola Sturgeon propounded. I also believe that the vast majority of members of the Scottish Parliament, irrespective of party or allegiance, want to ensure that the Scottish voice is heard effectively in Europe.

I have great respect for the eight members who serve in the European Parliament and for the work that they do on the many issues on which the Scottish Parliament is asked to implement European law. We should show our appreciation of and our support for them by voting not to reduce the number of members who are elected from Scotland. We should continue to argue the case for eight. When the SNP wins independence for Scotland, we will argue for more members.

First Minister's Question Time

11:59

Cabinet (Meetings)

1. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-402)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): First, Presiding Officer, I am sure that everyone in the chamber will join me in congratulating you on your being made politician of the year. The award is richly deserved.

Next week, the Cabinet will discuss ministers' excellent progress in delivering the partnership agreement, and we will discuss our commitments for Scotland and how we can take those commitments forward into the new year.

Mr Swinney: I cannot imagine that that discussion will take a terribly long time. However, I associate myself with the First Minister's remarks about the Presiding Officer and the well-deserved award that he received last week.

On Monday, the Minister for Communities and her deputy visited the incredibly successful Dublin Docklands Development Authority, which is the fastest growing area in Ireland. Before she left, the minister said:

"I am keen to explore with ... my Irish Ministerial counterparts what has contributed to this progress, and the lessons the Executive can learn".

What lessons were learnt on Monday?

The First Minister: I have not yet received a report from the Minister for Communities, but I certainly look forward to doing so.

Mr Swinney: Perhaps I can pre-empt the minister's briefing by sharing with the First Minister the contents of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority plan. Under the heading "Factors Contributing to Success", the plan says "Central to this success" is

"an attractive package of financial incentives to encourage high-quality ... investment."

The plan goes on to say that the introduction of a special rate of corporation tax

"was another major contributor to success."

In short, the authority says that control of tax policy is "essential" to achievement of that level of economic growth.

Given that the Minister for Communities and the First Minister are determined to learn lessons from Ireland's success, when will the First Minister

introduce similar proposals that will give Scotland the powers to put our industry and business at a competitive advantage and which will deliver the opportunities that people in Scotland seek?

The First Minister: The Scottish economy will be put at a competitive advantage partly because of the competitive advantage at which the UK has been put because of stable interest rates, low inflation, higher employment, lower unemployment and a better macroeconomic framework than has ever been the case in my adult life. Those factors make a serious contribution to economic growth in Scotland.

However, we in Scotland take our own responsibilities by pursuing the right economic policies such as developing skills, improving infrastructure, boosting research and development, doing what we can to improve productivity and ensuring that our Scottish companies can compete with the rest of the world. That is the right way to go. The low-tax—and ultimately low-growth—economy that Mr Swinney advocates would damage Scotland, employment and the people of this country.

Mr Swinney: The problem with what the First Minister has just said is that he is currently presiding over low economic growth in Scotland. We have lost 50,000 manufacturing jobs in this country. In a recent newspaper article, the Prime Minister wrote:

"Making everybody follow the same tax rules would quickly diminish Europe's competitiveness by killing jobs and stifling growth."

The "same tax rules" for Scotland are

"killing jobs and stifling growth".

If the First Minister is remotely interested in putting Scotland at a competitive advantage, will he learn the lessons of Ireland, which is the fastest growing economy in Europe? Will he do something right for Scotland and give us the powers that will put us at such advantage?

The First Minister: Mr Swinney does not want to put Scotland at a competitive advantage; instead, he wants to put it at a competitive disadvantage. He wants to have what he calls fiscal autonomy, but that is the wrong strategy for boosting economic growth. We know that the way to boost economic growth in Scotland is to improve skills, boost the infrastructure and ensure that we have productive and competitive companies that are investing properly in research and development. If we do that, we will be able to compete with high-value jobs and a high-value economy, instead of the low-value economy that Mr Swinney wants to be part of. His approach will always bring short-term success but long-term decline.

We have to learn the lessons of the 1980s and 1990s and ensure that the Scottish economy can compete in the 21st century. We do that by ensuring that our industry is competitive, not by trying to deceive industry by promising it greater public spending and the tax cuts that would never materialise under an SNP Administration.

Mr Swinney: Why is it okay for the Prime Minister to go around Europe defending every country's right to have its own tax rules to avoid

"killing jobs and stifling growth"

when he will not allow the people of Scotland to take the same decisions? Why is that right for every other country but somehow wrong for Scotland?

The First Minister: The people of Scotland voted for devolution, not for independence. They voted for a UK-wide tax regime that gives us the highest unemployment—sorry, the highest employment—

Members: Oh!

The First Minister: It gives us the highest employment, the lowest unemployment, the lowest interest rates and the lowest inflation that most members in this chamber have ever experienced. That is a basis for serious macroeconomic growth. The way that we in Scotland build on that is to use the powers that the Parliament has to boost skills, boost infrastructure, boost R and D and boost productivity. If we do that, we will boost economic growth.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands)

(Con): To ask the First Minister when he next plans to meet the Prime Minister and what issues he intends to raise. (S2F-407)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I hope to meet the Prime Minister shortly and I am sure that our discussions will cover a wide range of issues of importance to Scotland.

David McLetchie: I do not doubt that it will be a wee chat rather than a "big conversation".

Last month as part of the debate about the possible introduction of top-up fees in English universities, Jim Wallace told university principals that there would be no more money for universities in Scotland. However, on Monday of this week the First Minister claimed—I think I quote him accurately—that he would

"make sure Scottish universities retain a competitive edge, not just in terms of the UK but increasingly across the world."

Does the First Minister acknowledge that those statements are seen by many as being riddled with apparent contradictions, and will he tell

Parliament which one represents the Executive's position?

The First Minister: If Mr McLetchie reads the speech that the Deputy First Minister made last Tuesday he will find that his report of that speech is inaccurate. The Deputy First Minister did not say at any point that Scottish universities would not receive additional funds and he made the point that it is an issue that we will consider in the course of the next spending review.

David McLetchie: That might be the position, but it is certainly not the way that it is understood by Scotland's university principals, who are concerned about the policy divide that is opening up between north of the border and south of the border. There is a great deal of confusion on the issue. We now learn that if top-up fees are introduced, our students who seek to study south of the border could face an "education Hadrian's wall"—as it was described in the press this morning—because they would have to pay £3,000 up front to attend and pursue courses at English universities. If the Prime Minister drives his policy through, what are the First Minister and his Administration going to do to mitigate its impact and ensure that Scottish students can still attend universities in the British system without having to pay £3,000 up front for the privilege of doing so?

The First Minister: Those who run the university systems in England and in Scotland have been able to use their basic intelligence to ensure that, despite the fact that we in Scotland have proudly abolished tuition fees—Mr McLetchie might not have noticed that we already have a different system in Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom—we have managed to preserve the ability of Scottish students to study in England and of English students to study in Scotland. It is not beyond the wit of any Government or any university in the UK to ensure that that situation will continue.

It is certainly our commitment that the universities of Scotland will continue to provide the best possible education, that Scottish students who choose to study elsewhere will continue to receive it and that our universities will continue to be able to compete on the international stage with their research and teaching, as they do already. We will ensure that whatever proposals are finally agreed by the House of Commons, the Scottish university system will stay ahead of the game.

David McLetchie: I look forward to the First Minister telling thousands of students in Scotland that tuition fees have been abolished when the bills for the graduate endowment land on their doormat within the next year or so—they will have an entirely different perspective on the so-called abolition. The problem that we are discussing today is entirely of the Labour party's making. It

was Labour that introduced tuition fees, Labour that abolished grants and it is Labour that proposes top-up fees in England. I urge the First Minister to use his powers of persuasion to convince the Prime Minister to adopt Conservative policy north and south of the border, which would mean no tuition fees or top-up fees for any student anywhere in the United Kingdom.

The First Minister: What I want to see for Scotland is the best possible university and higher-education system: a system that is well funded but which generates its own income; that is funded by Government, but which also has commercial relationships with businesses that turn research into commercial projects; and which is flexible and imaginative not only in how it secures its income but in how it uses its expenditure.

If we achieve that, we will continue to have universities in Scotland that are ahead of the game. I am also pleased to see that some of the proposals that have been debated down south are already among the best aspects of the new system up here in Scotland, such as the abolition of up-front tuition fees and the introduction of more bursaries and grants for low-income families. Those ideas are being copied by our colleagues down south and I welcome their conversion to those ideas. I hope that over the next few weeks, as their policy becomes clearer, we in Scotland will get a chance to develop our policies, which will ensure that Scottish universities and Scottish students stay, as I said, ahead of the game.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): Does the First Minister agree that a Labour Government has forced major constitutional change in the UK for the benefit of our democracy, but that current proposals to create a new supreme court have wide-ranging implications for the Scottish legal system? Does he agree that Parliament requires as a matter of urgency a debate on how we propose to enhance our distinctly Scottish approach to civil and criminal justice?

The First Minister: I agree absolutely that there should be a debate in Parliament; we intend to initiate such a debate early in the new year, but I also want to be absolutely clear about the proposal for a UK supreme court. It is entirely wrong of senior legal figures to describe the proposed court as being somehow an English court that will take powers away from the Scottish legal system. It will be a UK court that will have powers that are similar to existing powers at UK level. There will be no diminution of Scottish input or Scottish representation in that body and it is important that we ensure that that is the case. That is exactly the job that Scottish ministers and the Lord Advocate have been pursuing over recent months, which is reflected in the proposals that

have been reiterated yet again by the UK Government.

Obesity

3. Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Executive's position is in response to the programme "Stop Chewin' the Fat" and recent reports that Scottish children are among the most obese in the developed world. (S2F-415)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The latest figures on childhood obesity confirm what we already knew—that health improvement must be a long-term consistent priority for Scotland. Childhood obesity has significant implications for the future health of Scots and for our health services, but we will not tackle the problem overnight. It will take at least a generation of concerted action to turn round the eating and exercise habits of our nation. Flagship programmes in our school classrooms and playgrounds—such as hungry for success and active schools—demonstrate our commitment to improving the situation for Scotland's children.

Tommy Sheridan: After four and a half years of the Labour-Liberal Government in Scotland, and two years of the First Minister being in charge, one in five 12-year-olds is defined as being clinically obese. In June, the First Minister rejected the advice of the British Medical Association, One Plus, the Child Poverty Action Group and a range of trade union organisations, which argued that we require a radical solution; namely, free healthy and nutritious school meals. Will he now display the level of courage and political maturity that is required to admit that he was wrong, that we need a step change now, and that every child in Scotland should be guaranteed a healthy and nutritious school meal to tackle the problem?

The First Minister: I am determined to ensure that our schools and councils deliver healthy and nutritious meals for Scotland's school children. That is exactly why we are spending the money that Mr Sheridan would like to spend on the best-off and richest children on improving the quality of school meals, availability of school meals and take-up of school meals. Those priorities—getting nutritional quality right and improving take-up—are exactly the right ones for Scotland, but we must also ensure that children take more exercise and that they are fed better outside their classrooms. More than 100,000 Scottish school children are going to benefit by the end of this year from our free fruit in schools programme. That is the sort of initiative that will make a difference, unlike the tokenism of Mr Sheridan, who wants to benefit the rich but not to help the poor.

Tommy Sheridan: It is a bit contradictory to say that it is okay to give rich kids free fruit but not a free meal.

The programme to which I referred quoted 11 of the 12 food experts that were appointed by the First Minister's own food tsar. They said that free school meals would be required to tackle this problem. Why will the First Minister not listen to the experts? He will not listen to the British Medical Association, he will not listen to the trades union movement and he will not listen to the Child Poverty Action Group or to One Plus. Will he at least listen to the food experts who are advising him that free school meals are required to tackle this radical problem?

The First Minister: I am determined to listen to the evidence, but the programme that Tommy Sheridan quoted got the evidence wrong. One of the claims that it made was that the improvement in diet in Finland was down to the introduction of free school meals. Free school meals were introduced in Finland after the second world war to deal with starvation—not in the 1980s to deal with a poor health record. Finland rightly implemented national action, with all parties and people from all sectors of society working together to improve the diet, eating habits and exercise habits of the population. As a result, the health of the nation was dramatically improved. That is exactly what we are trying to do in Scotland. That is how we should concentrate our resources and that is what we will continue to do. We will back the evidence, back what works and back the international examples that show that Scotland is in shame at the moment, but which will ensure that it is a better place to live in the future.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): Does the First Minister agree that, in looking at the evidence on child obesity, it is absolutely vital for the next generation that we do not focus exclusively on what food our young people are eating and which diet they are following? We have to look at physical activity in school and in getting to school. Does the First Minister agree that the historic low rate of children walking to school is a national disgrace? Does he also agree that it is vital that we do everything that we can—for example, the twenty's plenty initiative and encouragement of safer routes to school, as is being done by my local authority—to tackle the appalling rate of obesity among the next generation?

The First Minister: There is no doubt that more walking to school and more walking in our society would make a significant contribution to exercise habits, to our health and to the use of our health service. Initiatives such as twenty's plenty—which ensures that the introduction of 20mph speed limits round schools becomes uniform throughout

Scotland—provide a significant opportunity, not just for greater safety around schools and greater walking opportunities. Other initiatives to encourage more youngsters and adults to walk more in Scotland are vital for the health of individuals and for the health of the country.

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): In the light of the shocking obesity levels in Scotland, does the First Minister now accept that, rather than spend money on setting up healthy-eating phone lines that no one calls, it would be more effective to remove unhealthy fatty foods and fizzy drinks from vending machines in our schools so that we stop giving our children contradictory and mixed messages about what it is healthy and unhealthy to eat?

The First Minister: We have to be more intelligent than that in our response to the situation. The reality in Scottish schools was that the number of children, who instead of eating or drinking in school, were leaving school to eat chocolate and drink rubbish further down the street increased dramatically for at least two decades. It is vital that we maintain in our schools initiatives to sell the right things and that we encourage children to eat and drink the right things, but we must also encourage children to stay in school so that they are not eating and drinking rubbish elsewhere.

The initiatives that have been put in place by the health improvement campaign—which Shona Robison and other members have criticised—take branding off vending machines, ensure that there are drinks other than fizzy drinks in every machine, ensure that water is available for our youngsters in schools throughout Scotland and ensure that they are encouraged to drink it. Those initiatives will make a difference; they will not drive kids back outside schools or encourage them to go to the local newsagent for their preferred alternative.

Commonwealth Games

4. Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what economic benefits there would be from a bid to bring the Commonwealth games to Scotland in 2014. (S2F-422)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): We know that hosting major events brings significant benefits for the Scottish economy and an invaluable profile for Scotland.

I am keen to see the Commonwealth games return to Scotland. However, the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland will take the decision on whether to bid for future games, and it will take the lead on any bid and any analysis that is required in the meantime. No decision has been made by the council on 2014 or on any

subsequent games. When it makes a decision, it will have my full support.

Bristow Muldoon: Does the First Minister agree that events such as the successful MTV Europe awards that took place in Edinburgh recently demonstrate the worldwide impact that Scotland can have when hosting such international events, and does he also agree that if we are successful in a bid to host future Commonwealth games, it is essential that we try to ensure that the facilities and the economic benefits are spread throughout Scotland, and that it is essential that we ensure that we have the developed transport infrastructure that can support such events?

The First Minister: Bristow Muldoon managed to raise a number of points in one question. It is clear that we want an improved transport infrastructure and that we want to ensure that the benefits are spread throughout Scotland. I believe that the Commonwealth games is the sort of event that we in Scotland can host, and that we can host it well. I think that we could do it significantly better than we did in 1986, to be frank, but the matter will require proper analysis in advance. It will require not only Government support and Government money, but the right site, location and preparation that would ensure that the games were a success for all concerned. That would be the objective of the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland. We have supported the council in improving the Scottish team and we now want to ensure that, when it does finally bid for a future Commonwealth games, it will be successful.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am sure that a present-day Labour politician such as the First Minister will not want to be reminded of the involvement of past-days Labour politicians in Commonwealth games bids. Can he assure us that we will not have a crook like Robert Maxwell involved in any future Scottish bid for the Commonwealth games?

The First Minister: I have neither met nor had any dealings with Robert Maxwell and given that he is now—I believe—dead, it would be quite hard to involve him in any future Commonwealth games. On politicians and the Commonwealth games, perhaps I should say that the decision of the then Conservative Government not to back the Edinburgh Commonwealth games was a major contributory factor to those games' being chaotic in preparation and disappointing in execution. Should the Commonwealth games come to Scotland in future, we shall ensure that they are much better organised and financed and that they do Scotland proud.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): Does the First Minister agree that, in addition to the Commonwealth games, other international events such as the G8 summit could be welcomed to

Scotland as an opportunity to boost the country? Does he agree that those who want to see Scotland at the top table should stop trying to stop the top table's being brought to Scotland?

The First Minister: I am looking for Roseanna Cunningham, but I do not see her in the chamber. She is opposed even to the prospect of the G8 summit's coming to Scotland. It is interesting that the Scottish National Party appears to want a seat at the top table but does not want the top table to come to Scotland and benefit our country.

Free Bus Travel (Strathclyde)

5. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Executive is taking to ensure the continuation of free bus travel for elderly people throughout the Strathclyde area. (S2F-412)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Free local travel for older people and people with a disability is one of the great successes of Scottish devolution. We are committed to funding it and to creating a Scotland-wide scheme by 2007. However, there must not be blank cheques for operators and bus companies, so all funding requests are properly scrutinised.

Robert Brown: I welcome the runaway success of the scheme. However, the scheme is supposed to be revenue neutral as far as the bus companies are concerned. Does the First Minister accept that there is rather a large uncovenanted bonus going to the bus companies without their having necessarily to run any more buses or any more routes? Will the Executive, with the bus companies, examine the funding formula and the arrangements to ensure maximum advantage to public transport and the public purse in Scotland, rather than to the bottom-line profit levels of the bus companies?

