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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 20 November 2014

Session 4

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 20 November 2014

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

General Question Time

Educational Psychology (Support for Training)

1. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands (Lab)): To ask the Scottish Government what support it provides to people who want to train as educational psychologists. (S4O-03721)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The University of Dundee and the University of Strathclyde offer, in alternate years, a two-year master of science in educational psychology. Educational psychology students are eligible to apply to the Student Awards Agency for Scotland for a £3,400 postgraduate tuition fee loan for each year. In addition, from 2015-16, Scotland-domiciled students who undertake the course will be eligible to apply for an additional loan of up to £4,500 each year to help with living costs.

I met students from the University of Strathclyde cohort on 1 May this year to discuss their experience of the course, the levels of support available and the work that they want to do as educational psychologists.

David Stewart: Last year, a report from the Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists highlighted in stark terms that the number of trained educational psychologists in Scotland is “dangerously low” while, at the same time, demand for services is soaring. What words of comfort can the cabinet secretary give to the young trainee educational psychologist I met recently who has spent a lot of time and effort to get a place on her course but is at risk of being unable to complete it because, as she told me, the £49,000 bursary was removed by the Scottish Government in 2012?

Michael Russell: Two issues need to be considered. Mr Stewart has addressed both of them helpfully—I say “helpfully” because that is the case. We have rehearsed the issues in the chamber before, but I will explain them briefly. The first is the recruitment and retention of educational psychologists. The workforce planning that is undertaken for that indicates that the numbers that are being trained are adequate for the jobs available. As long as that is the case, it would be foolish to increase the number in training. If at any stage the workforce planning indicated that more were required, I would take that seriously. There is

no shortage of students applying for the courses; they are high-quality postgraduate courses and high-quality students go into them. Of course I am happy to meet students and MSPs to discuss individual cases.

The second issue is postgraduate support. There was a very varied map of postgraduate support and there were two problems with it. One was that it had many inconsistencies, which arose from previous shortages and the money that was put in to address them. The second was a decline in the number of Scottish students undertaking postgraduate study. Yesterday, I announced that Bryan MacGregor, vice-principal of the University of Aberdeen, will undertake a review to look at the map of postgraduate provision and support for it and to see whether the prescribed list of courses for support should be changed in any way and how we would do that. I would welcome input from MSPs on that.

Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route Fastlink-A90 Junction Design

2. Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its assessment is of the proposal to reconsider the Aberdeen western peripheral route fastlink-A90 junction design. (S4O-03722)

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): The design of the Stonehaven junction, along with the suggested alternative, was debated at length during the public local inquiry in 2008. To reconsider the alternative design when the project is approaching financial close would cause significant delay to the spring 2018 completion date and incur a substantial, but as yet unspecified, extra cost.

Nigel Don: The minister and I have discussed this quite a bit. Will he confirm that, although changing the Stonehaven junction as suggested would involve a relatively small variation of contract, it could not possibly be undertaken without the planning considerations, which might build in the delays that nobody wants to see? As the constituency MSP, I am not suggesting that there should be any further delay at all.

Keith Brown: I understand of course that there were and remain competing views on the best option. However, as I have said, they were examined exhaustively by ministers and the public local inquiry. The Scottish Government is determined to achieve the speediest possible completion of the AWPR as the project moves to financial close. We would not want to risk in any circumstances the potentially huge costs and disruption, the necessity of a further public consultation process and possibly even a further public local inquiry, all of which would be inevitably

associated with changing the route at this very late stage.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): What leverage is the minister using in this half-billion-pound contract to get the successful contractors, including Balfour Beatty and Carillion, to own up, apologise and pay up to the workers they systematically prevented from gaining employment through their practice of blacklisting?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The questions are supposed to be about the design of a junction on the Aberdeen western peripheral route, but the minister might wish to answer Mr Findlay's question.

Keith Brown: As we have said many times, we have made sure that the companies that bid for those contracts and others are not involved in the practices that Neil Findlay mentioned. We have taken our responsibility seriously and made sure that we have discharged it.

Subordinated Debt (Monitoring)

3. John Wilson (Central Scotland) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Government how it monitors the use of subordinated debt in procurement projects by the hubcos and the Scottish Futures Trust. (S4O-03723)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Subordinated debt is invested in hub projects through Scottish Futures Trust Investments, which is a subsidiary of the Scottish Futures Trust that was established for that purpose. Investment decisions are made and investments are monitored by the board's investment committee. Scottish Futures Trust Investments accounts showing investments made are published annually.

John Wilson: What discussions has the cabinet secretary had with the Scottish Futures Trust about its prudent use of high-risk, high-yield financial instruments, namely lower-grade junk bonds? How widely are those instruments used by hubcos for financing Scottish Government and local government procurement contracts?

John Swinney: I cannot give Mr Wilson a specific answer about the quality and category of investment finance that is acquired, other than to say that the Scottish Futures Trust has been successful in obtaining the necessary private capital to support a number of strategic developments. In the previous answer, Mr Brown talked about the Aberdeen western peripheral route. The SFT is involved in the procurement of the finance that is necessary to support that project.

The Scottish Futures Trust has a strong and robust framework for assessing the attraction of capital investment into such projects. That will be sustained by the scrutiny of Scottish Futures Trust Investments and by the Scottish Futures Trust as a whole.