The First Minister: It is important that the claims that are submitted by the bus companies and operators be properly scrutinised. I believe that now would be a good time for us to review the systems that are in place, in order to ensure that claims are being properly scrutinised and that there is neither too much money going to bus companies nor that any scheme is left in danger through lack of finance. It is important that the bus companies claim only those journeys that are actually made, and it is important that the operators claim only those journeys that the bus companies can justify. We are examining the systems for that to ensure that they are properly in place. If changes are required, we will have them in place in advance of the national scheme, whose introduction by 2007 we are committed to.

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): Does the First Minister agree that we should be

ensuring not only that the bus operators run their buses on time, but that they serve their communities rather than serve their own profits?

The First Minister: That is a wider issue than the concessionary fares scheme, but I have no doubt that the bus services of Scotland still require significant improvement, particularly in communities that are poorly served on what might be seen by the bus companies as low-value routes, or in the evenings and at weekends, when many elderly people are left without the ability to use the scheme that we all believe is such a success.

That is why we have introduced quality bus contracts. They have not yet been taken up throughout Scotland in the way that we would like them to be, and that is one of the reasons why we have proposed a national transport agency for Scotland. I believe that such an agency could have a serious impact not only on dealing with our major transport infrastructure projects and improving integrated transport, but on improving bus services. I hope that we will get a chance to make that impact.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): The First Minister will be aware that many disabled and disabled elderly people are unable to use the free bus services in Strathclyde because many of the buses are unsuitable for disabled access. Will he tell us how he intends to address that problem, given the impending full implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995?

The First Minister: That is essentially a matter for the bus companies, but it is one that they must address. In areas in which the use of full-size buses could not be justified, there are a number of innovative schemes that use smaller modes of transport to ensure access and services for people with disabilities. However, it is also important that the bus companies take on board the message from this Parliament and our colleagues in Westminster, and that they act in relation to the quality of services that they provide for all our citizens, not only those who can climb on and off buses.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Given that the first motion on the issue was lodged in December 1999—it was signed, incidentally, by the current Minister for Finance and Public Services—and that, in a parliamentary answer last week, I was told that discussions are taking place on a national free concessionary fares scheme for our pensioners, why on earth will it take another four years to deliver?

The First Minister: It is important that we ensure that a national scheme has the sort of safeguards that Robert Brown addressed in his supplementary question, and that that national

scheme is properly organised and can be financed. It was important to get that process under way by establishing the local schemes and ensuring that they were a success, which they have been.

One reason why it will be important to have a national scheme is that we will be able to ensure that we have a bit of consistency throughout Scotland in the delivery of, and the comments that are made on, the service. Earlier this week, the Scottish National Party's official transport spokesperson, calling for the Executive to finance the Glasgow bus concessionary fares scheme said that it was

"a mess of the Executive's own creation and they need to sort it out now".

The same person said in an Edinburgh newspaper on Tuesday:

"the West of Scotland Executive is looking after the West"

and that those in the east

"are not getting as good a deal as Strathclyde."

We will have a consistent bus fares scheme throughout Scotland; let us have some political consistency from the SNP.

Holyrood Inquiry

6. Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): To ask the First Minister how the Holyrood inquiry will now obtain potential evidence from BBC Scotland, in the light of the recent decision by BBC governors to endorse the decision by BBC Scotland to withhold the tapes of "The Gathering Place" from the inquiry. (S2F-433)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): As I have said before, Lord Fraser's investigation is independent of Parliament and of Scottish ministers. It is therefore entirely a matter for him to identify and seek evidence that he feels might be helpful to his investigation, but it is also right for us to continue to urge everyone who is involved to assist him with his investigation and with the evidence that he wants to see.

Fergus Ewing: Lord Fraser, John Swinney and the First Minister have all urged the BBC to co-operate and yet it continues to refuse to do so. Indeed, its response, to plagiarise the vocabulary that Margaret Thatcher used when talking about Scotland, has been no, no and no. Will the First Minister therefore now grant Lord Fraser the legal powers that are necessary to force the BBC to hand over the tapes? Does he agree with me that the BBC's refusal to co-operate and hand over the tapes is based on a false assertion; namely, that all contributors received an undertaking? That assertion is patently untrue.

The First Minister: I remind colleagues of what I said the last time we discussed the matter in Parliament: the Hutton inquiry that has just taken place in London had powers that were identical to those of the Fraser inquiry. The Hutton inquiry had the BBC's co-operation in relation to material that I am sure was sensitive, and I strongly urge the BBC to co-operate with Lord Fraser who, in his questioning and attempts to seek evidence, seems to be doing an excellent job even without the tapes. We should all continue to support him in the work that he is doing. I also hope that Lord Fraser and the BBC can reach a proper solution to the matter according to what I believe is his responsibility and the BBC's duty.

12:30

Meeting suspended until 14:30.

14:30

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Hydro Subsidies

1. Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what representations it will make to the Department of Trade and Industry regarding the loss of hydro subsidies in 2005 and any potential price rises for energy consumers in the Highlands and the north-east. (S2O-870)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): We will be working closely with United Kingdom ministers to ensure that consumers do not lose out as a result of the decision by the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets.

Mrs Ewing: I know that the minister shares my concerns about fuel poverty, as does the Minister for Communities. Has the Executive been directly in touch with Stephen Timms, the UK minister for energy who, on 18 November, said that he would make

“a further announcement ... at the earliest possible time”?

Have we any idea of what that time scale might be and can we have published any notification that the Executive gave directly to the UK minister?

Lewis Macdonald: I can assure Margaret Ewing that on 17 November—the day that the decision was announced—I spoke directly to Sir John Mogg, the chairman of Ofgem, to Ian Marchant, the chief executive of Scottish and Southern Energy plc, and to Stephen Timms, the energy minister in the Department of Trade and Industry. They all gave me assurances that they were as keen as I was to ensure that consumers would not be affected by the changes. Stephen Timms, in particular, gave me an assurance that his officials were already working on introducing an alternative scheme, in order to avoid any significant impact on consumers in the north of Scotland. Sir John Mogg indicated that, because of the legal advice that had been received, the Ofgem consultation would be completed quickly and that in that process—in the course of this year—it would come to a view on the removal of the existing subsidy arrangement. The DTI is very keen to produce an alternative proposal as quickly as possible.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I thank the minister for those answers. Does he agree that, as the Highlands are going to be such a source of renewable energy—wind

power, wave power and hydroelectric power—it is very important that Highland consumers see the benefit of that and are not penalised in any way?

Lewis Macdonald: I could not agree more with the points that Maureen Macmillan makes. The north of Scotland in general has led the way in the United Kingdom in the production of hydroelectricity. That is the origin of the question that we are addressing here today. The DTI and I are keen to ensure that the north of Scotland does not suffer any disbenefit as a result of the changes.

Destitution

2. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what provision it plans to make for the increasing number of destitute people in Scotland. (S2O-896)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Margaret Curran): There is no recognised measure of destitution as such. The Executive has a range of policies in place to tackle social exclusion, homelessness and poverty, as was demonstrated in the recent debate on poverty in Scotland.

Patrick Harvie: Does the minister acknowledge that, regardless of where the policies that create destitution among our asylum-seeking guests come from—whether they come from London or Edinburgh—it is part of the Scottish Executive's role to make provision for people who are suffering destitution and absolute poverty on our streets, particularly as we move into winter?

Ms Curran: I am sure that the member would recognise that the Scottish Executive is determined to ensure that we deal with poverty in Scotland and that of course we would want to deal with any cases of destitution with which we were able to deal. On previous occasions, Patrick Harvie and I have discussed the absolute requirement for us to operate within Scottish law, and within the scope of the law. Within that framework, we will do whatever we can to assist asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland. With all due respect—I understand the tenor of Mr Harvie's question—it is acknowledged that we have made strenuous efforts to provide services within the scope that exists.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Question 3 is withdrawn.

Schools (Charitable Status)

4. Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will support charitable status for all Scotland's schools. (S2O-865)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): Any body whose main purpose

is the advancement of education and which provides a public benefit is able, and will continue to be able, to be considered for charitable status.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Can a clear statement be made about what Scottish schools should do to preserve that charitable status?

Peter Peacock: As Lord James and the chamber know, we are about to consult on changes to charity law generally with a view to legislating. At no point in that process will existing charities automatically lose their charitable status, provided that they meet the new definitions in the bill that we produce and that they can show clearly that a public benefit derives from their work. The regulator will deal with charitable status case by case.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Does the minister agree that it would be unforgivable if negotiations with private sector schools had delayed charity law reform? Will he confirm that he will consider affording charitable status not only to existing private sector schools, but to local authority-run school projects that are for the public benefit of local children and are funded by not-for-profit trusts?

Peter Peacock: I know that the SNP opposes our public-private partnership proposals, which will provide the single biggest investment ever in Scottish education. The SNP continues to try to create the illusion of an alternative from a spurious charitable route, to which Fiona Hyslop may have referred today.

Members: Spurious?

Peter Peacock: Yes, the suggestion is entirely spurious. What is important is the fact that we are about to review charity law. We will have broad definitions, and we will leave it to the regulator to determine qualification for charitable status case by case. That is the best way to proceed.

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): Would the minister care to give his Christmas message to employees of the construction company that was forced out of business by the collapse of the East Lothian schools PPP?

Peter Peacock: I know that I have the correct colour of beard for Christmas messages but, in all seriousness, I say that the situation is difficult and involves many legal complications. Action is under way in relation to the winding-up of that company, so it would be wrong for me to comment in detail. However, such situations are not unusual with any form of contract to build a school, whether under a public-private partnership or in the traditional way. In a past life, I was involved in situations in which companies had gone bust in the middle of building a school. The situation is complex to sort out, but that can be done.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): Why should charitable status be given to institutions such as Fettes College, which practise social exclusion by charging fees of up to £19,000 a year to produce uncharitable people such as Tony Blair, who practises further social exclusion by proposing to charge students top-up fees of up to £3,000 a year?

Peter Peacock: As Dennis Canavan knows, the Executive has done more to tackle social exclusion than any Administration has and it will continue to do so. One feature of our new work on charities is clarity: public benefit must flow from a body that has charitable status. The regulator will test that public benefit case by case, and if it cannot be shown, a body will have difficulty in qualifying for charitable status.

Trunk Road Maintenance

5. Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is satisfied that the arrangements currently made by BEAR Scotland Ltd for winter gritting of trunk roads in the north of Scotland are sufficient and safe. (S2O-872)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): The Scottish Executive is satisfied that the contractual requirements for trunk road winter maintenance in the north of Scotland are sufficient and safe. I assure the Parliament that any concerns that are drawn to the Executive's attention about operational arrangements will be thoroughly investigated and that appropriate action will be taken if necessary.

Fergus Ewing: The minister is aware, as we discussed the matter over lunch—

Members: Oh.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): That was very dangerous.

Fergus Ewing: No food was involved.

Recently, I met workers in Kingussie who told me that the new work rosters that BEAR has introduced mean that in some cases they might have to work one man per lorry for 20 out of 24 hours. How on earth can that constitute a proper health and safety policy? Does the minister agree that that matter should be investigated urgently?

Nicol Stephen: As I mentioned over lunch, or, to be more accurate, just before lunch—I am glad that Fergus Ewing reached the chamber in time to ask his question after our discussion—I am willing to investigate further the serious issue that he has raised. The Scottish Executive will act urgently if there are any health and safety issues that relate to the work force or to cars, lorries or buses that are affected by trunk road maintenance. Whether in respect of the mobilisation of gritters or the

working conditions of staff, BEAR should operate safely according to contractual arrangements and legislative requirements. I have no reason to believe that it is doing otherwise, but I will thoroughly investigate the matter. I know that Fergus Ewing welcomes the offer that I made to him earlier to keep him involved in the matter and to arrange a meeting directly with BEAR and Scottish Executive officials.

Asset Seizure (Drug Dealers)

6. Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has assessed the effectiveness of its policy of seizing the assets of suspected drug dealers. (S2O-893)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 considerably strengthened the previously available powers of confiscation and seizure. The First Minister recently announced that £1.5 million has already been recovered—not just from drug dealers but from other criminals—during the first few months since the implementation of the act in March this year. We expect increasing returns over the coming months as more cases come through the courts.

Obviously, we will keep the effectiveness of the provisions under review to ensure that they meet our policy of confiscating the assets of drug dealers and others who are involved in exploitative crime. Doing so will help to deplete their working capital and limit their ability to further their criminal activities.

Dr Murray: The seizure of more than £1.5 million in assets and the freezing of a further £3.2 million in Scotland since the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 became law is encouraging, but will the minister tell members about the mechanism under which the share that is to go to the communities that are affected will be allocated? Will he assure me that small communities such as those in Dumfries and Galloway, which also suffer from the scourge of drugs, will benefit from the redistribution of those funds?

Hugh Henry: On 21 November, the First Minister announced that any future funds that are seized as a result of the measures would go directly to communities that are most affected. Many communities throughout Scotland are blighted by the effects of drugs. As a result of conversations that Dr Murray has had with me, I know that Dumfries and Galloway is not immune to such problems.

We are working on the policy and on how we might best distribute the moneys in question. We want the moneys to be effective and targeted, and one of our problems is that if we spread them too thinly, they can cease to be effective. We shall

bear in mind the arguments that the member has made about her constituency. Once the policy has been determined, we will announce the results as soon as we can.

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): Will the minister seek to bring an end to the current arrangement whereby 50 per cent of the proceeds of crime that are recovered are automatically handed straight back to the Treasury in London? Will he demand that all of that money is reinvested in the Scottish communities that bear the brunt of crime that is committed in Scotland?

Hugh Henry: That the glass should always be thought to be half empty rather than half full is typical. I welcome the fact that we have been able to use the money. Matters have developed in a quite unprecedented way. In the past, such money would not have been available to us, but it is now having an effect. We are in discussions with our colleagues in the Treasury and we hope that we will be able to announce the results of those discussions in the future. We are certainly making a case for Scotland about how the money should best be used, but we should recognise the progress that has been made and the benefits that have accrued. We should also start to look on the positive side rather than always be negative.

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): Does the minister concede that for as long as crimes go unprosecuted, for as long as there are delays in court procedures that lead to adjournment and postponement of cases and for as long as there is doubt in the minds of members of the public about the number of criminal activities that end up with a conviction, the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 will have limited practical application? Does that concern him?

Hugh Henry: Annabel Goldie spoke to her amendment in yesterday's debate, but has had to wait 24 hours to bring that matter to the chamber. We have discussed the matter previously. We are making changes, there are improvements and more resources are being invested. However, in the questions of Annabel Goldie and Nicola Sturgeon, we hear the same old worn groove from the same old record as they refuse to recognise any improvements that have been made. We will not be deflected from what we are doing and the improvements will flow through.

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): Does the minister agree that the best way forward is not simply to take the peanuts that we currently receive from drug criminals, because that represents only the tip of the iceberg? Does he agree that the best way forward is to save money in the criminal justice system through decent rehabilitation facilities in our communities across Scotland? For every £1 spent on rehab, we save £3 in the criminal justice system.

Hugh Henry: I recognise the benefits of treatment and rehabilitation. Indeed, we announced a thorough review of treatment and rehabilitation services in Scotland, which will be completed by the end of this year. I accept wholeheartedly that money spent on rehabilitation can be effective. However, unlike the Scottish Socialist Party, we do not believe in making respectable business people out of drug dealers. We will continue to resist that policy.

Ms Byrne rose—

The Presiding Officer: I think that Rosemary Byrne has a point of order.

Ms Byrne: I do not know who Hugh Henry was listening to. There is no way that I support drug dealers.

The Presiding Officer: Wait a minute. What is the point of order?

Ms Byrne: I did not say what Hugh Henry says I said.

The Presiding Officer: Order. I call Des McNulty.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): There is widespread concern about dealers' use of the proceeds of drug dealing to buy up legitimate businesses in order to use those businesses for the further processing of drugs. Will the minister assure me that every mechanism in the law will be used to prevent the drug trade being furthered through the buying-up of legitimate businesses? Will he consider using pieces of legislation such as the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill to do something about people who, in the furtherance of the drug trade, use children to intimidate and harass people who operate legitimate businesses?

Hugh Henry: The situation that is described by Des McNulty is complex. We know that criminals are becoming increasingly sophisticated. They launder their money through a number of business activities, such as taxi firms and suntan parlours, as has been reported over the years. Indeed, examples from the rest of the UK and Europe have suggested that some money-changing facilities are being used by criminals to launder money.

The sophistication of criminals needs to be matched by the sophistication of our law enforcement agencies. That is why we have invested significantly in the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency, which has had a remarkable record so far. However, we cannot be complacent. Every time we make a major advance, the criminals—often multinational businesses—also invest more in trying to stay ahead of those engaged in law enforcement. If legislation needs

to be passed, we will do so. If investment needs to be made, we will certainly consider that.

We are meeting with some success. In that regard, I pay tribute to those in the SDEA, and I recognise the work that has been done by Jim Orr, who leads the SDEA and who will be retiring shortly. The SDEA has been remarkably successful and I am sure that it will continue to be so.

Older People (Financial Security)

7. John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to meet its social justice target of making sure that older people are financially secure. (S2O-879)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Margaret Curran): We have implemented a wide range of measures to tackle poverty and disadvantage. For example, we are helping to maximise disposable income through our central heating programme, the warm deal, free local off-peak bus travel—which will be extended to a national scheme—and free personal and nursing care.

John Swinburne: Does the minister agree that the average council tax bill represents more than 25 per cent of the basic state pension but only 3.5 per cent of gross annual earnings? The Executive's omission of a target on dealing with the unfair impact of the council tax on pensioners means that it is failing pensioners. Will the Executive remedy that disregard by addressing the failures of the council tax benefit system or, further, by following John Prescott's plan for a 20 per cent reduction in council tax in England and Wales next April, which would release the necessary income to allow senior citizens to pay for household essentials such as heating?

Ms Curran: I do not know whether I will cover all the issues that John Swinburne raised in those questions, but I am sure that he will come back to me if I do not. I take it that his general point is about council tax rises and the impact that they have on pensioners' disposable income. The rises in Scotland were different from those in England—they were less than 5 per cent—and more than half of pensioner households receive council tax benefit, which exists to help poorer households.