Private Rented Housing Sector (Reform)

4. Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to reform the private rented sector. (S4O-03724)

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): The Scottish Government has taken significant action to reform the private rented sector since launching our strategy for the sector in May last year. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 includes provisions to regulate the letting agent industry, to introduce a new private rented housing tribunal and to provide local authorities with further powers to tackle poor property condition. We are consulting on proposals for a new private tenancy, which will improve security for tenants while providing safeguards for landlords, lenders and investors.

Siobhan McMahon: Shelter Scotland's make renting right campaign has highlighted the fact that a chronic shortage of affordable housing has driven more people into the private rented sector. Throughout my region there are more than 20,000 private renters, many of whom are trapped in renting and cannot access social housing or get on the property ladder. Does the minister support Shelter Scotland's campaign, which is calling for a private rented sector that is modern, stable, flexible, predictable and fair for the people who live in private rented housing and the landlords who let out their properties?

Margaret Burgess: The Scottish Government has been working with Shelter Scotland and other stakeholders on the development of our proposals for a new private rented tenancy. Shelter Scotland states in its make renting right campaign that it supports the Scottish Government in making renting right across Scotland. That is because we have already made proposals to improve security of tenure for tenants.

In addition, we are working with the house-building industry and have funded a private rented sector champion who will drive initiatives to boost the supply of new homes that are purpose built for private tenants and will unlock new sources of housing investment.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): Security of tenure and increasing rent costs are key issues in the private rented sector. Does the minister agree that introducing a standard three-year tenancy and

caps on rent rises would vastly improve confidence in the sector?

Margaret Burgess: As the member will be aware, we have been monitoring rent levels in Scotland. Last week, we published comprehensive rent statistics, which show that most average rents have increased by a figure that is lower than the rate of inflation and that some rents have fallen. However, we are aware that rents are rising faster in some areas and in some household types, which is why we are inviting views on the issue as part of our consultation on the new private rented sector tenancy system. We are consulting on that and I encourage the member to add her views to the consultation.

Drink-driving Penalties (Devolution of Power)

5. Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the power to set the penalties for drink driving being devolved. (S4O-03725)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Scottish Government set out in “More Powers for the Scottish Parliament: Scottish Government Proposals” that we consider that full responsibility for the law on road traffic offences should be devolved to this Parliament. That would allow decisions to be made in Scotland about how best to improve the safety of Scotland’s roads, in the context of Scotland’s road safety framework to 2020.

The devolution of powers would include drink-driving penalties, so consideration could be given to whether changes should be made in the area.

Christian Allard: In light of Tuesday’s debate, when we considered an amendment from the Conservatives and there was welcome support from Labour members for the devolution of more powers, will the cabinet secretary write to the United Kingdom Government to highlight the cross-party support in this Parliament for the devolution of more powers on the issue?

Kenny MacAskill: I am happy to consider doing so. The member raised an important point. We debated the proposal to lower the drink-driving limit, and the motion was passed. There was a great deal of support across the chamber and certainly from members on the Labour benches, including Dave Stewart in particular.

As has been suggested, including in the Conservative amendment, further steps could be taken, whether we are talking about graduated licences or a further lowering of the limit, which would require consideration of and power over the penalties that would apply. It seems to me that rather than the Parliament simply having the power to lower the limit we should have further powers to make Scotland safer. We have gone as

far as we can with the current limits, and I can certainly consider taking on board the member’s point.

The Presiding Officer: Question 6, in the name of Dave Thompson, was not lodged. I have been given an explanation.

A890 (Stromeferry Bypass)

7. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the Highland Council about the A890 Stromeferry bypass. (S4O-03727)

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): On 20 May I met the leader of the Highland Council to discuss a number of issues, including potential funding options for Stromeferry. My officials at Transport Scotland continue to offer support to and to liaise with the Highland Council on the matter.

Rhoda Grant: The minister will know about the recent landslide, which is one of many landslides over many years—indeed, going back to when I went to high school in the area. He will also know that the A890 is the access road for the local high school and hospital, as well as a well-used tourist route, and that the only available diversion is 130 miles long—which is not really a diversion at all.

The price of rerouting the road would be high, but the economic benefit for the area and for the rest of Scotland would be enormous. Will the minister consider helping Highland Council with the funding of the project, perhaps through joint funding by the Scottish Government and Highland Council, so that we can bring that about as quickly as possible and ensure that disruption ceases?

Keith Brown: As I said, we have had a discussion with Highland Council about the matter—at least twice, because we discussed the issue with the council after an earlier rockfall. We will continue to liaise with and to offer support to Highland Council on the matter.

Highland Council is the roads authority for the area. In addition to demands to spend more resources in every area of Scottish Government activity and demands to spend resources to mitigate what the Westminster Government is doing, we are getting demands to do things that are the legitimate responsibility of local government. It is impossible to see where the resources would come from—unless Rhoda Grant wants to identify exactly where the resources should come from.

The approach that we have taken so far, which is to discuss the matter with Highland Council to see what support we can offer, is the right one. The relevant local authority is the roads authority,

and in this case the matter is Highland Council's responsibility, albeit that we will work with it.

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): The Highland Council has spent many millions of pounds on maintenance and landslip clear-up on this now life-threatening section of the Stromeferry bypass. Does the minister agree that the council should seek the co-operation of the Macpherson family at Attadale estate in planning the least expensive route over their land to Gleann Udalain, on a bypass to the bypass?

Keith Brown: As I said to Rhoda Grant, that is the responsibility of Highland Council. It is for the council to take forward such discussions and consider the options.