I am sure that John Swinburne agrees that we have an important target for the poorest pensioners in Scotland, on whom our policies focus when appropriate. He will know about the review of local government finance, and my colleague Andy Kerr is working very closely with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to ensure that we develop appropriate council tax policies.

Some people—I do not know whether Mr Swinburne has ever been one—are irresponsible

in relation to how they communicate issues around the level of council tax payments that are required, because they imply that no tax would ever be required and that we do not have to pay for social services and public services. From my experience of working with the pensioners' movement, pensioners are aware of the need to be financially responsible. The Executive will also be financially responsible, and that is how we will deliver the best for pensioners in Scotland.

Rented Housing

8. Murray Tosh (West of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to measure the level of need for rented housing in each local authority area. (S2O-867)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Margaret Curran): All local authorities have a statutory duty to prepare a local housing strategy, which should include a comprehensive assessment of housing needs. I have asked local authorities to submit their strategies by April 2004. Communities Scotland will assess each strategy to develop a more comprehensive view of housing need at the national level.

Murray Tosh: The minister will be aware that a handful of councils have submitted their strategies this year. However, is she aware that at least one of them gave a net annual need figure for affordable housing that was half the level that it had identified through its housing needs assessment, on the basis that it regarded the strategy as a bid and put in a bid at the level at which it thought that it might be funded? Does she accept that, if other councils follow suit, there is a serious risk that councils in general or in aggregate might under-report the true level of need in Scotland? Will she ensure that councils submit needs assessments that are calculated on an agreed national methodology and that they report their estimated needs in full?

Ms Curran: I am sure that you will find this a surprising statement, Presiding Officer: I have some sympathy with what Murray Tosh has just said. It is clear that the local housing strategies are not bidding documents and we are trying to discourage local authorities from thinking of them as such. A rational approach towards housing in Scotland is needed. We need to be clear about how we measure need and what levers we use to attempt to meet that need. We are now attempting to develop further the rational approach that we have adopted and to ensure that we have the dialogue with local authorities and other housing providers that is necessary for us to meet the complex housing needs of Scotland's population, whether in urban or rural areas. We are taking forward our affordable housing strategy on that basis.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Has the minister directly consulted housing associations, such as Forth Housing Association and Rural Stirling Housing Association, which are in my area, to get a fuller picture not only of the points that Murray Tosh raises, but of details on infrastructure, such as water and sewerage?

Ms Curran: Mary Mulligan told the annual conference of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations that there is a need for such dialogue in Scotland and that we need to be clear about what is happening in housing provision on the front line and about the complexity of housing need. In some areas, we have an oversupply of inadequate housing and, in other places, there is an absolute shortage and the situation is acute. We need to understand that, which is why we are about to inaugurate a discussion with the key stakeholders, particularly picking up some of the issues to which Sylvia Jackson referred.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Does the minister recall stating, during the passage of the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Bill, that there would be no increase in homelessness applications as a result of that legislation? Will she say what monitoring has been carried out to check that position and what action has been taken to ensure that the waiting time for mainstream applicants for social rented housing decreases rather than increases?

Ms Curran: To be honest, I am not sure whether I really followed what Linda Fabiani said. I am not sure whether she was asking me about homelessness applications or mainstream housing, but I can come back to her if she tells me that I did not answer the question properly. We recognised that there would be an increase in homelessness applications, because we have given people the most radical package of rights that they have ever had in relation to homelessness, as has been recognised. We have always said that the increased package of rights has to be set in the context of a rational approach to housing to ensure that we balance supply with need, which is what we are attempting to do. That is why we introduced local housing strategies and are taking a much more evidence-based approach. It is also why we introduced systems, such as comprehensive registers, under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. I am happy to pursue those issues with Linda Fabiani later.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): In the village of Braemar, which is in the centre of the Cairngorms national park, in my constituency, 40 per cent of the 200 houses are second homes. There is a crying need for more rented accommodation. Does the minister appreciate that in such circumstances we need to take action in the shorter term as well as in the longer term?

Ms Curran: Yes. That is why we announced £10 million for the supply of housing in rural areas. I am aware that there are pockets of absolute shortage, particularly within the social rented sector. I am not pretending that somehow that money is a global solution to the problem. We must consider a much more comprehensive approach to ensure that we use the levers that are available to us to ensure that there is affordable housing in the social rented sector and to address the exclusion that some low-income families feel from the owner-occupied sector. We all face that challenge. I recognise the point that Mike Rumbles is raising. There are some immediate challenges.

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): Will the minister confirm that she has more than enough evidence of a serious shortage of affordable rented housing in some local authority areas in Scotland? Following her discussions with East Lothian Council on 6 October about a prudential borrowing scheme for investment in housing to rent, will she say when that exciting initiative can be taken forward?

Ms Curran: We anticipate the introduction of the prudential regime to housing in April 2004. I see that as a key development for many local authorities, in particular East Lothian Council, which faces many challenges and has taken forward its housing policy in an interesting way. The prudential regime is one option for it to take, as it sees fit—it is, of course, a matter for the council—to develop housing policy appropriate to its needs. That option is an important arm in our development of housing policy in Scotland.

Strategic Rail Authority (Meetings)

9. Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met the Strategic Rail Authority. (S2O-886)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): The Scottish Executive is in regular contact with the Strategic Rail Authority on a wide range of issues. I last met a representative of the SRA at approximately 11 am today.

Mr MacAskill: That precedes the minister's lunch meeting with my colleague, but there we go.

On the speculation about the SRA and the upgrade at Waverley, can the minister assure the Parliament that the work will address both capacity and access, that it will not be done piecemeal or on the cheap and that it will produce a first-class station for a capital city? Will he also assure us that the upgrade will be paid for in full by the United Kingdom bodies responsible, which have, after all, funded out of UK taxation—the projects are paid for by us as well—the Leeds and Manchester Piccadilly upgrades as well as £1.4 billion for the high-speed rail link from the channel to London?

Nicol Stephen: I can answer yes to most of the questions, but not to all of them. Yes, the upgrade of the station will tackle the capacity issues and the access issues—disabled access in particular. Yes, the upgrade will be of high quality and will respect the world heritage status of that area of Edinburgh. Yes, the upgrade needs to be a development fit for the capital city of Scotland, but it also needs to allow the development of rail services throughout Scotland. That is one reason why the upgrade is so strongly supported by people in the north, on the rest of the east coast and in the west of Scotland. It is crucial that we gain additional capacity so that, over the coming years, we can build the rail network in Scotland in the way that the Scottish Executive plans.

No, the upgrade will not all be funded by the SRA. We believe that a partnership approach will be the right approach. There is already a partnership involving the SRA. The initiative is led by the SRA, with Network Rail also in a leading role. The Scottish Executive is part of the group, as is the City of Edinburgh Council. I think that that approach will deliver the project. We are prepared to pay our share of the funding of the project. The key for me is that the project be delivered. It will be delivered in phases. I want to get the phase involving development, the expansion of capacity and the improvement of access under way as soon as possible. We will make an announcement on that as soon as possible.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): The minister has almost answered my question. He talked about developing Waverley station “over the coming years”, which will start alarm bells ringing for people who know that the station is already at capacity. He said that he will produce the proposals shortly. Will he publish details of the scope of the work that he wants at Waverley station? The key thing is not only that we start the work at the station, but that the work is of sufficient scale to cope with our radical ambitions, which are not only for Edinburgh and the surrounding area, but for the whole of the east of Scotland.

Nicol Stephen: I agree with that point completely. I reassure Sarah Boyack that the development proposals will tackle the issues of congestion at the station and the level of access that is required to develop new services. Improvements to disability access will also be covered. That work will be done in the first phase of the development. Given that the development is a major project that will cost a great deal of money, it must be phased appropriately and a partnership approach is important.

Congestion Charging

10. Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will ensure

that, before any congestion charging proposal is approved, it complies fully with the criterion of fair treatment in relation to road users. (S2O-889)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): A charging scheme cannot come into force until the order that makes it has been submitted to and confirmed by the Scottish ministers. We would assess the extent to which any scheme meets the fair treatment criterion and would consider the scheme as a whole before deciding whether to confirm an order.

Bristow Muldoon: Does the minister accept that a scheme that introduced exemptions for residents of one local authority area who cause congestion while charging residents of other local authority areas who cause equal congestion would not be fair treatment but outrageous discrimination? Would he reject any such proposal?

Nicol Stephen: I have said several times that any scheme must be fair and appropriate and that there must be evidence of public support for it, which must not come only from the local authority area in question. We will consider all representations that are made. We are starting such a process for the proposed Edinburgh road-user charging scheme. As the Minister for Transport, I must decide with the other Scottish ministers whether to grant the final confirmation of the order, so it would be inappropriate for me to say more this afternoon.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Is the minister aware that it is estimated that almost half the money that is raised from the City of Edinburgh Council’s congestion charge—which could be as much as half of £900 million—may be returned to local authorities outside Edinburgh to fund local transport improvements? For example, £96 million could go back to West Lothian Council. Does the minister agree that that issue should be taken into account when deciding whether fair treatment is ensured?

Nicol Stephen: All the factors will be taken into account. The significant sums of money that Robin Harper is talking about could be wisely invested in new public transport initiatives, which is part of the proposal. However, that is only one consideration that ministers must take into account when considering the attitude of local people towards the scheme.

The suggestion ties in well with the Scottish Executive’s commitment to increase dramatically the level of investment in public transport in Scotland. In the period to 2006, the Executive’s direct funding for public transport will increase by more than 70 per cent, excluding any contribution that might be made from road-user charging. Separately, we are committed to £375 million of

new investment in the Edinburgh trams project, which again excludes any investment that may flow from road-user charging.

Scottish Ambulance Service (Prioritisation of Calls)

11. Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how the Scottish Ambulance Service prioritises emergency calls in the local community during sporting events. (S2O-890)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): Emergency calls to the Scottish Ambulance Service will be categorised in the same way, whether or not a sporting event is being held in a locality. The service uses an electronic call-categorisation system to assist staff in prioritising the response to emergency calls.

Ms White: The minister talked about categorising and prioritising. Does he agree that something is very wrong with the system when, in one instance, two ambulances that were sitting outside a football ground could not respond to an emergency call a few yards away? Will he look into the way in which the service is categorised and prioritised?

Malcolm Chisholm: There is clear guidance on safety at sports grounds, which is why ambulances are required to be in attendance at major sporting events. I am sure that we all understand the reason for that. In those circumstances, the Scottish Ambulance Service must ensure that the requisite number of emergency vehicles are available for all the other calls that may be necessary. I know that there was a tragic incident in Glasgow recently, which I was very sorry to read about, and I extend my condolences to the family involved. I know that the Scottish Ambulance Service is urgently reviewing the circumstances of the case, but I do not think that the fact that there were two ambulances at Ibrox is a relevant factor.

Transportation of Patients (Charging)

12. Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP): To ask the Scottish Executive how charging patients with cancer in the Dumbarton area for their transport to Paisley for treatment is consistent with its social inclusion strategy. (S2O-907)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): Ambulance transport will be provided wherever there is a clinical need. In other cases, financial support for travel costs is available for those who need it.

Frances Curran: Does the minister agree that the rush to centralise services not just in the Argyll and Clyde NHS Board area, but in all areas,

undermines the Executive's social inclusion policy? Can he guarantee that those who are in poor families will be helped?

Malcolm Chisholm: The reality is that the moves that have been made out of the Vale of Leven hospital were made for reasons of clinical safety, which has to be the paramount consideration. Equally, services will be and are delivered locally wherever that is possible. I know that, for example, a lot of the cancer services that the question refers to are delivered at the Vale of Leven hospital.

As I said, when patients have to travel, they will get an ambulance if that is clinically required. That is a matter for the clinicians to decide. When patients use public transport, the same system will apply throughout Scotland—although there is an extra provision in the Highlands—and people on low incomes will not pay. People who are over 60 and have to use public transport will benefit from the national scheme that we all know about.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Does the minister agree that, rather than transport patients across the Clyde, it would be better and more desirable to tell NHS Argyll and Clyde to work with NHS Greater Glasgow to ensure that a full range of services are provided for people who live north of the river, as that would fit their natural travel-to-work patterns, their social patterns and existing transport links?

Malcolm Chisholm: Over the next year, NHS Argyll and Clyde will undertake a major piece of work in its clinical services review. It has already made some decisions on maternity provision, which I have commented on, and it is looking at all the other services. The question mentions cancer patients and many of the patient flows from Jackie Baillie's constituency into Glasgow are to the Beatson oncology clinic. The same travel arrangements will apply as I described earlier.

Hydro Schemes

13. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what role new hydro schemes will play in its plans to increase the generation of electricity by renewable means. (S2O-871)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): That depends on what proposals come forward from the industry, but I have approved three new hydro schemes this year and I am considering eight more.

Alex Johnstone: The minister will shortly have to make a decision on the Shildaig-Slattadale proposal in the west Highlands. Will he give an undertaking to take into account decisions that have already been made locally? Should he

decide to reject that scheme, will he, in the interests of transparency, make available any new scientific evidence that might have persuaded him that it was inappropriate to proceed?

Lewis Macdonald: Alex Johnstone will understand that the consents procedure requires that I do not comment on the particulars of any specific project. The Shildaig decision—like every other decision on a renewable energy proposal—will be made on the basis of our existing planning and consent guidance, whose provisions are clear. I remind Parliament that it is only a few weeks since a number of members—especially on the Conservative benches—suggested that the planning guidance on renewable energy for wind farms was not tough enough in taking environmental considerations into account. However, on both wind and hydro power, we will seek to strike a balance between economic development and environmental considerations, as is set out clearly in the national planning policy guidance on renewable energy.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am sure that the minister will agree that an increase in the generation of electricity from renewable sources in the Highlands and Islands is to be very much welcomed. However, that requires an upgrade to the interconnectors and the grid. Who will provide the cash for that? What is the scale of the investment that is required? Will that be in place during this session?

Lewis Macdonald: The responsibility for upgrades to the grid lies with the grid owners. We are working jointly with the Department of Trade and Industry, the regulator—the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets—and the grid-owning companies on their plans for carrying the work forward.

Point of Order

15:10

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Before the chamber empties, I ask whether we could welcome to the gallery Luis Eduardo Garcia, a Columbian trade union leader with Sinaltrainal. The reason why it is important to do so is that he fears for his life when he returns to Columbia. I hope that he will have the support of the Scottish Parliament.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): That is not a point of order, but I am sure that members regard him as being very welcome. [*Applause.*]

Bathing Water Quality

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-695, in the name of Allan Wilson, on protecting bathing water quality. There are three amendments to the motion. I ask those members who are not remaining for the debate to leave the chamber immediately. I call Allan Wilson to speak to and move the motion. Minister, you have 11 minutes.

15:12

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson): Thanks very much, Presiding Officer. I do not know whether I will fill the 11 minutes. I suspect that it is not compulsory.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Indeed it is not.

Allan Wilson: That might leave other members more time in which to make their contributions.

Today's debate provides a welcome opportunity to re-emphasise the importance of protecting Scotland's water environment, particularly our bathing waters, and to provide the Parliament with a full picture of the progress that has been made. It also provides us with a timely opportunity to consider the cost of those and future investments and to debate the implications of increasing standards, as is proposed by the current revision of the European bathing water directive.

Lest there be any dubiety about it, I should say first that Scotland has a very good water environment. There are almost 12,000km of coastal water around the Scottish mainland, 98 per cent of which the Scottish Environment Protection Agency reports as being of good or excellent condition. Some stretches are considered to be pristine or near pristine and none of our coastal water environment falls into the SEPA category of seriously polluted. We have a vast number of unspoiled beaches in rural areas, particularly in the Highlands and Islands, which are promoted by organisations such as the Marine Conservation Society for that very reason. They have miles of clean sand and water and there is often not a person in sight.

Unfortunately, we have had a problem meeting the standards of the bathing water directive at some beaches at some times in the past. Pollution reaches coastal waters either through sewage treatment works or as a result of agricultural run-off from farms. It is the unique combination of our climate, geology and geography, coupled with our livestock industry, that, in some parts of the country, increases the risks to bathing water quality.

We have come a long way in five years. In 1998, when we had 23 designated bathing waters, only nine met the mandatory standard of the directive and only three met the higher guideline standard. Since then we have made steady progress. In 2002, for example, 31 of our designated bathing waters met the mandatory standard of the bathing water directive and 24 met the guideline standard, giving us a pass rate of 91.6 per cent.

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): The minister may be aware of the on-going correspondence that I have had about Broughty Ferry beach becoming a designated bathing water area. He may also be aware that in two seasons the beach has met the highest standard of water quality. Given that state of affairs, will the minister consider re-establishing the bathing waters review panel to examine beaches such as Broughty Ferry beach, which have made such significant improvements, so that they can have designated status and all the benefits that that would bring?

Allan Wilson: The short answer to the member's question is yes. We will come on to consider designation in the context of the revision of the directive. Bathing water quality is only one part of the picture. We are completing a comprehensive survey of bathing water usage that we conducted over what members will recall was a glorious summer. We will consider that information in the context of other information relating to bathing water quality—the geological, geographical and climatic considerations to which I have referred. We will examine designation as a whole, taking into account all the factors that I have mentioned. Broughty Ferry beach and its popularity will be an important consideration in that process.

This year—2003—we had our best ever season, with a pass rate of 95 per cent. Eighteen designated bathing waters met the mandatory standard and 39 met the higher guideline standard. That is a good news story—not just for the Executive, but for the people of Scotland. It shows that we have adopted the right approach, have invested in the right solutions and have co-ordinated actions effectively. If we could count every year on the fine weather that we all enjoyed this summer—as parts of the south Mediterranean can—we would be able to guarantee high levels of compliance year on year, because sunlight naturally kills harmful bacteria in the water. However, here in Scotland we cannot always rely on having fine weather.