Both members are right to suggest that the site is very constrained. The railway is right next to the road, which is right next to the water, and the adjacent land is very steep. It is a difficult situation. We will do what we can, but it is right that Highland Council should explore all the options.

Youth Football Contracts

8. Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with football authorities regarding youth football contracts. (S4O-03728)

The Cabinet Secretary for Commonwealth Games, Sport, Equalities and Pensioners' Rights (Shona Robison): That is a matter for the Scottish Football Association and the football clubs. As the member will be aware, a petition has been lodged before the Public Petitions Committee on the matter. The Scottish Government has consistently made it clear that the Scottish FA and the football clubs have a duty of care for all the young people involved in the Scottish youth football initiative, which must be upheld at all times.

Chic Brodie: The future of Scotland's football resides in the successful development of young male and female footballers. Some recent reports and evidence earlier this year at a Public Petitions Committee round-table session on youth football—to which the cabinet secretary alluded—suggest that the contracted employment conditions of young footballers might be a matter for review. Will the Government at least engage with the authorities and have them consider an in-depth review?

Shona Robison: I am aware that the latest position is that the committee is expecting a review of the current registration process by Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, which is to be completed next month. I hope that that helps the Public Petitions Committee to take the issue forward. We will be

happy, following that review, to engage either with the commissioner or with the committee.

Local Income Tax

9. Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it plans to replace the council tax with a local income tax. (S4O-03729)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Scottish Government is committed to consulting others later in this parliamentary session to develop a fairer, more progressive local tax, based on the ability to pay.

Michael McMahon: I invite the cabinet secretary to congratulate Christina McKelvie on her honesty at the Scottish National Party conference at the weekend, when she admitted that the council tax freeze, being regressive, has benefited wealthy people in her area. Is the cabinet secretary going to disappoint Christina McKelvie by changing the current system and considering a more progressive system than the current regressive council tax freeze?

John Swinney: I was not aware that Mr McMahon had been present at the Scottish National Party conference. If he was, and if this is a gradual journey that Mr McMahon is making to come over to the SNP in due course, based on the warmth with which he has always questioned me over the years, I will give him a very warm welcome.

As Mr McMahon will know, the council tax freeze has delivered real benefits to individuals and families across our country. The council tax had risen significantly before the election of this Government. We committed to freeze the council tax, and the freeze will have delivered £1,200 in benefits to the average band D householder in Scotland during the lifetime of this Administration—during the previous parliamentary session and this session. That is welcome support to individuals.

For those on lower incomes, the council tax freeze has had a disproportionately greater impact on their household income. That is why the council tax freeze has given such real benefits to people facing financial challenges in Scotland today.

Welfare Reform (Impact Analysis)

10. Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what analysis has been published of the impact of welfare reform across Scotland. (S4O-03730)

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): The Scottish Government

has published a range of analysis, reflecting significant concern about how welfare reform is impacting on people across Scotland.

That includes analysis of how women and disabled people are being disproportionately affected by the reforms; of how the number of sanctions has been increasing over time; of how food aid provision has grown over time, which is partly because of the impact of sanctions; and of how, over the six years to 2015-16, the cumulative impact of all welfare reform changes means reductions of around £6 billion in welfare expenditure in Scotland. All the analysis is available on the Scottish Government website.

Stewart Stevenson: If welfare and social policy are devolved to this place, as indeed they should be under the vow, how will the Government use that to tackle poverty and create a fairer society?

Margaret Burgess: Our proposals will focus on equipping the Scottish Parliament with the powers to create more jobs, tackle inequality and protect public services in order to create a wealthier and fairer society.

First Minister's Question Time

11:59

Engagements

1. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the day. (S4F-02396)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Later today, in my first official meeting as First Minister, I will meet a group of carers from around the country to discuss directly with them the issues that they face. It is fitting that that will be my first official engagement as First Minister. It will allow me to thank carers—on behalf of all of us, I am sure—for the massive contribution that they make and also to assure them that I want to provide them with as much support as I can.

Jackie Baillie: Yesterday, the First Minister said:

“There is a big job to be done”—[*Official Report*, 19 November 2014; c 23.]

and that it was time to get on and do it. I could not agree more. Will the First Minister therefore tell members when the new system for allocating drugs to cancer patients will be available across Scotland?

The First Minister: As the member will be aware, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing has been improving the system of allocating drugs, in particular cancer drugs. We want to continue that series of improvements.

I am very well aware from my experience as health secretary—I know that Jackie Baillie is aware of this from her experience as shadow health secretary—that some of the most difficult decisions that are made in the health service concern the allocation of drugs. I want to ensure that, within a budget that we all know is finite, we make those decisions in the best possible way.

Jackie Baillie will be aware of some of the reforms that Alex Neil has already introduced.

On my first day in the job—this does not just apply to this issue; it applies to every issue—I say that I am open minded on any proposals that come forward from any side of the chamber on how the Government can do things better. I hope that Jackie Baillie will take up that invitation in the spirit in which it is intended.

Jackie Baillie: I certainly will take up that invitation and I very much welcome it, because the improvements that the First Minister is talking about should have happened by now.

In October last year, the health secretary announced a new and more flexible system to give

cancer patients access to the treatments that they require based on clinical need, not on where they live. In January this year, he said that the new system would be introduced in May. May came and went. When the health secretary was questioned in July, he did not answer. Earlier this year, clinicians from the Beatson west of Scotland cancer centre came again to the Parliament and said that the postcode lottery system continues, despite the health secretary's promises.