We have nevertheless made substantial progress in bringing our bathing waters up to European standards, which is great. I know that Bruce Crawford, in particular, will welcome that good news. However, such progress is expensive. Between 2000 and 2006, Scottish Water will invest

approximately £1.6 billion in improving urban waste water infrastructure to protect our water environment, which includes our bathing waters. Additional public-private partnership schemes will invest a further £500 million during the same period. That is a huge sum of money by anyone's standards. The investment has been prioritised to protect our bathing waters. All members, their constituents and every other Scottish Water customer have paid and will continue to pay for those improvements.

The work cannot stop there. As I mentioned at the start of my speech, a revised bathing water directive that proposes even higher water quality standards is being discussed in Europe. Why have those higher standards been proposed? The purpose of the directive is to ensure clean, safe coastal water for the public to enjoy and to afford equal opportunity and access to clean beaches throughout continental Europe and these islands. Protecting public health is a key priority in that process.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I am glad that the minister has told us about the European Commission's new bathing water directive. He is right to say that it will set even higher standards. What has the Executive done to ascertain the cost implications of even greater investment in the water industry and the potential impact on charge payers when the directive comes into force?

Allan Wilson: Considerable work, some of which is focused on shaping the directive, is being done to ensure that the directive's emphasis on improving quality suits the geographical, geological and climatic conditions to which I referred, so that the potential costs to Scotland are minimised and the potential benefits of improving water quality are maximised. As the work on the directive comes to a conclusion, it will shape the cost-benefit analysis.

Bathing in water that does not meet current European standards would not make people seriously ill, but they might get a minor eye infection or a stomach upset, which could spoil a holiday. It is only natural not to want to bathe in water that is anything other than perfectly clean. If we cannot guarantee always to meet the proposed new European standards, what can we do? As I have said before in the chamber, not even I can change the Scottish climate—

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): But in an independent Scotland—

Allan Wilson: After independence, perhaps every day would be the first day of spring.

I am sure that Alex Johnstone agrees that de-stocking the entire Ayrshire coast is a rather drastic prospect. One option is to live with the

minor temporary decreases in water quality and to ensure that the public is told about them so that people can take an informed decision about whether to bathe. That seems to be a realistic approach—after all, the dips in water quality occur only when it is pouring with rain, and who would want to use the beach in those conditions? Meeting the proposed new standards at all locations all the time will be a big challenge for us, especially in wet years.

I have outlined the extensive work that we have done to improve coastal water quality and explained the problems and costs that we face in making further, marginal, improvements. A new bathing water directive is looming. Should we look again at our bathing water designations policy? Where should the designated waters be? How can we best protect the public? What price are we prepared to pay for marginal improvements in water quality?

We need to adopt a sustainable approach to our bathing waters to ensure that we protect and manage our excellent water environment to benefit the people of Scotland. I am therefore happy to open this afternoon's debate and to hear what colleagues have to say on this complicated issue.

I move,

That the Parliament commends the results achieved during the 2003 bathing season for Scotland's designated bathing waters; welcomes the Scottish Executive's continued commitment to place the environment at the forefront of our strategy for protecting our bathing waters; acknowledges the importance of continuing to strive to achieve best value from the considerable investment that Scotland is applying, which in turn enhances Scotland's tourist credentials, and endorses the partnership approach taken by the Executive to work with all sectors to reduce pollution to the water environment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. The 11 minutes turned out to be both guideline and mandatory.

15:23

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): Allan Wilson started with a distinct lack of enthusiasm, which suggests that he was not party to the decision to have this debate. Despite what some members of the press might think, the debate has nothing to do with swimming pools. Nevertheless, we must face the fact that an increasing number of commentators are looking at the debates the Executive is bringing to the Parliament and asking, "Why on earth are they spending so long talking about that?" To me, it is not so much that the topics of debate are pointless—today's debate, for example, has the potential to be important; the real pity is that we have been presented with yet another self-congratulatory, self-deluding motion from the Executive, on such a narrow focus.

Good progress has been made: SEPA figures show that 95 per cent of Scotland's bathing waters met mandatory European quality standards and 60 per cent met the guideline pass standard, which means excellent quality. I am happy to commend those who have been involved in securing that progress, but even SEPA expressed disappointment that 100 per cent compliance was not achieved. It also recognised that if we had not had such a relatively dry summer, the results might not have been as good. I suspect that last summer will provide a blip in more than one set of statistics.

We should aim for excellence grade for all our bathing waters. We need to ask why the Government officially recognises only 60 bathing beaches in Scotland. Denmark has designated more than 1,000 beaches and Finland—Finland, for goodness' sake—has designated 500. Initially, 126 beaches were recommended to the Scottish Office, which opted to select 23. That number was then raised to 60 at the start of 1999.

As any beach that is used regularly has the potential to be designated, it is puzzling that the Executive apparently has no plans to reconvene the bathing water review panel. It seems as though the Executive is happy to say, "We have listed our 60 beaches. Everything is fine with them, so there is nothing more to be done." Perhaps that is part of the do-nothing-hope-no-one-notices strategy that the Executive appears to be pursuing.

A huge number of Scottish beaches lie outwith the list of 60. Hundreds of our most beautiful, quiet, seemingly unspoiled and relatively remote beaches are used by members of the public. Those members of the public equally deserve to be protected from pollution. Quiet out-of-the-way beaches are not the only beaches to fall through the net. Many other beaches that are not on the official list are used regularly by bathers, windsurfers, surfers and sailors. Some of those were tested by SEPA: beaches at Largs, Kirkcaldy and Helensburgh failed to meet the EU standard.

I do not believe that we should get too hung up on the number of blue flags we can run up our seaside flagpoles. Some of the things, such as toilet facilities and car parking, that are required for that status would change the unspoilt nature that is part of the appeal of some of our beaches. However, we need to ensure that the water quality around those beaches is up to standard. Such beaches are becoming increasingly popular with surfers and other watersports enthusiasts. A clean environment is a major part of Scotland's tourism potential. That is why it is a pity that today's debate has been given such a narrow focus: bathing waters do not exist in isolation from the rest of the marine environment.

Allan Wilson: Does the member accept that in introducing the debate I referred to the water environment more generally? I also referred to SEPA's pass rate of 98 per cent. Does the member accept that there must be a correlation between usage and quality if the intent of the directive is to be properly implemented?

Roseanna Cunningham: There is nothing wrong with making a correlation between usage and quality as long as we are ultimately talking about the water quality around all our coastal areas.

In a speech to WWF's oceans recovery seminar on 23 October, Allan Wilson promised that he would work with stakeholders before Christmas to produce a full consultation on the marine environment early in 2004. Today's debate would have been an ideal opportunity to inform the Parliament about the progress of that initiative, but the Executive is giving extremely mixed messages on its commitment to introducing legislation to protect the marine environment. Just a month after Allan Wilson's speech in October, Ross Finnie discussed the issue with the Environment and Rural Development Committee. Let me quote at length what Ross Finnie said during consideration of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Bill:

"If you can dispense with this bill quickly, deal with the water environment legislation relatively quickly and dispose of the proposed strategic environmental assessment bill in a trice, we will have time to consider much wider ranges of legislation. I do not wish to be facetious; the matter is important, but I have introduced a heavy programme that will take up much parliamentary time. I am conscious of the burden that we have already placed on your committee and you have other things to do. We will continue to work up what is required in terms of consultation and the scope we are looking at, but we have already proposed to the committee a hefty programme of legislation that will make a lot of work for you and me."—[*Official Report, Environment and Rural Development Committee*, 26 November 2003; c 522-23.]

I do not wish to appear facetious either, but if we have such a heavy work load and if there is so much meaningful debate to be had, why do we spend our time on debates such as today's, which are designed to be nothing more than self-congratulatory time fillers? That is why my amendment talks about bathing water quality being a component of the bigger issue that is the wider marine environment.

The Parliament needs to do some bigger-picture thinking. That is what people want to see. If we are discussing the waters around our shores, of course we need to consider the progress in improving the quality of the bathing water at 60 hand-picked beaches, but we must also consider the call for a single EU directive on maritime safety and oil pollution that has been made by KIMO—I shall not try to pronounce its Finnish name in full—which is the organisation that represents coastal

communities throughout the north of Europe. We need to take on board KIMO's findings that 96 per cent of dead seabirds surveyed in 2001 had plastics in their stomachs.

We should be considering the potential threat to our marine environment of the toxic fleet from the United States, and Westminster's plans for the dismantling of nuclear submarines. We should join the Irish Government in its concern about the impact of Sellafield on the marine environment.

We are a coastal country—a maritime nation—and we should be doing a lot more than talk about paddling in the sea. The Executive motion does no more than dip its toe in the issues that should be addressed. I ask members to support my amendment.

I move amendment S2M-695.3, to leave out from “welcomes” to end and insert:

“but believes that this is only one component in a larger concern about the marine environment that must be addressed urgently if the commitment to improving Scotland's natural environment overall is to be realised.”

15:30

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Today's debate is one of those in which I ought to take the opportunity to declare an interest, given that agricultural run-off is important to the subject. I should make clear my interest because I have some experience of what SEPA is trying to achieve.

The Executive's motion is self-congratulatory, but we should not allow ourselves to make that the only criterion for refusing to support it. Although I am proposing a fairly radical amendment, I am happy that we should support the efforts of the Executive and the others who are involved. Many people are working hard to ensure that our bathing waters are improved and that their quality is protected in the long term.

SEPA inspectors are involved in a project in which they visit farms where agricultural run-off is a possibility. The area in the north-east where I farm managed to escape designation as a nitrate vulnerable zone, but it has been included in the pilot project. I was able to be present when the audit took place. The work that is being done by SEPA inspectors—like the work that was done when these matters were the responsibility of the predecessor organisation, the North East River Purification Board—has been constructive and positive. Wherever possible, the inspectors have sought to work hand-in-hand with those who may be creating pollution, to ensure that they understand the regulations and are able to implement them in such a way as to prevent pollution. It is a pleasant departure from the

policeman mentality that often reigns in Government departments.

On the broader subject, the European Commission has proposed a replacement for the 1976 bathing water directive. The Conservatives welcome the chance to update the legislation. The Commission proposals include higher water quality standards, but on two, rather than 19, tests that affect public health. That is a more integrated quality management approach and the harmonised methods for handling water samples will also be of benefit.

The Conservatives in the European Parliament have welcomed the chance to simplify and update the legislation, to make it flexible and to improve the information given to the public about the quality of bathing water throughout Europe. However, Socialist, Liberal and Green amendments that have been passed in the European Parliament would extend the scope of the proposed directive to include waters that are used for other recreational activities, such as surfing and windsurfing. Those activities tend to be undertaken further from the shore over an extended period of time. Designating all those new waters as bathing water sites would significantly increase the extent of monitoring and management.

Amendments that add new criteria for the chemical composition of water and standards that relate to aquatic life but do not have a direct bearing on public health have also been pushed through. They will add to monitoring costs and could confuse the public, who are looking for reassurance about the health and safety of bathing water.

Of particular importance to Scotland is an amendment that is being lodged by Labour MEPs on behalf of the UK Government. It would allow more flexibility at times of diffuse pollution. The text of the amendment was only partly passed at first reading on 20 November 2003, but the UK will press it in the Council and the Conservatives will support it at second reading.

The Conservative party knows how important it is for Scotland to have a clean and safe water environment, especially bathing water. It must reach the EU's guidelines to safeguard public health and promote Scotland as an attractive place to visit—for the sake of our £4.5 billion per annum tourism industry if nothing else. We therefore urge the Executive to take the necessary action to bring the three failing beaches that are included in the report up to the level of mandatory EU standards.

The Executive must ensure that Scottish Water minimises sewage effluent leakage into rivers, as the effluent eventually runs on to Scottish

beaches. Cases of that nature attract adverse publicity, as happened in April this year when a sewer in Ayr collapsed and the river was flooded with effluent. Scottish Water has a bad record on leakage, not only from sewers but from water supplies, and compares unfavourably with suppliers in England and Wales. The water industry commissioner has already highlighted the extra cost to Scottish consumers that results from that record. It must be corrected, and we must consider whether we should address the way in which Scottish Water is held accountable. The current arm's-length approach taken by the Executive has resulted in Scottish Water being confused by competing priorities and budgetary constraints.

It is increasingly clear that planning will be a key issue in the waste disposal issues that the Parliament and the Executive have to address. We should have known that: Scottish Water's applications for much-needed improvements in sewage treatment have continually been knocked back on planning grounds. When we address the planning issue, it is essential that we simplify and speed up the process. With those provisos, I would be pleased, should I be required at the end of the day, to vote for the Executive's motion—but as others have said, it is a self-congratulatory motion.

I move amendment S2M-695.1, to leave out from "commends" to end and insert:

"notes the continuing improvement in bathing water quality in Scotland but believes that further progress is now dependent on addressing the limitations of Scottish Water and the planning system."

15:36

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): For centuries, the seas have been humanity's dumping ground. We therefore welcome the improvements to our coasts that have been made in recent years and the political interest being shown through the number of amendments that have been lodged for this afternoon's debate.

However, we must not forget that we have had a very dry summer, which, as the minister said, will have served to improve the bathing water results. Although the work of Scottish Water, SEPA and, no doubt, many of the individual farmers and other land managers who have contributed to this year's good result is welcome and to be commended, we should be aware that we also got lucky with the weather this summer.

Even within the current year's results, though, not all our beaches reach the minimum standards. The Executive's 2002 strategy for improvement states:

"Nothing short of full compliance will be acceptable."

We should bear in mind that what we are talking about here is compliance with standards set by the bathing water directive way back in 1976. Although we have a record of improvement against standards set by that directive, we need to accept that, under the new, revised directive, compliance will be harder to achieve.

Allan Wilson: I understand the point that Mark Ruskell is making, but does it not run contrary to his previous point, which was that we got lucky this year? In fact, we have made continuous progress from 50 per cent compliance in 1998 to 95 per cent compliance in 2003. This is not simply a freak result in one year; there is evidence of steady progress over that period.

Mr Ruskell: I have already mentioned that steady progress has been made, but the motion alludes much more to this year's results. We cannot consider only this year's results: we have to consider the steady progress over time and, indeed, continued progress. While we have a record of improvement against standards set by the 1976 directive, we need to accept that, under the revised directive, compliance will be harder to achieve.

The minister is right to say that there is no room for complacency; nor should we forget that many bathing beaches that are used by the public need to be brought under the scope of the new directive. For example, beaches such as Kirkcaldy Linktown and Largo east in my region, which are vital for the regeneration of the Fife coast, are still failing to meet those basic safety limits.

Given the impact of diffuse pollution from agriculture on bathing water, we need to consider what opportunities the common agricultural policy reform will offer for shifting Government funding away from agricultural practices that contribute to pollution. Let us not forget that, while we applaud the £2.5 million Executive biogas project that was launched today, £600 million goes into agricultural subsidies each year under the CAP—public money equivalent to one and a half Scottish Parliament buildings every year.

We should seek the highest possible level of modulation under CAP reform to pay farmers for environmental benefits. We should also ensure that the definitions of good agricultural practice that will require to be met for receipt of subsidy are synonymous with excellent environmental management on the farm.

CAP reform is not the only policy area that requires attention. Scotland has seen decades of underinvestment in our water structure. We should pay heed to Unison's warning that current investment has to be paid for either through water

charges or by diverting resources from other public services.

I also want to draw members' attention to weaknesses in the bathing water directive when it comes to pollution from non-biological sources. Areas such as Sandside bay, on the north coast of Scotland can become contaminated with spent fuel particles that have leaked from Dounreay. If Sandside bay were a designated bathing area, it could slip through the bathing water directive net because the standards in the directive do not apply to radioactive or chemical pollution.

If we were to find ourselves cutting up nuclear submarine hulls, the risk would be further magnified. We need a proactive interpretation of the statement in the revised directive that says that

"care for our bathing waters needs to progress from simply sampling and monitoring to integrated quality management".

The water framework directive that was enacted by the Scottish Parliament as the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003 is a far-reaching piece of legislation that has resource implications in keeping with its importance. The Executive commitment in the partnership agreement to implement the act is welcome. It will provide the policy context within which the bathing water directive can operate.

The Executive has committed itself to consulting on the best strategy for protecting and enhancing all of Scotland's coastline. In that respect, it is significant that the revised bathing water directive embraces the principles of integrated coastal zone management. That concept represents the sort of joined-up approach that we need to take to the promotion of the sustainable management of our coasts. It is an approach that I hope is implicit in the wording of the Executive's motion, which refers to the Executive's approach

"to work with all sectors to reduce pollution to the water environment."

It is easy to place the responsibility for clean bathing waters on Scottish Water and SEPA alone. We need to face up to our own patterns of consumption and to accept that we all have a part to play in minimising pollution.

The improvements that we have seen in bathing water quality are welcome. Further progress is needed, however, before we can come close to meeting the requirements of the bathing water directive and of our own Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003. We have to tackle pollution at source and to accept that doing so requires investment. The longer-term benefits to Scotland's economy, the quality of life and quality of our environment will, however, make that a real investment for the future.

I move amendment S2M-695.4, to leave out from "commends" to end and insert:

"notes that while 2003 represents a record year for compliance with the Bathing Water Directive, some of Scotland's best bathing locations still fail to meet minimum standards; notes that compliance with the higher standards required by a revised European Directive will place further demands upon Scottish Water, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and other bodies with responsibilities for water quality; further notes that other legislation also impacts on Scotland's bathing water quality, and urges the Scottish Executive to be mindful of these considerations and of the importance of integrated coastal zone management when it consults on the best strategy for protecting and enhancing Scotland's coastline."

15:42

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): The statistics that have been published for 2003, which show that 95 per cent of our 60 designated bathing waters meet the mandatory standard and that more than 60 per cent meet the higher guideline standard, are to be welcomed.

Allan Wilson and other members outlined the considerable progress that has been made since 1998 and, indeed, from 2002, with a little help from the weather. I do not need to rehearse the statistics. However, there is no room for complacency. Five per cent, or three, of the 60 designated bathing beaches failed to meet the standard.

Even where bathing water meets the minimum standard, there is no guarantee of protection from the effects of pollutants. Friends of the Earth has pointed out that 73 per cent of reported illnesses among water sports enthusiasts occurred on beaches where water quality meets the minimum requirements.