Can the First Minister tell cancer patients in Scotland why there has been the delay?

The First Minister: I do not accept the characterisation of delay and I want to deal with the issue as consensually as I possibly can. Although I absolutely respect Jackie Baillie's good faith in asking me the question, I hope that she will respect my good faith in answering it. All of us across the chamber want people to get the best possible access to drugs and to all healthcare that can help them in time of need.

As Jackie Baillie will be aware, new Scottish Medicines Consortium rules have been in place for some time, but that is not a closed book. There are some very complex and challenging issues around the decision-making process for the allocation of drugs. The Government has not shied away from that, and we will not shy away from it. We will continue to make progress based on the discussions and the consideration that the health secretary has had. I will be very happy to meet clinicians and, indeed, representatives of cancer organisations and cancer patients so that we can include them in our consideration of how we go forward on the issue.

As Jackie Baillie will be aware, one of the reforms that was made previously was to allow more transparency around the whole process of SMC decision making. Although there will always be difficult decisions in this area and it will not be possible under any circumstances to have a position in which every single drug is always approved for use, I want to ensure that we have confidence in the decision-making process so that, even where decisions are taken that people are, for understandable reasons, disappointed by, people know that the decision-making process that underpins them is strong, robust and transparent.

Jackie Baillie: I respect the good faith in which the First Minister approaches the matter, but the question that I asked was not about the SMC; it was about access via health boards. What she is saying is completely at odds with what cancer charities, clinicians and, more important, patients are saying is their real experience of the system now.

On that basis, let me highlight to the First Minister one case that was reported in the *Evening*

Times last month: that of Jean MacDonald from Glasgow. Jean is a carer for her mother, who suffers from leukaemia. She was denied treatment for ovarian cancer in Glasgow, despite the fact that the same treatment was available to patients in Edinburgh. She and her family had to scrape together £35,000 of their own money to pay for cancer drugs. I am sure that the First Minister would agree with me that that just is not right.

Again, can she tell me when she will end the postcode lottery for cancer patients across Scotland, which her health secretary promised would happen by May?

The First Minister: I say to Jackie Baillie in all seriousness that I want us to work now to ensure that we do not have a postcode lottery not only in that aspect of healthcare, but in any aspect.

I am familiar with the case that she raises from the *Evening Times*. I would be happy to speak personally to the individual in question, not only to hear her experiences, which is the most important thing, but to share with her the work that the Government is doing and intends to do in the future to improve the situation.

Jackie Baillie and I had many discussions on this issue when I was health secretary and she was shadow health secretary. We have the SMC, and we are improving the process of decision making in that respect. We spoke about the situation that she raises with regard to local drugs committees and health boards and how we ensure that decision making is much more consistent across the country.

This is my first day in office. I could stand up here and, in response to any of the questions that I am asked, engage in the usual defensive ding-dong. I dare say that there will be weeks when I do exactly that, but—today of all days—I want to make something very clear. I am a new First Minister. I have been a proud member of the Government for seven years, but I want to come to this job with an open mind and a willingness to hear proposals from members on all sides of the chamber. The Government is working on the issue and will continue to do so, but I say it again: this is a complex issue. If any member in the chamber, not just on the front benches, has a proposal for how we can do these things better—

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): We have.

The First Minister: Richard Simpson says that he has. I would be happy to meet him personally to hear that proposal, because on this issue—possibly above all other issues—it is important that we do not divide along party lines. These are matters of life and death for many people.

I hope that members on all sides of the chamber, no matter the ding-dongs that we have on a range of issues in weeks to come, will take what I am saying in the clear spirit in which I say it.

Jackie Baillie: I very much welcome the First Minister's comments about how open she will be with Opposition parties in discussing such serious cases. The issue is about local decision making. I know that she understands that the debate is not theoretical but very real. However, the new system for cancer drugs was promised in May, and the delay in introducing it will be a lifetime to someone with a terminal illness.

Let me leave the First Minister with the thoughts of the partners of two cancer patients.

Jacqui Morrison, whose late husband met Alex Neil to discuss the issue, said:

"By delaying implementation of the new system the Government has broken its promise to patients like my late husband that they would have the ability to access medicines needed to manage their end of life care. How many more patients must suffer before fair and equal access to end of life treatments in Scotland comes into effect?"

Graeme Rankin said:

"Last November, Alex Neil made a promise to bowel cancer patients that the new system would be implemented by May this year. He gave me and my late wife personal assurance that this issue would be solved. I am hugely disappointed and frustrated that a year on, patients are still begging for treatment."

I am happy to work with the First Minister, but I simply ask her this: when will this Government treat cancer patients in Scotland with the dignity and respect that we all believe they deserve?

The First Minister: I will not be provoked into a party-political dispute on the issue today, but Jackie Baillie's last comment was slightly beneath her. I care—as we all do, regardless of our party politics or our divides on other issues—about ensuring that people who are affected by cancer get access to the treatment that is most likely to prolong or to save their lives. Let us all unite on that point.

I have the greatest respect for the quotes that Jackie Baillie has just read out, but I do not accept her characterisation of the Government's performance and position on the issue. Without meaning to undermine any of those quotes, I ask all members of the chamber to reflect seriously on this, as I reflected on it a lot when I was health secretary, for five years.