There are many contributing factors to bathing water pollution. In the past, the main culprit has been sewage effluent. That is not surprising when collectively we produce 1.1 million cubic litres of liquid domestic sewage per day. All of us know that there is a lot of catching up to be done in respect of foul-water treatment. However, considerable investment has been made in upgrading existing sewage treatment works and in building new ones to eliminate sewage as a contributory factor to failing water standards. That work will continue.

As that major water pollutant is tackled, other factors including industrial discharges, diffuse agricultural pollution and the run-off from built-up areas, roads and car parks, which might contain oil residues, become more apparent. The increasing use of sustainable urban drainage systems is helping to reduce pollution from run-off, and controls on industrial discharges continue to tighten. Indeed, many industries are cleaning up their act voluntarily, as they begin to quantify the

costed disbenefits of waste and the benefits of corporate responsibility and of having green credentials.

Much work has been carried out on how to tackle diffuse agricultural pollution through containment of slurries; nutrient budgeting to avoid excess manure being spread and leaching into water courses; and good management practices at water margins.

The original bathing water quality directive of 1976 was one of the first pieces of European environmental legislation and was introduced to require bathing water quality to be monitored and tested to protect bathers from health risks and to preserve the environment from pollution. The revised directive, which was proposed in October 2002, will use only bacteriological indicators but will set a higher health standard. It will provide long-term quality assessment and management methods to reduce the frequency and costs of monitoring. Well-developed management of bathing waters and extensive public information will replace an approach based purely on monitoring and retrospective compliance and there will be a stricter single standard for both fresh and coastal waters.

The quality of our bathing waters should improve even more when the requirements of the water framework directive begin to kick in and as we make progress on better protecting the marine environment with the introduction of marine national parks and integrated coastal zone management. Indeed, that issue has been highlighted extensively in our stage 1 consideration of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Bill. Although we might not be an obvious beach resort tourist destination, we attract water sports enthusiasts who surf, dive, canoe and sail around our coasts. Clean coastal waters also benefit the flora and fauna that attract walkers, bird enthusiasts and dolphin watchers. We need high water quality standards to protect and encourage those important tourism sectors.

Aquaculture, which also makes an important contribution to our economic activity, benefits from Scotland's reputation as a country with a clean water environment. As a result, there are good economic and environmental reasons for pursuing good bathing water quality regardless of whether we are required to do so to comply with European standards.

Good progress has been made and we are going in the right direction. However, we must not relax our efforts. I support the motion, and regret that the three amendments were not phrased as addenda, because each of them adds points that will be taken on board, whatever the vagaries of the voting system.

15:47

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I know that the debate has been billed as an example of the dumbing down of the Scottish Parliament's agenda, but listening to the speeches so far, I am struck by the extent of the public policy choices that must be made on this matter. Although the issue is not a front-page one—unless beaches fail to meet standards—big public policy matters such as public expenditure and public health have arisen as a result of discussions in Europe on the new bathing water directive. Our involvement in the debate will not earn us any brownie points—perhaps that is an inappropriate phrase; I will say kudos instead—but members have already made some vital points.

The issue centres on what we consider to be acceptable standards in the 21st century for the beaches around our coast. As Nora Radcliffe pointed out, we are not the top choice for a two-week beach holiday. The Scottish weather cannot support that kind of tourism. However, that does not mean that thousands of people do not like surfing, windsurfing and sailing. Members who have tried such sports will know that the people who take part in them spend a large part of the time in the water. Furthermore, they do not go to designated beaches to engage in those activities. Although it is tempting to say that the illnesses that the minister mentioned are minor ones, they are still public health issues and we cannot dismiss them out of hand.

I want to concentrate colleagues' minds on this issue. Members might not have realised that two weeks ago the European Union imposed a fine on Spain because it failed to meet the quality standards set out in the existing bathing water quality directive. We are not talking about a small punishment. Spain will be required to pay about €624,000 every year for every 1 per cent of inshore Spanish bathing waters that continues to fail to meet the quality standards.

That is absolutely right. We admit that the rest of Europe has thousands more beaches than Scotland has, but that does not automatically mean that all those beaches meet the EU's standards. It is good that we are making much progress in Scotland and it is a real mistake to pretend that we are the only country in the whole of Europe that does not have decent bathing water facilities and that we are uniquely bad in that regard.

There are some aspects that are of particular importance in Scotland. Although, as several members have mentioned, we have had very good weather in the past year, diffuse pollution is a genuine issue that we will have to examine. As the minister pointed out, the new bathing water legislation will force the Parliament to focus on

what has already been achieved in Scotland and to think about the standards that we want to ensure our beaches meet in future. We will have to focus on how much money we are prepared to spend on improving the water around our coastline. What are we prepared to do about that? What are we prepared to see in legislation?

It is true that improvements to our waste water treatment works have had a massive impact on water quality in key areas. The fact that part of Portobello beach made the guideline standard is a massive achievement when one thinks that only 2km away there is a waste water treatment facility that serves half a million people. That must be cause for celebration. Although the Environment and Rural Development Committee has addressed other issues in relation to that facility, we should acknowledge the achievement at Portobello.

It is right that a huge amount of taxpayers' money is being invested in higher-quality sewage treatment. We now have tertiary treatment facilities around Scotland whereas, historically, it was all right just to discharge raw sewage into our environment.

I know that the Tories focused on Scottish Water, but a bigger issue lies behind that.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I appreciate what the member says about new treatment works, but is she aware that, in places such as Campbeltown and Inverary in Argyll, where new treatment centres have recently been put in, the people are far from happy with the results, because the situation is worse than it was before?

Sarah Boyack: Earlier this week, I met Scottish Water to discuss that very issue. If the member contacts Scottish Water again, he will find that work is going on with the local council to resolve the problem, which goes back to some of the historic planning problems that Alex Johnstone mentioned.

I want to concentrate on diffuse pollution, which is much harder to control. That is where we could expend much more of our energies. We know that heavy rain causes pollution by washing away pesticides, slurry and chemicals from our farms, and that the run-off from roads, housing and industrial developments can become contaminated with pollutants such as silt, oil, metals and other chemicals, which collect in the sewerage system and end up in the sea; no one has discussed that issue at any length today.

We need to pay much more attention to diffuse pollution. Recently, I took part in a WWF chemicals test and was highly surprised to find that I had a pesticide in my bloodstream that was banned 20 years ago. Pesticides run off agricultural land, move through our rivers and end

up in the sea, along with a cocktail of other pollutants. The quality of our bathing water is important, so I think that we need to do much more upstream and onshore. We must not only consider integrated coastal zone management and the need for a marine environment bill, both of which have been mentioned, but tackle the pollution at source.

I am disappointed with the amendments. Although Alex Johnstone acknowledged the importance of planning in his speech, he was wrong to focus on Scottish Water. As well as examining the good things that have been done, we need to focus on the second half of the Executive's motion, which talks about the major challenge that we face. The nationalists made exactly the same mistake; their amendment would have been totally acceptable as an add-on—indeed, it would have been a positive and constructive add-on. It was a mistake to try to delete the reference to the challenge that we face, which is outlined in the Executive's motion. That is why I think that the amendments should be rejected.

15:54

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): I am surprised that we are debating bathing water quality for a couple of hours, given the number of pressing issues that the Parliament faces. The Parliament needs to increase the relevance of its debates to match what people outside the Parliament are talking about. Some of the subjects that were discussed during SNP time this morning, such as financial powers and the threat to cut the number of MEPs in Scotland, are far more fundamental; they are the sort of issue that we should be spending our time discussing. Bathing water quality is a very important and worthy subject, but I do not think that it should be commanding two hours of our time, given the pressure we face in relation to several other issues. When starting his opening speech, even the minister looked rather disappointed and worried when the Presiding Officer told him that he had to speak for 11 minutes.

The marine environment is crucial to Scotland because we are a marine nation and we are responsible for much of Europe's coastline. That means that we have an enormous responsibility to look after our marine environment. The issue is important not only because bathing water quality is important to human health.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member give way?

Allan Wilson *rose*—

Richard Lochhead: I give way to Sarah Boyack.

Sarah Boyack: In the past 30 seconds, the member has contradicted himself. He said that the debate is irrelevant and that the subject is not a matter of public policy, although we are spending £3 billion on Scottish Water to improve our sewage treatment works, yet he also said that the marine environment is one of Scotland's key assets. Richard Lochhead should think about inshore fisheries, on which he spoke articulately yesterday. The subject that we are debating today is a big issue. It is not attractive or sexy, but it is fundamental.

Richard Lochhead: When the Parliament is pressed for time, there is a difference between worthy and important issues and issues to which the public want the Parliament to devote two hours of debate in our national political forum. A distinction also exists between the overall marine environment and bathing waters, on which the debate focuses. We should be talking about many other matters. If members speak to the public, they will find that the public have a similar view to mine. The turnout at elections is plummeting because the Parliament is not seen to be talking about issues that matter to the people of Scotland.

The marine environment as a whole is important for economic reasons, because it concerns the shellfish industry; the tourism industry, which other members have mentioned; and the growing organic aquaculture industry. All of those depend on good-quality and healthy sea water, and that is not to mention the human health implications to which other members referred.

The minister should say why we designate only 60 beaches, unlike many other countries, which designate thousands. Another matter is the "Good Beach Guide", which receives a huge amount of publicity when it is issued. The public become confused by the messages in that coverage and the fact that the Government has designated 60 beaches. They are not sure whether the message is that our beaches are or are not of great quality.

This year, the "Good Beach Guide" endorsed only 10 extra beaches in Scotland, and endorsed only 32 of the 126 beaches in Scotland that were sampled. I understand that beaches in the outer Hebrides are of great quality but are not sampled, which distorts the image that the public receive from the guides that are publicised in the press.

The pressure from the European Union on the Scottish Government to deliver environmental improvements is a positive aspect of the EU. The debate arises because of an EU directive, and other EU legislation such as the dangerous substances directive, the groundwater directive and the birds and habitats directives all have an impact on our marine environment. I am thankful that the Government cannot get away with dragging its feet because of EU pressure. The EU

does not always have a good press in Scotland, but it deserves a good press this time.

My final point is about reserved matters. Ghost ships have been in the news a lot recently. Those ships could have had a huge impact on our beaches and on the quality of the marine environment. I am thankful that the ghost ships, which are in Hartlepool, will not come into Scottish waters, but they could have done so. When I wrote to the ministers about the subject, their reply was that they did not know about the issue. The Executive did not know about the matter until it saw all the publicity and it contacted the UK Government. We need a bit more co-ordination.

Much of the legislation is reserved to London. The fact that 77 acts are relevant to the marine environment in Scotland creates huge confusion and complexity, so we must simplify the situation. I hope that the Executive has proposals in the pipeline to achieve that. We must find out how to streamline those 77 acts so that we know who is responsible for what and the public understand the situation. We must do much to ensure that the marine environment goes higher up the political agenda.

15:59

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Conservatives certainly welcomed the Executive's document "Scotland's Bathing Waters: A strategy for improvement" when it was published in 2002. Our biggest industry is tourism, which has a value of £4.5 billion annually, so it is essential that our many beautiful beaches and bathing areas should be as pristine as possible.

The Executive declared:

"We are committed to achieving European standards at all 60 Scottish identified bathing waters",

but it gave no time target for meeting that commitment. In view of the Executive's somewhat wha's-like-us motion, we are entitled to ask whether we should commend the results that have been achieved. Let us examine them.

This year—as the minister rightly mentioned—39 Scottish sites passed the European Community's higher guideline standards, 18 passed the basic or mandatory standards, but three failed to reach the required EC standards. I will not name and shame those three sites, but they account for 5 per cent of the country's 60 identified bathing areas. In England and Wales, only 1.2 per cent of the 500 designated areas failed to reach the standards, so we are not doing as well as we might like to tell ourselves.

I welcome pilot projects that have been funded by the Executive and organised by SEPA. For example, electronic messages relating to water

quality and European Union bathing standards were flashed in six bathing sites in south-west Scotland this summer. However, no one can deny that many of Scotland's bathing areas continue to be dogged by pollution.

In particular, I welcome the achievement of four bathing areas in Scotland this year in winning coveted blue flag awards. The award scheme is run throughout the United Kingdom by Environmental Campaigns—ENCAMS—which compares UK beaches with beaches throughout Europe and South Africa. They are aimed at meeting the highest standards of cleanliness and coastal environmental care. I am particularly delighted at the success of those four beaches because all four of them are in Fife. One of them—the West Sands—is in my home town of St Andrews. The others areas are Aberdour's Silver sands, Burntisland and Elie harbour beach.

Allan Wilson: I welcome what the member says. However, in welcoming the pristine quality of Fife's beaches, does he accept that the problem that we face in south-west Scotland and north-west England is to do not simply with climactic change but with the geography and geology of those parts of our islands?

Mr Brocklebank: I am not totally convinced by the minister's argument, given the amount of industrial pollutants that come out of the Forth estuary, the power stations and so on.

Fife has done exceptionally well in obtaining those four blue flag awards, which are the only four in Scotland. However, let us face it—the rest of the UK has 100 blue flag awards. On a population basis alone, we should have had around 10 awards in Scotland, but we got four.

Much as the Executive might like to bask in Fife's success, I must pay tribute to Fife Council—which is a rare occurrence for me—for its commendable work in achieving such high bathing standards. Councillor Jim Brennan said:

"the maintenance of the beaches is the responsibility of Fife Council, local communities, Scottish Water".

He did not mention the Executive in his press release.

Yesterday afternoon, in respect of Alex Fergusson's members' business debate, I urged the Executive in its forthcoming strategic review of Scotland's inshore waters to consider setting up regional management groups to protect and preserve all the stakeholders who are involved in our coastal waters. I said that those groups should include fisheries, tourism and wildlife interests, as well as local authority representatives. They should certainly also include water purity experts.

The truth is that until we have sight of Allan Wilson's looming new water directive, it is difficult

to offer the Executive any more than a could-still-do-better assessment in any interim report on improving our water environment.

16:03

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I thank you, Presiding Officer, for the opportunity to speak in support of the motion in the name of Allan Wilson. I am aware that the debate is taking place when work is being undertaken to improve the number of bathing areas in Scotland that comply with the standards that have been set out by EU directives.

I would like to say something about what Richard Lochhead, convener of the European and External Relations Committee, said this afternoon that concerns me. We have discussed early intervention and having the earliest warnings that we possibly can to influence Europe at an appropriate time. We know that there is on-going work in Europe to change protocols and to examine the work that has been undertaken under the EU directives. Therefore, Richard Lochhead was gainsaying something that the European and External Relations Committee has agreed to—that is, that there should be the earliest possible warning about such issues.

Bruce Crawford: Would not it have been appropriate to have had this debate a month and a half ago, before the directives were coming up for discussion in the European framework, so that the Parliament could have influenced the process?

Helen Eadie: Bruce Crawford will find that Richard Lochhead dismissed the idea. I find it surprising that members, including the convener of the European and External Relations Committee, who is sitting opposite me, are saying that the subject is not important.

I am able to speak on this topic from the perspective of being an MSP for the constituency that contains the bathing waters of Aberdour, which won the EU blue flag award. Ted Brocklebank mentioned that in a speech that contained much with which I agreed. I also speak from the perspective of someone who has been actively involved in work on environmental matters with the North Sea Commission, which is an organisation comprising political representation from Scotland, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Holland and Belgium. As do the EC and many MSPs, the North Sea Commission recognises the importance of setting high standards for the quality of our water.

The strategy set by any one of the member states is interdependent on the strategies that are set by other member states. The minister has to cope not only with this country's strategy; he has to think of the strategies of other countries

because the pollution arising from whatever happens in Holland, Germany or wherever has an impact on the pollution around our beaches, as was highlighted earlier in relation to Sellafeld. For that reason, it is vital that we strive constantly to develop our political relationships with our neighbours around the North sea. Pollution in the sea and the air knows no boundaries, so the size of the challenge that the Scottish Executive faces is immense.

The challenges come not only from international waters but from the actions of every one of us in Scotland, as some of our colleagues—in particular Sarah Boyack—illustrated today.

When I think of the benefits that derive to Fife as a result of the fact that we have those blue flag bathing waters, I reflect on the commitment that has been shown by many professionals over a long period of time. That work was not done overnight and I inform Ted Brocklebank that it was started in the days of the Labour-controlled Fife Regional Council and culminated in the work of Scottish Water.

Mr Ruskell: I share Helen Eadie's delight that there are blue flag beaches in Fife, as they are significant. However, a tourist walking on the Fife coastal path would also pass beaches that do not meet the minimum requirements. Does Helen Eadie agree that we should strive to include those beaches in implementation of the bathing water directive and do something about the situation?

Helen Eadie: The purpose of the debate is to allow us constructively to criticise the situation and make contributions. The minister has not pretended today that there is not much more to do, although we have done a lot. That is a fair point to put to colleagues.

It makes sense to improve our bathing water. On behalf of my constituents in Dunfermline East, I welcome the expert teams that have existed for some time across Europe. Within the general debate about the EU, it makes sense to sign up to the EU's directives and protocols. People often ask in what way it is relevant for us to be in the EU and the subject that we are discussing is an excellent example of why it makes sense for us to be in the EU.

I support the point that Mark Ruskell made about integrated coastal zone management, which is vital. Only in recent years has the UK taken that issue seriously on board. Our EU neighbours have been working on integrated coastal zone management strategies for a long time. The member states' expert teams have been working continually to define appropriate bathing water quality microbiological standards and compliance rules. Those experts have acknowledged, from their trials, assessments and evaluations, that the

potential EC expert standard is too stringent for wider-scale application. That recognises the cost implications that Bruce Crawford mentioned and points to the fact that a political balance needs to be struck between the standards and cost factors.

Despite what the press and other commentators might say, this debate is important from the point of view of public health, the economy and the EU's interrelationships. We need to say to our colleagues in Scottish Water, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and local authority and political bodies, such as the North Sea Commission and the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions, that we need to interact with them. We need to affirm this Parliament's desire to support politically their key work.

The debate is not self-congratulatory on the part of the Scottish Executive but is meant to celebrate the fact that enough of us care to applaud the efforts of the experts who are engaged in this vital work. In securing the debate, our minister, Allan Wilson, has recognised the many facets of bathing water quality. Putting the issue under the microscope, as we have done today, will send a message to the people of Scotland.

As Mark Ruskell said, we do not want our bathing waters to be dumping grounds, and our bathing water quality is one component in the tourism strategy.

I am sure that the minister initiated the debate in a spirit of asking what we can do to make things better, so the challenge for all members is to make constructive criticisms and not simply more snide political comments.

16:10

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): It would be churlish not to acknowledge that considerable improvements have been made in bathing water quality—the minister has already mentioned them—but even bathing water gets mired in smoke and mirrors. On 23 September, the Executive published on its website a press release with the big banner headline "Best ever bathing water results". The press release goes on to talk about

"95 per cent of designated bathing waters meeting the mandatory standard of the Bathing Water Directive and over 60 per cent meeting the higher guideline",

which was true. The minister is quoted as saying:

"While the preliminary results achieved for the 2003 bathing season are the best ever for Scotland's designated bathing waters, we are by no means complacent."

However, the headline in *The Scotsman* the next morning was "SEPA fails to reach goal for clean Scots beaches", so what should we believe when

we read about such matters? *The Scotsman* tells us:

"Some 5 per cent of Scotland's 60 designated bathing beaches fell foul of European Union requirements this season, with three beaches on the west coast failing to meet minimum safety standards.

And only 65 per cent of the popular coastal spots offered bathing water of 'excellent' quality, as outlined in the European Bathing Water Directive.

Studies of an additional 53 popular coastal waters found only 91 per cent met EU standards of cleanliness."

At that stage, a spokesman for SEPA also said:

"SEPA is very disappointed its target of 100 per cent compliance has not been met, and acknowledges there is still a lot of work to do."

I make those points because it is important that we get some clarity on what is really happening. There has been an improvement, but it has not been dramatic and there is a long way to go. It ain't, as the banner headline said it was, a case of "Best ever bathing water results". That may be a fact, but it is in danger of belying the truth.

Murray Tosh (West of Scotland) (Con): Will Mr Crawford clarify his party's position? Is he aware that the quality of bathing beaches and the provision of sewage treatment have been one of the most bitterly debated issues on the west coast of Scotland, particularly in Ayrshire, over the past 20 years? Is he aware of the scale of historic and current investment and the continuing planning disputes that affect communities such as Largs, Millport and Arran? Will he reflect on the fact that the climatic and topographic character of the west of Scotland is entirely different from that of the east coast, from where the Scottish National Party speakers have all so far come, and will he acknowledge that the matter is of considerable importance to quite a lot of Scots even at this stage in the Parliament's life?

Bruce Crawford: To be frank, I do not know what Murray Tosh is getting his dander up about, because I did not say at any stage that the issue was not important, and Roseanna Cunningham mentioned the Ayrshire situation. The attendance at the debate shows how much attention members in general are paying to the debate. On the Ayrshire situation, I took the rather large tome that considers all the problems that that area faces out of the Scottish Parliament information centre today to read before the debate.

Sarah Boyack *rose*—

Bruce Crawford: I would like to make some progress, as I have just taken an intervention.

Mark Ruskell was dead right on integrated coastal zone management and on the bathing water standards not applying to radioactive waste. That is why it is important that Roseanna

Cunningham's amendment be agreed to. It widens the debate from beaches to the whole marine environment and gives a much more strategic perspective, which we need. Had we had a debate on the marine environment, I am sure that more members would have attended and spoken, although I understand the importance of this debate for certain parts of Scotland, as outlined by Murray Tosh.

I will spend some of my time examining the impact that some of the nuclear establishments in Scotland have through what they discharge into the marine environment. Sarah Boyack was right to say that we need to tackle some of the issues at source. We certainly need to tackle the nuclear issues at source. I will start with the impact of the British Nuclear Fuels Ltd facility at Chapelcross. BNFL operates four Magnox reactors at Chapelcross. Since 1980, a processing plant that produces tritium has also operated on that site. Gaseous wastes from the site are discharged into the local environment and liquid radioactive waste is discharged into the Solway firth.

Recent habitat surveys have confirmed that local people who have large intakes of local seafood are exposed to risks from radioactivity. In addition, wild fowlers and fishermen who tend stake nets are exposed to external radiation. The presence of caesium 137 from Chapelcross in geese that feed on the salt marshes is also marine derived. However, none of that shows up in the figures that we are dealing with today in respect of the designation of beaches.

Mark Ruskell has already talked about the shame of Dounreay. From the beginning of its life, it has been an ugly scar on the environment of Scotland. Not only has the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority establishment been contributing to environmental degradation and harming public health for decades, so has the adjoining Ministry of Defence Vulcan plant. It has been discharging liquid radioactive waste into the sea. The on-going shame of the finds of radioactive particles at Sandside beach demonstrate well the dangers of radioactive waste to Scotland's marine life, beaches and human life. That should be a factor in whether our beaches are designated as being safe.

Our nuclear power stations also discharge harmful radioactive waste into the marine environment. There are problems at the Holy Loch and at Faslane and Coulport, where those discharges are on-going. As far as the Forth estuary is concerned, there may be clean beaches that are beginning to get the blue flag but, if 27 submarines are cut up at Rosyth, that will lead to the discharge of even more radioactive waste into the Forth until 2025. The picture would be completely different if we included those issues in

consideration of whether the beaches are clean. We must do what we can to ensure that that work does not happen at Rosyth. As I am probably already over my time, I will finish at that point.

16:17

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): The Scottish Socialist Party recognises the progress that has been made, but we warn against complacency. I am pleased to hear the minister say that the Executive will not be complacent.

Unfortunately, the Executive recognises only 60 official bathing beaches in Scotland, whereas Denmark has designated 1,000, Finland has designated 500 and Italy has designated 5,400.

I will pose a number of questions, which were invited by the minister in his opening speech. What condition are the rest of our beaches in? What is the statutory requirement for monitoring non-designated beaches? Why are only 60 beaches designated? Do the general public not use the other beaches for leisure activities and what safeguards are in place?

Dounreay and Chapelcross have been mentioned. I will also mention Dundrennan on the Solway firth. For the past 20 years Dundrennan has been used by the MOD for the testing of weapons containing depleted uranium. Thousands of projectiles have been fired into the Solway firth, in spite of fears of potential health risks.

Since testing began in Kirkcudbright in 1982, more than 7,000 DU shells have been fired into the Solway firth. Most of the shells—approximately 20 tonnes of shells—still lie on the seabed; only one has been retrieved. How clean are the beaches around the Solway firth? What standard of monitoring is carried out there? How much has been done to reassure the people who live in that area—where there is a leukaemia cluster—that they are not at risk?

The CAP reforms are on-going. Farmers have to deal with several layers of bureaucracy and form filling. Do we really think that that is the best way to prevent agricultural pollution from ending up in our bathing water? Farmers do not want to pollute any more than the rest of us do, but with the proliferation of chemicals that they are currently forced to use in agriculture—they often have no choice—the risk of seepage into water is high. Is it not time for the Executive to take a lead in promoting organic and sustainable farming practices, which reduce chemical loading to the environment and reduce the potential for polluting our bearing waters?

16:20

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Allan Wilson started the debate by avoiding a question from

Shona Robison—at least, he did not give a firm answer. He went on to tell us that the weather is largely responsible for pollution even though it is also responsible for reducing pollution. To our unlimited astonishment, he went on to say that the Executive is unable to control the weather. He finished his speech by inviting us to answer two questions: whether we should reconsider the designation of bathing waters and how much we are prepared to pay. The responses have shown that the 20 or so members who are present are prepared to take that challenge seriously, which is why we are here.

The debate has been reasonably good in the sense that it has sparked off good ideas although, as Roseanna Cunningham, Alex Johnstone and others mentioned, one element of the debate was yet another self-congratulatory catalogue. Roseanna Cunningham called on us to look at the bigger picture and consider the wider marine environment, which has been done—Mark Ruskell was happy to do so in his speech. Roseanna mentioned marine pollution such as that from Sellafield and plastic in fishes' stomachs. I add to that the chemical pollution of fish in many parts of the North sea, which alters their physiology.

Alex Johnstone mentioned that he has visited farms and said that he is glad that SEPA has adopted a co-operative approach in working with farms to control diffuse pollution. Mark Ruskell agreed with that approach and gave a practical solution to the issue of where the required money will be found. Our answer is to consider the contribution that modulation of the £600 million that is to be put into agriculture could make to cutting the amount of money that the water authority spends on cleaning water. Instead of having an end-of-pipe solution, we should prevent pollution in the first place and allow the water authority to get on with its most important and pressing job, which is to replace our water mains, which leak up to a third of the total amount of water stored, and to replace our well-built but ancient Victorian sewage system.

Murray Tosh: Does Robin Harper agree that, in many areas, tightening the European directive on bathing water may involve not further engineering works or additional treatment works but a complex relationship between Scottish Water and the local agricultural communities, given that the principal source of pollution in the west of Scotland is in flood water from rivers, which is affected by agricultural run-off from organic and non-organic stock farms?

Robin Harper: Mr Tosh has hit the nail on the head—that is exactly what Mark Ruskell said and what I have been reinforcing.

Many of the arguments have reinforced the point that the issue is hugely complex. The Executive

must realise that point in addressing the issue. For example, we must tackle flood control through measures such as paying farmers to allow their fields to be flooded and planting trees, which may be part of the answer.

Allan Wilson: Robin Harper admits that the issue is hugely complex but, at the outset of his speech, he did not differentiate between the fact that rainy weather washes faecal bacteria into our coastal waters and the fact that sunny weather kills those bacteria.

Robin Harper: I hoped that the minister might have forgiven me for that bit of levity at the beginning of my speech.

Sarah Boyack, in her eminently sensible and well-directed speech, pointed out the wide variety of policy options that are available. I hope that she appreciated that in the Green party's offering from Mark Ruskell, we suggested some of those options. Again and again, members complain about Scottish Water raising its water charges, but there is not much choice. The money must be raised either through raising the water charges or through general taxation. It is up to the Executive to make that choice and for us to support the Executive if it decides to raise the money in some other way. It is imperative that Scottish Water spends to save and that investment in improving the infrastructure for water in Scotland is made now and as quickly as possible.

To Richard Lochhead, all that I can say is that there are several sensible amendments and there has been a good debate. We have taken the issue seriously. Even if the matter were not a big public issue—and I would contest that assertion—Parliament and the Executive would have a duty to lead on a subject that we thought was important. We should debate such an issue whether or not the public think that it is important. Whether or not the public are rattling our doors, this is a very important issue and one that must be debated.

16:26

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): We started the debate with Allan Wilson outlining the progress that has been made and touching on future investment and the implications of improving standards. He acknowledged the fact that sunshine is a reserved matter and ended by asking salient questions about priority setting in the future, which we would do well to reflect on.

Roseanna Cunningham thought that more beaches should be considered for designation, but then pointed out why designation is not always appropriate. I agree with her that designated beaches are only one of many measures that can and should be taken to ensure good coastal water quality.

It was useful to hear from Alex Johnstone about some of the practical work that is being done to bring about improvements.

Mark Ruskell was the only member to mention the possibility of future funding being made available through the CAP reform and modulation for environmental measures.

Sarah Boyack highlighted the difficulties of addressing diffuse pollution but also why it is fundamentally important that we begin to tackle that huge and complex area, which requires a lot of research and consideration.

Richard Lochhead carped at the topic for debate, but his speech showed just how wide and important the topic of water quality is. As Sarah Boyack reminded him, it has major resource implications.

Richard Lochhead: Does the member accept the fact that my so-called carping was simply pointing out that we had to widen the debate beyond bathing waters to address the whole of the marine environment, because this is one of only two Executive debates this week?

Nora Radcliffe: The proof of the pudding has been in the eating. The motion might have been, as Richard Lochhead said, quite narrow, but the debate has been wide ranging and the motion has triggered the opportunity for us to have a useful debate on the issues.

Ted Brocklebank—who is no longer in the chamber—did a very good job of promoting Fife and Fife Council.

Helen Eadie reminded us that pollution does not stop at man-made borders. She also made the salient point that environmental improvement takes long-term commitment.

Bruce Crawford and Rosemary Byrne highlighted the polluting effects of nuclear power stations, as well as armaments and agrochemicals, respectively.

It has been a good debate that has recognised the breadth and complexity of the issues. There has been value in airing and exploring those issues this afternoon.

16:29

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I declare an interest in the subject, as I am a farmer. I shall speak in support of our amendment and re-emphasise the Conservative party's commitment to the protection of bathing water quality.

As Alex Johnstone and the minister noted, we all have a duty to protect public health. Nowhere is that more critical than in the west of Scotland, where many local people use our local beaches. In

addition, cleaning up our bathing water enhances our tourism industry generally.

Nowhere is that more vital than on the beaches of Ayr, Prestwick and Troon—although, before he intervenes on me, I concede that the minister's local beaches, at Ardrossan, Largs and elsewhere, are equally important. Last summer, sitting in my office in Wellington Square in Ayr, I have been aware of literally thousands of people making their way to Ayr beach to swim in what are now clean and safe bathing waters. The huge investment in our new sewerage system, to which Murray Tosh alluded, is now paying off.

We have been lucky in Ayrshire this year as, mercifully, a burst sewer on the River Ayr did not significantly contaminate our beaches. By good luck, the old sewer running alongside the new one was able to be brought back into use to cope with the low volumes during the dry weather, and a potentially disastrous incident was avoided. Another incident, near Lochgreen golf course in Troon, was also swiftly dealt with by Scottish Water. Although I am not always Scottish Water's greatest fan, I must acknowledge the enormous effort that it made to protect our beaches on those occasions.

More can be done to continue to enhance our bathing waters, not just in Ayrshire but throughout Scotland. Stopping the daily trips of the Glasgow sewage sludge boats down the water to deposit Glasgow's sewage off Ailsa Craig and into Ayrshire's coastal waters is just the first step. Local authorities, as well as the Executive, must play their part. One case in point is the lack of funding from South Ayrshire Council to allow the South sands at Troon to compete for a seaside award. Despite the fact that it has some of the cleanest bathing water in Scotland, the fact that money cannot be found by the council for a ranger service has denied Troon the opportunity to compete for the award. That is short-termism in the extreme, especially given the fact that Troon will be the focus of world sporting attention next summer, when the open championship comes to Troon again. I hope that at least some members will take the opportunity to come to Ayrshire for the open, and perhaps visit our beaches, if the weather permits.

We in Scotland must continue to support the revised EU bathing water directive, on a value-for-money basis. We will welcome the single river basin district designation order, which is to be laid before the Parliament later this month, as well as the subsequent creation of sub-basin management plans. We will need to continue to address the problems of diffuse pollution from industrial sewage and agricultural sources, as Sarah Boyack mentioned. That must be managed in a cost-effective way. That has not always

happened in my constituency, particularly on farms in the Craigie area.

We continue to have reservations about the long-term cost to industry and agriculture of the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003. Unlike King Canute, however, we will not stand totally against the incoming tide of additional costs, provided they deliver quantifiable, cost-effective benefits to tourism and public health.

As Alex Johnstone said, we will need to support colleagues in the European Parliament. They have introduced an amendment to the directive to allow more flexibility over diffuse pollution when flooding occurs after heavy rainfall or snow melt. SEPA and the EU must note that our colder Scottish climate and typical lack of sunshine mean that our beach bathing waters do not benefit from the amount of cleansing ultraviolet radiation that is enjoyed by continental beaches, and I noted the minister's comments on that.

Nationally, we will have to spend significantly greater sums than other European countries will to bring our waters up to the same EU standard, which the EU must recognise. Locally, we must extend across Scotland the provision of electronic message signs that SEPA piloted in Ayrshire last year, which Ted Brocklebank mentioned. As we seek to attract more foreign visitors to our shores, we must provide them with the information with which they are familiar. I found it surprisingly reassuring to note that a beach that I visited when on holiday in southern Europe this year had a blue flag. Presumably, visitors to Scotland would be glad of similar reassurances when they come here, as Roseanna Cunningham suggested.

The debate has been very worth while, and many important issues have been raised for the minister to note. I would be particularly interested if he could give me an explanation as to why the geology of Scotland, as well as its geography, should affect bathing water quality—I am intrigued about that. I look forward to the minister's closing remarks and I commend our amendment to the Parliament.

16:35

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Today's debate is similar to one that I experienced previously in a lesser place—Ross and Cromarty District Council. In that debate, which took place in 1990, the same issues cropped up as crop up now. Unfortunately, the source of pollution, which arrives with the tides, is largely ignored in this debate about protecting bathing water quality. It is certainly ignored in the motion that we are debating.

SNP members are frustrated by the narrow way in which the motion is framed and by the fact that

many important issues relating to the marine environment have been excluded from it. Can the minister tell us whether—as Roseanna Cunningham asked—time will be found in the near future to progress the work that he has done to create the groundwork for a new bill?

Allan Wilson: I am happy to reassure the member that when we develop our framework strategy for the marine environment more generally we will bring it to the chamber for debate at the first opportunity. Does he accept that if the SNP had lodged its amendment as an addendum to the motion—as others suggested—I might have accepted it for wider debate, and that SNP members also have a responsibility in these matters?

Rob Gibson: It is difficult to second-guess the Government. Normally SNP amendments are completely unacceptable, regardless of the form in which they are lodged.

I represent the Highlands and Islands region. When I examine a map of the area, I notice how many beaches are located in national scenic areas or proposed areas of great national value along our coasts. That is why I am extremely disappointed by the narrow way in which the motion has been framed and why I must press the point that our amendment tries to draw the Parliament's attention to that important matter.

Roseanna Cunningham talked about the need to take a sustainable approach to this issue. Some aspects of bathing water quality development are sustainable, but until we take measures across the whole range of beaches around our shores—including seemingly unspoiled beaches that are not among the 60 beaches that have been mentioned—we will not be able to measure whether, as a nation, we are making the progress that we should be making with them.