As anybody who has held that post will know, I had to deal with some heart-wrenching issues, but access to drugs was probably the most heart-wrenching issue that I dealt with. We talk about losing sleep over issues and that one falls into that category. One of the reasons it is heart-wrenching

is that you know not only that improvements need to be made to the processes—and I accept that improvements still need to be made to the processes that we have—but that, no matter how many improvements to the processes you make, you will always have some cases in which a patient entirely understandably thinks that they should have access to a drug that, for clinical reasons in particular, they cannot get access to. That is one of the most difficult things for a politician to comprehend.

Again I say to Jackie Baillie that I am not standing here saying that things are perfect, and I will work with members from across the chamber to improve matters. However, politicians have a duty to recognise how difficult some of the issues are and that there will always be difficult cases, no matter how good the processes are. If we can all go forward in that spirit, we can make further progress and I, as a new First Minister, am determined that we make it.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the First Minister when she will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S4F-02394)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I had a pleasant conversation with the secretary of state last night on the telephone and, during that conversation, we agreed that we would meet in early course.

Ruth Davidson: Earlier this month, a judge in Glasgow's High Court found Ross Wright guilty of rape. In an incredibly brave move, the woman he had attacked—Erin O'Neill—decided to tell her story. She revealed how she discovered only after the court case had finished that Wright had been released early from prison following a previous violent assault. He had served only half his sentence. Erin told the *Daily Record* newspaper:

"Wright should have been behind bars. But he was allowed loose on the streets to rape me."

Ross Wright was freed because of the absurd rule of automatic early release. We have been calling for that law to be scrapped for a number of years. The Scottish Government has now published plans to address that, but they will cover only a derisory number of cases. Does the First Minister not see that those plans are utterly inadequate?

The First Minister: First, I pay tribute to Erin O'Neill for her bravery in giving up her right to anonymity and speaking out on an extremely important issue. She has written to me personally. I will reply to her letter in full soon and would also be happy to meet her so that she can say to me directly what changes she considers should be made.

As Ruth Davidson rightly indicated, the Prisoners (Control of Release) (Scotland) Bill has now been introduced to the Parliament. It will end the entitlement to automatic early release for the most serious and dangerous offenders. We expect the Parliament to pass the bill—subject, of course, to the approval of members—by June next year.

I point out, as has been pointed out in the chamber before, that automatic early release was introduced by the Conservative Government through 1993 legislation and left in place throughout the entirety of the Labour-Liberal Democrat Administrations here in Holyrood. I certainly agree that the change needs to be made. Legislative proposals have been published. It is now the Parliament's job to scrutinise those proposals and, if any member considers it appropriate, propose amendments.

Ruth Davidson has expressed an opinion that the sentence length that the Government's proposals would cover is too long and, therefore, that the proposals are inadequate. We are about to go into a parliamentary process in which any member, including Ruth Davidson, will be able to advance those views and propose amendments to the bill.

Ruth Davidson: The First Minister knows that I am on record as saying that the United Kingdom Government was wrong to introduce automatic early release and that the Scottish Government is wrong not to abolish it entirely.

I have the Scottish Government's bill here. The plans that are contained in it barely scratch the surface of what we are talking about. In fact, new figures from the Scottish Parliament information centre show that, last year, the plans contained in the bill would have applied to just 107 sexual offenders and 24 other violent criminals. That adds up to 131 offenders out of a total of more than 14,000 criminals who were sent to jail last year, which is less than 1 per cent.

The Government has argued previously that ending automatic early release is a resource problem. This is not a resource issue: it is a moral issue. Criminals need to know that, unless there is an exceptional reason not to, they will serve the sentence that the judge hands down.

In her admirable speech yesterday, the First Minister said that, where there was common ground, she would be

"a willing and listening ally."—[*Official Report*, 19 November 2014; c 36.]

Today, she said that she is open minded on how to make things better. If she thinks that there is common ground between us, can we work together to end this scandal for good?

The First Minister: I am very happy to seek to work with Ruth Davidson on the issue. We are in the position of being relatively at the start of a parliamentary process, so there is the opportunity through the normal procedures to discuss how the bill that has been introduced to Parliament by the Government can be improved. I give the commitment that I will work with members across the chamber and be open minded about that.

In August, Victim Support Scotland described the bill as an

"important advance which will go a long way to improving the public perception of justice in Scotland".

There is considerable support for the bill's proposals. However, that does not change the position that I am taking today of being open-minded on how we can go further if there is a willingness and ability to do that.

Ruth Davidson said that this was an issue of resources. Inevitably, most issues have an element of resource consideration around them. We need to make sure that we have the right number of prison places for the prisoners whom we need to accommodate in our prisons. That is a simple statement of fact.

I respect Ruth Davidson's position on the issue and note the fact that she was not a member of the former Conservative Government at Westminster that introduced the policy. However, that Conservative Government did not build a single new Scottish prison during its 18 years in power. By contrast, since 2007-08, this Government has invested more than £528 million in the prison estate. We are taking the decisions that address what Ruth Davidson describes as the resource issues in our prison estate. That makes it more possible to introduce the reforms that she called for today.

We are going about this in the right way and in a reasonable way. We have published a bill, in which our proposals are focused on the most serious offenders and sexual offenders in particular. If Ruth Davidson has proposals to bring to me and the Government about how we can improve the content of that bill, I will be very happy to listen.

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Will the First Minister provide reassurance that all the appropriate steps have been taken to ensure safety and wellbeing at Donaldson's school, Scotland's national school for the deaf?