Alex Johnstone mentioned important aspects of the work of Scottish Water, some of the mistakes that have been made in the past and the need to get planning issues sorted out to allow for progress. However, while the Conservative amendment adds its congratulations to the Government's self-congratulatory motion, it does not add a huge amount to the debate, although Conservative members have been involved to great effect in many of the debates relating to the Ayrshire coast and nitrate vulnerable zones. We are happy about that, but the Conservative amendment does not add much to the total price of this debate.

Murray Tosh: In welcoming and acknowledging what has been done, we are also considering what must be done next and what the next phase of European directives will be. There are important land-use issues that we must consider carefully.

Conservative members who have spoken on those matters have been concerned by the tone of the SNP this afternoon, which has suggested that such matters are not appropriate for debate in the chamber. I argue that the directives have important implications for agriculture in Ayrshire and the south-west of Scotland that merit such scrutiny, albeit in the context of the wider issues that Mr Gibson has correctly addressed.

Rob Gibson: It would be helpful if the motion mentioned any of the directives, but it does not. We are stressing that we would like these issues to be debated, but the Government's motion does not do that.

In his speech, Mark Ruskell discussed integrated coastal zone management. That is the kind of development in legislation that will have to be introduced in order for there to be a sustainable approach. However, there is no mention of that in the motion, either.

Nora Radcliffe mentioned that many companies are voluntarily cleaning up their acts and developing more green practices, which is a help. However, many other organisations lag far behind. If only two bacterial indicators are included in the new directive, it will ignore the pollution that comes to our shores in the form of nuclear waste from Sellafield and particles from Dounreay, which follow the tides and the flow of the currents. Measures that deal with such pollution cannot possibly be left out of a considered view of a sustainable policy for the coasts.

Nora Radcliffe: Does the member acknowledge that my comments on the voluntary measures that companies have taken were made as an addendum to my remarks about how we are tightening up controls on discharges to, for example, water courses?

Rob Gibson: I am glad to acknowledge that. I am also glad that Nora Radcliffe has been joined by another colleague for the first time in this debate, which shows the importance that the Liberal Democrats have placed in it.

Sarah Boyack pointed out that many countries have the same problems as Scotland has. That is why a debate in the context of what the European Union can do is important for all the waters around our coasts and why we are looking for European recognition of the issues. Again, it is a pity that the motion does not mention that.

Richard Lochhead pointed out that 77 acts will soon need to be made homologous in order to create a marine bill that is fit for Scotland's future. I was at the meeting of the Environment and Rural Development Committee at which the developments in natural heritage were discussed, and Ross Finnie hinted that that work might take place next year, the year after that, some time or

never. That kind of remark on the urgency of the matter shows how self-congratulatory the motion is.

In the Highlands and Islands and in every part of Scotland we are looking for the means to change the way in which people measure bathing water quality and the quality of the waters around our shores in general. Given that there is a campaign, run by KIMO, to save the North sea, surely we should expect some means to be found of recognising the amount of material—such as plastics—that is washed up on our shores. If bathing water quality data are only one measure of that, when will we have the kind of comprehensive approach in which interest has obviously been generated by this debate—although not by the motion?

Nora Radcliffe: Will the member take an intervention?

Rob Gibson: No. I am sorry, but I am finishing.

The SNP amendment was drawn up in such a way as to draw attention to the fact that the motion is underpowered, too self-congratulatory and in no hurry to deliver. If the minister wants there to be some urgency in the approach that he adopts, he should consider the SNP's amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): I now call the minister to wind up the debate.

16:43

Allan Wilson: At last. I was champing at the bit, Presiding Officer.

I reassure Roseanna Cunningham, Richard Lochhead and their partners in doom and gloom that this debate was not thrust upon me. I asked for the debate because I believe that the matter is important.

As has been identified by every other party in the chamber, from the Tories through the Liberal Democrats to the Greens and the Scottish Socialist Party, the nationalist position is completely contradictory. The SNP tells us that this debate is dumbing down parliamentary debate, and then goes on to tell us how important—or, as Richard Lochhead said, how very important—bathing water quality is, not least to tourism, which is our biggest industry. What would the SNP amendment do? It would delete any reference to environmental pollution of our water environment and any reference to tourism. If the SNP had proposed an addendum, we would have been happy to consider it.

In that context, although Robin Harper mentioned that Murray Tosh hit the nail on the head, I think that Sarah Boyack did precisely that

in her speech. We have excellent waters that need to be kept clean, but we could do more and we will strive to do so. I can tell Bruce Crawford that there is no contradiction in that statement. We seek a 100 per cent compliance rate and have a 95 per cent rate, so there is more still to do. However, we must balance that aim with realism at all times. However much we spend and—I say this to Robin Harper—wherever the money comes from, we may not be able to guarantee 100 per cent compliance all the time. That is because, as I said in my opening speech, we have a climate, a geography and—John Scott will note—a geology that, combined with our land use, can sometimes work against us. When I refer to geology, I am talking about the steep slopes, the impermeable soils, the granite base and the fast-flowing rivers, all of which can contribute to particular periodic problems in the south-west of Scotland and the north-west of England. I think that that point was made very well by John Scott's colleague Murray Tosh to whom I now give way.

Murray Tosh: I agree absolutely with the significance of those points, but will the minister reflect on the desire that exists in many communities, especially down the west coast where that geology exists, to have their amenity beaches lifted to the designated status so that the desired improvements in sewage treatment and water quality can take place? He will be familiar with places such as Largs and Helensburgh, where such improvements are still an important and significant local issue.

Allan Wilson: Yes—I find myself agreeing yet again with Murray Tosh. I will come on to deal with designations.

Scottish Water obviously has a number of priorities, only one of which is improving bathing water quality. I suspect that I am like no one else in the chamber in being acutely aware of some of the conflicts that the planning regime poses for Scottish Water in places such as Largs, Arran, Helensburgh and elsewhere, where the requirement to get on with improving water quality and treating sewage can sometimes conflict with local concerns. As Mr Tosh will know well, those local concerns cannot be ridden roughshod over but must be taken account of. However, at the end of the day, the overwhelming priority is to improve water quality and to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is introduced.

To that extent, I propose that we take the partnership approach that we have pioneered with all those stakeholders, including the research organisations, Scottish Water and, without a doubt—I can tell John Scott—the NFU Scotland. Indeed, I think that we should involve the agricultural community as a whole, not just farmers.

Sarah Boyack: Does the minister agree that we are talking about a win-win situation, in which fewer chemicals are put on our fields, fewer chemicals are then washed into our seas and we spend less money having to clear them up? That is a really good win-win situation, which his motion should start to let us deliver.

Allan Wilson: I do indeed agree. That is not in any way being self-congratulatory—far from it. We are bringing to the Parliament's attention that, yes, people are paying more in water charges and, yes, we are investing more taxpayers' money, but that is leading to real improvement in water quality. The people of Scotland deserve to know that.

Robin Harper: The minister mentioned stakeholders. Is it not important to involve the estuary forums, given the extra work that, for instance, Forth Estuary Forum has done on things such as marine pollution and the pollution that comes from litter being left on beaches?

If I may add just one other little pitch, I just want to remark on how complicated the issue is. For example, I am told that if the Executive had been in a position to ban the fitting of macerators, that would have saved the old East of Scotland Water at least £1 million in extra treatment. That would have dealt with people who flush their potato peelings down the sink instead of putting them where they should be, which is in the compost.

Allan Wilson: Again, I agree with Robin Harper. Dare I say it, but the Scottish Coastal Forum also provides us with a welcome opportunity to discuss areas of interest regularly with all those stakeholders.

Part of Scottish Water's investment programme is investing to save. We predict that over the lifetime of that investment programme, there will be a requirement to reduce charges, and low-inflation increases will be necessary at the conclusion of the programme as the capital development comes on stream.

Mr McGrigor *rose*—

John Scott *rose*—

Allan Wilson: If the members do not mind, I have taken many interventions and I would like to move on. I have three and a half minutes left and I will be pleased to take further interventions later.

Having listened to all the comments, it is clear to me that we have to formulate and discuss a new bathing water designation policy with all those stakeholders, taking into account the revision of the EU bathing water directive. We have to consult widely on that. It is not practicable for all areas around the coast to be designated as bathing waters—I do not believe that anyone would suggest that we do so. We have to target spending so that we can give the highest level of

protection to the public in places where people use the water.

We continue to look for new ways of reducing agricultural and urban run-offs.

John Scott: Will the minister give way?

Allan Wilson: John Scott gets his chance at last.

John Scott: I am raising a point that Alex Fergusson brought to my attention—sadly, he cannot be in the chamber today—about the inconsistency of the approach taken with farmers in his area when the agricultural colleges telephoned round and took 10 farms into a scheme. The rest of the farms in the river basin, or the water catchment area, were not part of that scheme. One farm is completely fenced while another is not. There is no consistency of approach in trying to reduce diffuse pollution. Perhaps the minister will address that.

Allan Wilson: Perhaps I will. The thrust of our strategy, as referred to earlier in the debate, and in the water framework directive more generally, is to include all stakeholders in a catchment area and ensure that all their views are taken into account in developing a catchment-based policy on diffuse pollution. If that approach is not being taken as it should be in one particular part of Scotland, we would certainly want to encourage it.

Sustainable urban drainage systems are another way in which we can remove rainwater from drains that go to sewage treatment works, thus reducing the demand on them and reducing the likelihood of overflows. As Mark Ruskell said, I announced the awarding of a contract to pilot biogas on a number of farms in Scotland. That is completely new to Scotland and, if it is successful, it will reduce agricultural run-off and deliver green electricity to farms.

Earlier this year, we also piloted real-time signs at five of Scotland's beaches on the west coast. That pilot worked well and we found that we could predict changes in water quality based on rainfall. That is the approach that is recommended by the World Health Organisation. It deals with short-term dips in water quality caused by rainstorms washing agricultural run-off from local fields into bathing waters.

Unlike southern Europe, we do not have a tourism sector that depends on beach holidays, nor do we have endless access to ultraviolet radiation in the form of sunshine to clean our waters naturally. However, some of our beaches—such as Ayr beach—are used by significant numbers of people when there is good weather.

The main issue for Scotland is therefore how to build on what is one of our main assets—our unique water environment. We have to ensure that

it is protected and improved, but we also have to ensure that we apply resources at the right places for the best reasons. Scotland's coastal water environment is unique and important and the people of Scotland deserve to have access to it. We all acknowledge the high status of Scotland's water environment; it is one of the things that attract people to the country.

The press and, dare I say it, some of our nationalist colleagues sometimes give the impression that we are lagging behind our European partners. We have all heard that certain countries are better than we are, but the statistics do not back that up. According to last year's data, compliance with the bathing water directive in UK coastal waters was better than in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, Ireland, Italy and Sweden. That is no small achievement, and we should remember that Scotland's and the UK's results for this year were even better, with a compliance rate of 95 per cent for Scotland and 98.4 per cent for the whole of the UK. That is real progress, brought about by record investment and real partnership working, and I know that the Scottish Parliament will welcome that when we come to vote on the motion.

Business Motion

16:56

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-686, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) that Stage 1 of the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill be completed by 2 April 2004; and

(b) that Stage 1 of the National Health Service Reform (Scotland) Bill be completed by 5 March 2004.—[*Tavish Scott.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As we have reached the end of business before the time set out in the business list for the start of the next item, I now suspend proceedings under rule 7.4.1(d) until 5 o'clock.

16:56

Meeting suspended.

17:00

On resuming—

Decision Time

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):

There are 10 questions to be put as a result of today's business. I ask members to note that, in relation to this morning's debate on the financial powers of the Parliament, if the amendment in the name of Andy Kerr is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Tommy Sheridan falls.

The first question is, that amendment S2M-697.3, in the name of Andy Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S2M-697, in the name of John Swinney, on the financial powers of the Parliament, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Ms Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)

Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 50, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S2M-697.2, in the name of David McLetchie, which seeks to amend motion S2M-697, in the name of John Swinney, on the financial powers of the Parliament, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 14, Against 100, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in Tommy Sheridan's name falls, so the third question is, that motion S2M-697, in the name of John Swinney, on the financial powers of the Parliament, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Ms Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)

Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 49, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament recognises the significant benefit that Scotland gains from being part of the United Kingdom

and notes that public expenditure in Scotland is at record levels and that this is helping to deliver the commitments in the Partnership Agreement to growing Scotland's economy; delivering excellent public services; supporting stronger, safer communities; and developing a confident, democratic Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that amendment S2M-694.1, in the name of Tavish Scott, which seeks to amend motion S2M-694, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on European Parliament seat numbers, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Ms Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)

Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 36, Abstentions 14.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that motion S2M-694, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on European Parliament seat numbers, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)

Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 77, Against 35, Abstentions 1.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament welcomes the accession of the 10 new member states of the European Union on 1 May 2004; notes that the elections to the European Parliament are a reserved matter; recognises that all 15 existing member states have agreed to reduce their quota of MEPs to enable the new member states to be represented on an equitable basis; notes the consequent reduction of United Kingdom

seats in the European Parliament from 87 to 78, and considers that this is appropriate given the enlargement of the European Union.

The Presiding Officer: The sixth question is, that amendment S2M-695.3, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, which seeks to amend motion S2M-695, in the name of Allan Wilson, on protecting bathing water quality, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)

Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Ms Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 44, Against 61, Abstentions 6.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The seventh question is, that amendment S2M-695.1, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S2M-695, in the name of Allan Wilson, on protecting

bathing water quality, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 39, Against 73, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The eighth question is, that amendment S2M-695.4, in the name of Mark Ruskell, which seeks to amend motion S2M-695, in the name of Allan Wilson, on protecting bathing water quality, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)

Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Mr Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 51, Against 62, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The ninth and final question is, that motion S2M-695, in the name of Allan Wilson, on protecting bathing water quality, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Ms Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)

Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 78, Against 3, Abstentions 33.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament commends the results achieved during the 2003 bathing season for Scotland's designated bathing waters; welcomes the Scottish Executive's continued commitment to place the environment at the forefront of our strategy for protecting our bathing waters; acknowledges the importance of continuing to strive to achieve best value from the considerable investment that Scotland is applying, which in turn enhances Scotland's tourist credentials, and endorses the partnership approach taken by the Executive to work with all sectors to reduce pollution to the water environment.

Unity Enterprise (Glasgow Airport)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S2M-578, in the name of Trish Godman, on Unity Enterprise at Glasgow airport. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament commends Unity Enterprise, a registered charity, which provides education, training, work experience and other assistance to young people and adults who have disabilities and disadvantages of one kind or another; notes in particular the helpful and practical assistance given by a group of such young people and adults to passengers at Glasgow Airport, especially the help shown to those individuals who have to use wheelchairs, in relation to shopping requirements, visits to cafes and toilets and the company offered to passengers in allocated areas; believes that this is both a comfort to travellers and offers a useful introduction to the workplace for those who are themselves disadvantaged, and therefore considers that the Scottish Executive and other appropriate agencies should do what they can in order to extend similar services to other airports, bus terminals and railway stations.

17:12

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): It gives me great pleasure to speak to my motion on Unity Enterprise. Naturally, I will behave myself and will finish on time.

If we are honest about our job, there are times when we feel that we have had enough, because it is like hitting our heads off a brick wall. We never do it right; sometimes we do not even do it wrong—things are just bad and we get bad vibes from people. We go to people, we help them but we get no answer and no kind of support. I suppose that one could say that the same applies to most people's jobs.

Meeting a particular person or group can change that and, more often than not, the change is not down to us but down to them. I think that that is what happened to Hugh Henry and me when we went to Glasgow airport and met the members of Unity Enterprise. It was excellent to see people with disabilities assisting passengers and families of passengers in numerous positive and helpful ways. Like many others, I have been quite rightly told by people who are disabled that the last thing they want is charity. They seek the right to play a full part in their communities—in employment, leisure, culture and social activities. That is the value statement of Unity Enterprise.

Hugh Henry and I saw that in operation at Glasgow airport. Travellers were pleased to be helped in various ways by people with learning difficulties who are earning a reasonable income

for the work that they do. For the past two days, testimony to that has been visible in the Parliament's foyer, where there have been copies of letters of appreciation sent by those who have been helped.

Unity Enterprise is an inter-church voluntary agency. It is not a happy-clappy do-gooder outfit; it is a serious way of addressing an issue that Parliament should be involved in. It seeks to help people in communities who are unemployed or who have disabilities or mental health problems. There are Unity Enterprise projects in West Dunbartonshire, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, Inverclyde, Glasgow, East Renfrewshire, Renfrewshire, East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire and Argyll—indeed, in most parts of Scotland.

Let us take a quick look at the range of opportunities and work that is available in those areas. In Inverclyde, there are catering options at the Fitzgerald centre and an exclusion from school project, which is about encouraging children not only to return to school, but to go on to work in Inverclyde. I know that my colleague Duncan McNeil has been supportive of those two projects. A housing support service has been established in Patricia Ferguson's constituency of Glasgow Maryhill, which she supports as an MSP. A project that involves visiting long-stay patients in hospital has been established in Renfrewshire and Inverclyde. Many of those patients are isolated from friends and family, who have to travel some distance to hospitals.

The independence options project concerns employment opportunities in East Dunbartonshire and West Dunbartonshire. It provides retraining and helps people to achieve national certificates and finally—we hope—employment. The furniture options project provides woodwork skills. That project is located in Clydebank, which is in my colleague Des McNulty's constituency. A travel cafe and travel agency have been established in the Trongate in Glasgow. That wide range of projects is very much part of our social inclusion agenda.

I am especially encouraged by the emphasis that is given to employment opportunities. Wendy Alexander, in whose constituency Glasgow airport is situated, is interested in that subject. Those opportunities take the shape of work-experience placements, sheltered employment activities, supported employment in part-time and full-time jobs and even encouragement to take self-employment opportunities, when that is appropriate. Of course, becoming involved in the labour market has many benefits.