The First Minister: That is an important and serious question. Last Friday, Education Scotland inspectors raised serious child protection concerns with ministers. Alasdair Allan, the Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages, acted on the very same day by serving on

Donaldson's school a notice under section 66(c) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. That required immediate action by the school.

I can tell Parliament that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education remain in the school to ensure that all appropriate steps are being taken.

Members will appreciate that, given the seriousness of the allegations and the involvement of Police Scotland, I am limited in what more it would be appropriate to say at this time. However, I make clear that we as the Government will not hesitate to take any further action that is required to ensure that pupils at Donaldson's school are kept absolutely safe.

Cabinet (Meetings)

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

In reflecting on this afternoon's Parliament proceedings, I am tempted to get in touch with the 50:50 campaign.

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S4F-02395)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Willie Rennie could always join the campaign.

We will discuss matters of importance to the people of Scotland.

Willie Rennie: In the spirit of the approach that the First Minister has set for this afternoon, I encourage her to look early doors at issues around justice, such as the mishandling of corroboration, the routine arming of police and the stop and search of children, which are matters that I have raised week after week in the chamber. Everyone knows that Kenny MacAskill is going, but which of his policy failures are staying?

The First Minister: Well, well, well. In the interest of maintaining the remarkable spirit of consensus that I have managed to maintain for almost 20 minutes now—the strain!—I extend to Willie Rennie the same offer that I have extended to Jackie Baillie and Ruth Davidson. My door is open for sensible discussion on any policy that any member wants to discuss. I cannot promise that I will agree with him on everything, but where we can find common ground I am willing to try to find it. There is a lot that we can be very proud of in our justice system. I was in the Court of Session this morning—for entirely pleasant reasons, I hasten to add—in front of a full bench.

The Government has fulfilled its commitment to have 1,000 extra police officers. I still remember the days when members throughout the chamber cast doubt on whether the Scottish Government would be able to do that, but we have done it. Recorded crime in Scotland is at a 40-year low, down 35 per cent since 2006-07; the risk of being

a victim of crime has fallen; the clear-up rate for crime is at the highest level in over 35 years; and violent crime is down by almost half since 2006-07. There is always more to do, but I think that the Government's record on justice issues is a good and strong one.

Willie Rennie: I encourage the First Minister to look at some of the failures in the justice system, as that sounds like exactly the same answer that her predecessor gave. I would like her to explore the areas of weakness. If it is going to be a fresh start, what policies is she going to look at again? The incidence of stop and search is now seven times higher in Scotland than in the rest of Britain, with thousands of children being searched every week. The old First Minister told me that he was "comfortable" with stop and search. Is the new First Minister going to be any different?

The First Minister: Like Willie Rennie, I do not want to live in a country where stop and search is used inappropriately or excessively. I am proud of the approach that we take to policing in this country. I represent a constituency that has the highest ethnic minority population and the highest Muslim population in the country, and the approach that our police take to what, in other cities across the United Kingdom, might be difficult issues is absolutely exemplary. I want to ensure that it continues to be so.

We will continue to take the right approach on these things. People who are watching this will also want to live in a country where they are safer from crime and from being the victim of a knife attack or the victim of somebody who is drunk and disorderly in the street. It is, therefore, right that we have an approach to policing that keeps people safe, but it must also—I stress this point and hope that Willie Rennie agrees with it—protect the civil liberties and human rights that all of us should be determined to protect.

I am pretty sure—I may be proved wrong, but I am an optimist—that Willie Rennie and I will be able to find a lot of common ground on a lot of issues. As I occupy this post over the next weeks, months and, I hope, years, let us have a good old go at doing so.

Child Sexual Exploitation

4. Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Government is taking to address child sexual exploitation. (S4F-02404)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The safety and wellbeing of all children and young people are a key priority for the Scottish Government. We published Scotland's national action plan on child sexual exploitation on 11 November, and it represents a comprehensive

strategy for addressing a complex challenge. It builds on work that has been taking place across Scotland, combining examples of local best practice with national strategy, and it will help us to ensure that we are taking the necessary steps to put our commitment into action.

Jim Eadie: Does the First Minister agree with children's charities in Scotland that every one of us in society has a duty to protect children who are at risk of, or who are already victims of, child sexual exploitation? The public inquiry in Rotherham found that vulnerable children were failed by the very people and agencies whose job it was to protect them. What more can the Scottish Government do to protect children from being drawn into exploitation, to support the victims to recover and to use the full rigour of the law to bring the perpetrators of such abuse to justice?

The First Minister: We all need to recognise that we all have a role to play in protecting children from sexual exploitation. That is why we have brought together action by Police Scotland, children's charities, councils and the Scottish Government in the national action plan. However, we are going further than that. The action plan will also see an awareness campaign that extends not only to the agencies and professionals who are directly responsible but to the public, particularly those who work at night.

I stress that we all have a part to play. On behalf of the Government, I say that we want to ensure that everyone plays their part in tackling what is an abhorrent crime.

Road Safety

5. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government is doing to make roads safer for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians. (S4F-02402)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): It was this Government that, in 2009, introduced Scotland's first road safety framework. Through that framework, we are committed to working with our road safety partners to ensure a steady reduction in the number of those killed or seriously injured on Scotland's roads between 2009 and 2020. The latest published figures show that that approach is working, with the lowest road casualties in Scotland since records began. However, as on many other issues, there is still much work to be done.

Mark Griffin: After a number of tragic accidents in the past few days, Brake, the road safety charity, has launched its look out for each other campaign. Its research highlighted that, in a survey of more than 5,000 primary school pupils, more than 60 per cent think that roads can be dangerous for walking and cycling and more than

40 per cent have been hit or nearly hit by a vehicle while on foot or bike. Will the First Minister support that campaign and consider the calls from Brake, Sustrans and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health that the Scottish Government work with local authorities towards the establishment of a 20mph speed limit in all residential and built-up areas in order to reduce the number of fatalities?

The First Minister: I thank Mark Griffin for raising this important issue. I am happy to give my support to Brake and to the campaign that he talks about. I am also happy to ensure that ministers and I discuss with partners the proposal that he set out. This is an area in which there is much consensus. As I said earlier, it is important that all partners come together to reduce the number of tragedies that he, rightly, refers to.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): What is the Scottish Government's current view on the issue of stricter or presumed liability in relation to injuries to cyclists?

The First Minister: The Government ensures that we do everything that we can to protect the safety of all road users, particularly the most vulnerable road users, such as cyclists. As part of the refresh of the cycling action plan, Transport Scotland carried out a review to assess the impact of presumed liability in a number of European countries. It found no robust evidence to suggest that the introduction of presumed liability would improve the safety of cyclists, but we will continue to consider all options so that we can do as much as possible to reduce the number of these tragedies.

Nursery Provision

6. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government will take to ensure that all children receive their full two years' entitlement of nursery provision. (S4F-02397)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We have committed more than £300 million over this year and next to increase entitlement to 600 hours a year, which is around 16 hours a week for all three and four-year-olds, and we have now expanded that to our most disadvantaged two-year-olds. However, I want to go further. If this Government is re-elected in 2016, we intend, by the end of that session, to almost double childcare from 16 hours to 30 hours a week. We have a strong record in government and a strong vision for the future.

Liz Smith: In light of the promise that social justice will, at all times, underpin the Scottish Government's policy, will the First Minister tell the chamber whether she thinks that it is fair to deny the 50 per cent of children whose birthdays fall

between 1 September and 29 February the full two-year nursery provision that is provided to those children whose birthdays fall between 1 March and 31 August?

The First Minister: First, I find it very heartening to be challenged on the social justice agenda by a Tory. Who says that Scotland has not changed—and changed for the better?

It is a challenge that I am very happy to accept. As Liz Smith will be aware, there is no statutory entitlement to two full years of funded early learning and childcare. The current statutory starting age for early learning and childcare is the first term after a child's third birthday. Those with birthdays between March and August receive six terms of funded early learning and childcare; those with birthdays between September and December receive five; and those with birthdays in January and February receive four. That is the statutory position.

However, now that we are getting close to the end of this session of First Minister's questions, I want to end it in the same way I started it. My commitment to extending childcare is real, genuine and strong. I think that this Government has an excellent record in extending childcare, but I want to go much further. We cannot go as far as we set out in the white paper because—unfortunately—we did not win a yes vote. However, I want us to go as far as we can. Just as I have asked people to come to me with proposals, I will end with an appeal to the chamber: support the Government on this. It is right for our young people and right for their parents, because it makes it easier for them to get out to work.

The Presiding Officer: That ends First Minister's questions.

Child Poverty

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-11213, in the name of John Wilson, on child poverty figures increasing. The debate will be concluded without any question being put, and I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button either now or as soon as possible. I also invite those who are leaving the chamber and, indeed, the gallery to do so quickly and quietly.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes End Child Poverty's Child Poverty Map of the UK, in which it highlights the increasing levels of child poverty throughout the country; notes what it considers the worrying levels of child poverty in Central Scotland, in which North Lanarkshire is thought to have a child poverty rate of 25% after housing costs, with South Lanarkshire as high as 20%, and Falkirk 21%; considers that these figures show that more must be done to reverse this disturbing trend, and notes the view that tackling child poverty should include finding effective ways of offsetting the recent changes to the welfare system as well as rising energy and food prices that have pushed families further into financial decline.

12:32

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (Ind): I thank those members across the chamber who signed my motion and enabled this debate to take place. I also put on record my appreciation of Children 1st, the Child Poverty Action Group, Barnardo's Scotland, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and Save the Children, among others, for their briefings for the debate.

As my motion states in no uncertain terms, child poverty in Scotland is rising, and End Child Poverty's child poverty map shows increasingly shocking levels of poverty. For example, the new town of East Kilbride in the South Lanarkshire Council area is quite rightly regarded as a prosperous location, but figures indicate 25 per cent child poverty in the East Kilbride South ward. In another part of South Lanarkshire, Larkhall, the figure for child poverty is 26.46 per cent.

It is important to realise that behind those statistics are children and young adults who are going without food and the bare essentials. Poverty is totally unacceptable in a modern, prosperous Scotland and, in many ways, it is sad that we find ourselves once again having to discuss the continued blight of child poverty in Scotland.

The awful truth is that, according to End Child Poverty, one child in five in Scotland is living in poverty. I am aware that, over the past 15 years, members in this chamber have initiated various debates on the subject of poverty. Its effects

should not be underestimated. It leaves a deep scar on those who live in it, and it impacts on our people's educational attainment, with many failing to develop their life chances.