The minister and his colleagues will be in broad sympathy with the aims of Unity Enterprise and other voluntary agencies that do similar work, but I

want to know what practical, financial and legislative measures the Scottish Executive can take to assist such agencies. The Minister for Transport is to reply to the debate, but a minister who is responsible for enterprise, education, communities or equal opportunities could have replied, because Unity Enterprise's work covers all those subjects. The Executive departments that deal with those subjects must work together to help and support agencies such as Unity Enterprise.

For too long, we have ignored or overlooked the legitimate needs and aspirations of people with disabilities and health problems. I remind members that last year's Madrid declaration for the European year of disabled people says that disability is a human rights issue, that people with disabilities have long been invisible citizens and that local authorities, employers, trade unions and others should do all that they can to ensure that such fellow citizens enter the labour market as equals and that their employment is based on equality in relation to terms and conditions of employment and to promotional opportunities.

The Madrid declaration prompted the motion, which compliments Unity Enterprise on the work of its members on behalf of people who have been invisible for too long. I hope that such voluntary agencies can rely on the full support of the Parliament and a Scottish Executive in which all departments work together.

17:18

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I congratulate Trish Godman on securing this important debate on a subject that is dear to the hearts of all of us—not just the hearts of people who are present, but the hearts of people who could not stay behind for the debate. I do not say that just because Renfrewshire Council's area and the Glasgow airport area are my old stomping grounds. As Trish Godman said, Unity Enterprise's work is not confined to Renfrewshire and Glasgow airport—it reaches out all over Glasgow, to Inverclyde and other areas.

I compliment Unity Enterprise on its work. Perhaps Johann Lamont will comment on that, because today she brought together 40 or 50 carers from throughout Glasgow. It was interesting to see carers' reactions to questions. Tonight, we are debating people who have learning disabilities and who may be cared for, but who are doing a marvellous job of caring for other people. The people to whom I have spoken in the confines of the airport about the work that is done there say that the project is excellent.

Like Trish Godman, I ask whether the Minister for Transport is the right minister to respond to the

debate. Perhaps the Minister for Communities or the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning could respond, as Trish Godman said.

The Executive has a strategy for carers, which was discussed at today's meeting with carers. Could we have a strategy to monitor what happens to people with disabilities? Perhaps a bit more help could be provided in Unity Enterprise's area, where such good work is being done.

One reason for having this debate relates to people with learning disabilities. Sometimes the phrase "learning disabilities" is not liked; language and labelling can be big problems. Such people are starting to get their lives together with the help of agencies; they then push forward and help other people. As Trish Godman said, it is important that they can live in their own homes in Maryhill and other areas. People are being given the benefits of independence and are, as a result, reaching out and helping other people.

We could consider expanding such work. In airports, people in wheelchairs and elderly people are not always helped as they should be. Perhaps that is why the Minister for Transport is here. Unity Enterprise does an excellent job within the airport.

Work should not stop where it does; rather it should be progressed. As Trish Godman said, people are not only helping themselves and others, but are gaining a wee bit of confidence. I hope that they get on to the employment ladder, which is where Unity Enterprise and similar projects will come to the fore. Such organisations have the expertise, experience and contacts that can help people to get on to the employment ladder and to lead lives that are like the lives other people lead. Nothing should hold them back—if they are prepared to put themselves forward and to help other people, Parliament should be prepared to help them.

I hope that Unity Enterprise—along with other such projects—will be monitored and that its good work will be considered in order to find out whether it can be stretched out further than Glasgow, Inverclyde and Renfrewshire, and in order to establish a strategy for such projects. We should recognise that people want to contribute and that they are contributing.

As always, finance is an issue, but we should acknowledge that people are already contributing emotionally and financially, so Parliament should contribute, too. If that takes finance, strategies and projects, we should consider those and view the issue in the wider sphere.

Again, I congratulate Trish Godman on securing the debate. I hope that the minister can come up with good answers, a strategy and finance.

17:22

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland)

(Con): I, too, pay tribute to Trish Godman for allowing us to acknowledge the work of Unity Enterprise and in particular the positive and constructive work that it has carried out at Glasgow airport, as the motion carefully describes.

The charity was established in 1989. However, if we are being honest, I suspect that many of us have been unaware of the good work that it does. It was, of course, initially an inter-church initiative, which gave it strength when it was first formed.

I have been struck by the extensive work that the charity has discharged, and not only in relation to the age groups and categories of young people that it helps. It has been forward looking in considering the issue of integration with society. In respect of its core values, it states:

“We believe that every person has an equal right to participate in the economic and social life of our society.”

Nobody would disagree with that, but the challenge sometimes is how to give effect to that aspiration: the charity demonstrates impressively exactly how effect can be given to that.

I am aware from my experience with the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust—which is also a charity—that some of the most interesting developments for young people come in the most unexpected ways. Often, they happen because young people in particular circumstances and situations are provided with a medium through which they have an opportunity to show what they are capable of contributing. They are given a framework within which that contribution is encouraged and in giving that framework, we hope to nurture their confidence in how they will proceed through life, and contribute to society.

Trish Godman will be aware that I have not signed the motion. There is a reason why I have not done so, to which I shall come. My remarks are not meant in any discordant sense, but I have four slight concerns that I thought it necessary to articulate.

It seems to be important that the voluntary and charitable sector is seen to be independent and not to be associated with the Executive. I say that for no narrow party-political reasons. One of the strengths of the voluntary and charitable sector is that participants feel that they are doing their own thing. Equally important, perhaps, is that the public acknowledges that they are doing their own thing and are not being propped up by the Executive, which could have a negative effect on perception of them. It is important that the charities are autonomous in their operation. It is right that Unity Enterprise should make decisions about how it wants to work, where it wants to work and how it should set about discharging its responsibilities

and implementing its aspirations under its charitable purposes.

The invitation at the end of the motion is for the Scottish Executive and other appropriate agencies to

“do what they can in order to extend similar services to other airports, bus terminals and railway stations.”

However, I am not sure that I think that that is the role of the Scottish Executive. Although it is certainly the role of the charity to do that—Unity Enterprise is to be commended for what it is doing and encouraged to investigate the possibilities—I do not think that it is appropriate for the Executive to play a lead role in that task.

It is important to mention another implication. Throughout Scotland local charities do extremely good work. It is important that we recognise and respect their independence and their right to contribute to their communities in whatever ways they think are fit. We need to be careful, before we set out too prescriptive a direction for any one charity, that we do not prejudice the work of other charities.

I thank Trish Godman genuinely for bringing Unity Enterprise to Parliament's attention. I thoroughly applaud the work that the charity does, but I felt it necessary to express my slight concern about the last three lines of the motion.

17:27

Dr Jean Turner (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)

(Ind): It is very nice that I can take part in this debate. I have to say that I find members' business debates to be the most interesting debates that we have in this chamber.

I congratulate Trish Godman on securing this debate. I was exceedingly interested to find out about Unity Enterprise because I knew nothing about it until I spoke to Ena Donachie in the foyer of the Parliament headquarters. She is an energetic lady and I learned a lot from her. The wonderful thing about the charity is that it values people and allows people to feel valued in themselves. It appears that it does more than just help people at the airport, as I have learned this evening.

I know many people who would fall into the category of those who are not in the first bloom of youth and who travel all over the world to visit their families. As people get older, they need help. Airports and airlines provide services that take people in wheelchairs to their aeroplanes, but Unity Enterprise provides a little bit more. It is difficult for some elderly people to get into toilets, cafes and so on in airports if they are on their own and many people of a certain age travel on their own.

We cannot always depend on a good Samaritan coming along. Coming to Parliament this morning, a taxi driver told me that he had taken to the train station a blind lady who had taken her dog to the veterinary school in Glasgow. On arriving at the train station, he found that nobody was willing to help her because her dog could not wear its harness. He did a little bit more than taxi drivers would usually do and ensured that she got on the train. However, because we cannot always depend on such people being around, we will always need organisations such as Unity Enterprise.

I welcome whatever support the charity gets from partners for the service that it provides. In a way, in relation to equal opportunities, human rights, social inclusion and people's need to get in and out of places, we might think that airports should provide the service that is provided by Unity Enterprise. However, I think that it is likely that a charity such as Unity Enterprise will do the job better.

I would like the charity's work to be rolled out throughout the country. I would also like a similar service to be introduced in hospitals because it can be extremely difficult to get in and out of our hospitals. People must often be dropped by the kerb at the hospital, but they have difficulty getting from the kerb to the foyer, never mind going on to whichever department they have to go on to. It would be nice to have people to welcome folk as they approach the hospital's front door and to help them to get inside. I had frequently to take a disabled aunt to hospital, prop her up outside and leave her there while I drove away to find a parking spot miles away from where she was tottering and hanging about; it would have been lovely if there had been a kindly face to put her in a wheelchair and take care of her.

Trish Godman: I offer a bit of clarification. I accept Dr Turner's point about airports employing people to provide such a service, but what is important is who is employed. Unity Enterprise employs people who have had health problems and difficulty getting into employment. If an airport decided to provide such a service, it might not be so much at ease with employing such people. We can see that when we look at the people whom airports do not employ. Employing such people is what Unity Enterprise's work is about.

I also say to Annabel Goldie that what the last bit of the motion calls for is what Unity Enterprise has asked for: that the Executive give it help and guidance on how to move into other airports and into railway stations.

Dr Turner: I appreciate fully what Trish Godman says. If we left the service to the airport, it would not employ so many people, which is the beauty of Unity Enterprise's service. The fact that the people

who provide the service have had problems or have special needs means that they are more understanding of other people's needs and will probably do the job much better, and because they are not under time constraints, they will give their all.

I appreciate fully what Unity Enterprise does and am glad that I have learned about it. I wish Unity Enterprise every success and I hope that it will keep going and that the Executive will be able to give it advice.

17:32

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I did not intend to speak, but I thought that, at the very least, I should congratulate Trish Godman on securing the debate and timing it so well with the display in the foyer of Parliament headquarters, which I know that many of the members who are present visited.

To take up Annabel Goldie's point, to extend projects such as the one that Unity Enterprise operates at Glasgow airport to other airports and to bus stations—indeed, to wherever—is a legitimate and appropriate role for the Executive. The Executive should facilitate projects in the voluntary or charitable sector, where the organisation concerned wants that, and should facilitate and encourage projects' expansion. Equally, we must realise that, in many respects, the Executive's agenda—which is about delivering social justice and equality of opportunity and creating employment opportunities—fits with the majority of voluntary organisations, which have no difficulty in working with us while preserving their independence and acting in the interests of the people whom they serve.

I am fortunate enough to remember Unity Enterprise from a former life. I will not confess to going back to 1989, but before I arrived at the Parliament, I had worked with Unity Enterprise when I was employed in local government. I found that the work that it did at that time in East Dunbartonshire was significant and most impressive, as is the work that it currently does in West Dunbartonshire. As a social enterprise, part of Unity Enterprise's uniqueness is that it is close to the community that it serves and, because of that, delivers incredibly effectively for that community. That is something of which the Executive is mindful when it works with social enterprises.

The key point that I will make about Unity Enterprise's work is to do with people with learning disabilities. If members visited the display in the PHQ foyer, they met some of them today. There was an enthusiastic young man called Gerry, who happens to come from Alexandria, which is an

area that is close to my heart. For me, Gerry epitomised what the project is all about: it is about employment and giving people life chances and opportunities that they would otherwise be denied.

Many members will know of “The same as you? A review of services for people with learning disabilities”. That was a seminal piece of policy work undertaken early on by the Executive. It was about changing the shape of services for people with a learning disability. One of the report’s key recommendations is that it is not only about providing people with a service but about enabling people with a learning disability to go out and participate as other people would in real jobs, real opportunities and real training.

We must ensure that the signal that comes from the chamber is not only that the work that Unity Enterprise is doing is significant but that we must enhance and build on the number of work opportunities that are available for people with a learning difficulty, because they can do exactly the same job that we can do. The project builds confidence and self-esteem and provides a useful service not only to the people involved but to the communities in which they live. It recognises that each of us has skills and talents that should be nurtured and cherished.

I again congratulate Trish Godman on securing the debate and congratulate Unity Enterprise and all the other voluntary organisations like it that day in, day out provide a range of opportunities for people in our communities, particularly those who may be disadvantaged in the labour market.

17:36

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I shall be very brief—certainly by my standards.

I congratulate Trish Godman on securing the debate and I congratulate members on the speeches that they have made. The debate gives us an opportunity to mark the important work of an organisation at local level that does the job not because it is going to be marked in the Parliament but because it makes a significant difference to people’s lives.

The jobs created by Unity Enterprise are jobs that need to be done—they are real jobs. Although Unity Enterprise is a charity and a social enterprise, the people who do those jobs deliver a real service and should be recognised on that basis.

Unity Enterprise does the slightly more difficult job of involving people in work who perhaps find it difficult to get into work. Due to various circumstances in their lives, they have faced barriers to getting to the stage of working and participating in the things that go with work, such

as the social side and the opportunity to mix with other people.

I particularly welcome Unity Enterprise because of the important work that it does for people with learning disabilities. We want to see initiatives such as Unity Enterprise rolled out elsewhere, but Unity Enterprise also gives a strong message to other employers—in the private, voluntary and public sectors—about the importance of having diversity in their workplace and employing people with, for example, learning disabilities, who have proven to be as good workers as anyone else when they have the proper and appropriate support. It might be that if we look imaginatively at how that support can be delivered, we can provide a service and create real opportunities for people in the workplace.

There is a broader issue to do with involving people. The issue of learning disabilities is close to my heart. I am involved in the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament for learning disability and the parallel transport liaison group in Glasgow, which works with people who use the internal transport service delivered by Glasgow City Council that takes people to day centres and special schools. That experience has taught me several things. One of the lessons that I have learned is how important it is for people with learning disabilities and other disabilities to be in the main stream and to be part of society, because they have as much to give as we have to give them. If they are at the centre of the delivery of a service, it will, from their point of view, be an awful lot better.

It is important to see people. Trish Godman talked about invisible people; it is important to give visibility to people. They have the right to make demands on society and the right to make their contribution to society.

Although it is not a matter for the Parliament, there are issues to do with the barriers that prevent people, particularly people with learning disabilities and other disabilities, from going into work. We must look imaginatively at working in partnership with Westminster to establish how the barriers can be overcome. We are all enriched by the kind of work that is done by Unity Enterprise and by opportunities to have as diverse a work force as possible in all sectors of the economy.

I congratulate Trish Godman again. I thank Unity Enterprise for all the information that it provided for us today and commend it for all the hard work that it has done and will do in the future.

17:39

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): I add my congratulations to Trish Godman on securing this valuable debate. I also congratulate

Unity Enterprise on the innovative project that we are discussing, which provides the opportunity for young people and adults who have disabilities and disadvantages of one kind or another to act as companions to older and disabled people at Glasgow airport. I am here this evening because that is a valuable role.

There have been similar projects over the years and, as has been said, Unity Enterprise goes back to the 1980s. However, too many of those initiatives failed to receive the financial backing and support that they needed and, too often and for a variety of reasons, they folded. It is good not only that the project is being sustained, but that it is thriving and that there is such purpose and belief in the work that is being done so successfully at Glasgow airport. The work clearly benefits travellers significantly. We need more such transport initiatives because transport is not only about facilities and infrastructure, but about attention to passengers—the customers—and other soft, service issues. Too often, in thinking about transport, we forget about those issues. The service is valuable and I would like it to be made available in other locations, including other airports. I know that there are plans to set up similar schemes in Edinburgh airport, Waverley station and Glasgow Central station and a range of ideas about how the service might develop.

When some people hear about new initiatives such as the new deal for disabled people, they might be cynical about the likelihood of success because of the resources that are required to make such schemes work. However, it is encouraging that 1,300 disabled people have found work through the new deal for disabled people. We have worked in partnership with the UK Government and it is important that we continue to do so. I am sure that, along with the Department for Work and Pensions, Scottish Enterprise and transport operators, we can sustain, grow and develop the initiative and not simply stave off the crises that too often affect voluntary sector transport projects. I am sure that all members share that ambition. To achieve it, we must recognise the potential to increase the number of trainees. Unity Enterprise believes that approximately 100 people could be employed if we rolled out transport interchanges to other airports and railway stations where the service could be provided. As the Minister for Transport, I will do anything that I can to encourage the support that is required and merited.

Annabel Goldie said that the voluntary sector must be independent, but where would charities be without public sector support? Many charitable organisations benefit greatly from support from the Scottish Executive and other branches of government. The issue is about partnership. Some of the most effective use of Government resources

can come from leveraging in value and supporting the huge voluntary effort that is put into charitable work.

One great disappointment is that when money is tight and budgets are being arranged—for example, in the annual local government budget adjustments—too often the voluntary sector is the first to lose out. The opposite should be the case. We should do more to support the voluntary sector. Many members have spoken passionately about that topic over the years. I congratulate Jackie Baillie and others on the attention that they have given to the voluntary sector. I really believe that we can do a lot more in that area.

It is appropriate that we are debating this subject in the European year of disabled people. The Executive has been working hard, in partnership with disability organisations, to use the opportunity that has been provided by the European year of disabled people to raise awareness among employers, service providers and others about not only disabled people's rights, but the potential of disabled people. As Trish Godman said, it is uplifting and inspiring to see the self-confidence and pride that young disabled people can gain through initiatives such as Unity Enterprise. It is not all about promoting rights and participation, important though that is; it is also about the sheer joy and inspiration that is created through putting effort into initiatives such as Unity Enterprise.

We want to do more: that is the point at which I stop. I cannot promise to provide more funding this evening; however, I can promise further support and dialogue. Unity Enterprise has not yet finalised the details of the expansion initiative that it would like to launch, but from a transport point of view I can undertake to be supportive and encouraging of that initiative.

Several other ministers could have been standing here this evening. I am pleased that it has been me. I will take back to other ministers Trish Godman's comments and encourage a cross-Executive, joined-up approach in Government to ensure that all aspects of this worthwhile initiative continue to be supported by the Scottish Executive.

Meeting closed at 17:47.

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