Poverty, but particularly child poverty, is a mark of our lack of collective ambition for future generations. It is estimated that 11 per cent of pupils in the most deprived areas leave school without any qualifications, compared with 3 per cent in the rest of Scotland.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Following the new First Minister's conference announcement at the weekend that addressing child poverty was going to be central to the new plan, does the member share my surprise that only two Scottish National Party backbenchers are interested in this debate? Is that not a surprise to the member?

John Wilson: I cannot comment on Mr Findlay's observations, but it is disappointing that there are few members in the chamber from all sides taking part in the debate.

The factors that drive poverty are diverse, but they are more challenging than ever. For far too long we have relied on various schemes simply to ameliorate poverty. End Child Poverty has called on the United Kingdom Government to rethink welfare benefit policies and taxation policy. On the back of that, we must acknowledge the need to reconsider our outlook on welfare policy. In that regard, in his recently published book "Good Times, Bad Times: the Welfare Myth of Them and Us" and in his article in *The Guardian* on 12 November, John Hills dispels the myths that have been peddled about a them-and-us society—people rely on the welfare system at various times throughout their lives. In addition, researchers at Loughborough University have taken account of housing costs, which are an important consideration in real day-to-day living costs.

Poverty is careless in the extreme, as the problems that it creates mean that, as a society, we are regularly trying to play catch-up, creating various ad hoc projects to tackle the symptoms instead of really tackling the root causes.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Will Mr Wilson take an intervention?

John Wilson: Sorry, but I do not have time to take further interventions.

The new First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has clearly highlighted that one of her objectives is to eradicate poverty in Scotland. I, for one, look forward to her Government's proposals on tackling poverty. However, it is a poor sign of today's society that in my lifetime food banks are being used almost as the norm by an increasing number of people in work. That clearly impacts on the family and on the individual's emotional

development and general wellbeing. Local citizens advice bureaux and Department for Work and Pensions offices throughout Central Scotland, for example, have to refer families to food banks on a daily basis. The situation cannot be allowed to continue to blight our society.

The onset of Christmas brings us the usual cheap marketing techniques utilised by payday loan companies, which are no doubt a factor in how people spend their limited financial means. It is also worth noting that energy companies regularly withdraw discount tariffs for the most vulnerable groups in society. With the onset of winter, people will again face an unmanageable hike in energy prices, despite the real-terms fall in wholesale energy prices.

Any economic strategy worth its salt has to recognise that opportunities will come about only if we also acknowledge the need for economic and social justice. That is a pre-requisite if all the people of Scotland are to flourish, especially our future generations. I hope that the Smith commission will deliver a framework for further powers for this Parliament that can assist the delivery of policies that will reduce the growing income gaps in our society and provide better cohesion. Devolving welfare powers is a necessary factor in the policy mix.

I thank End Child Poverty, which continues to raise awareness of its campaign and make useful contributions to the debate on ending child poverty in Scotland once and for all. I look forward to the day that this Parliament can say that we have eradicated the child poverty that is in our midst.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I inform members that we are pretty tight for time today, with many members wishing to speak. With members' help, I would like to confine them to their allotted time.

I call Jackie Baillie, to be followed by Alison Johnstone. Four minutes, please.

12:39

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I congratulate John Wilson on securing time for this debate and on the tone and content of his speech. I know that he cares passionately about the issue. Like him, I have been motivated for all my working life by the values of social justice, fairness and equality—the values that brought me into politics in the first place.

There is no greater cause than tackling child poverty, and Labour's ambition for Scotland is quite simply to end it. Like everybody else, I suspect, I want to live in a society where every child is given the best possible start in life and no one is left behind.

I used to work in some of the poorest areas of the west of Scotland, so I have seen the impact of poverty at first hand—the children whose life chances are determined before they reach the age of three; the parents who have been in and out of low-paid, temporary jobs; and the despondency and lack of hope that is visited on some neighbourhoods. Equally, however, I have seen the resilience and determination of people and communities to fight back.

In the decade to 2007-08, when Labour was in office, absolute child poverty fell from 39 per cent to 19 per cent. More than 1 million children across the UK and more than 200,000 children in Scotland alone were lifted out of poverty. Since that time, the decline has been much slower. In recent years, progress has stalled and we are now in danger of going the wrong way.

The lesson here is that levels of child poverty dropped more significantly in Scotland than in any other part of the UK and by 2007 we had the lowest level in the UK, despite the greater starting point. That was about political will and determination to change people's lives for the better, and we can and must do that again.

We already have control over a number of key areas—health, housing, education, childcare and more—and there is much that we can do ourselves. The Government's child poverty strategy is a reasonable one, but until recently there appeared to be no additional money earmarked for such a pressing problem, there was no monitoring framework in place and there was little idea of whether some of the inputs from Government were leading to the right outcomes and actually making a difference. If we are serious about this, we need to get so much better at doing all of that.

The scale of the challenge that we face is increasing. Almost 65,000 more children face poverty due to the welfare cuts proposed by the Conservatives. That is a political failure, not a failure of the constitution, and I make no secret of my desire to vote them out.

I turn to in-work poverty, because that has an impact on child poverty. In-work poverty is rising. The minimum income standard shows that, in the past five years, prices have risen by 25 per cent at the same time as wages have declined in real terms. We are facing a cost-of-living crisis the likes of which we have not seen for decades.

I want to make sure that work pays. It was Labour that proudly introduced the national minimum wage and it is Labour that has led the argument for the living wage in this Parliament. The Scottish National Party says—it said it just recently—that it shares our ambition, so I am genuinely disappointed that it rejected the

opportunity to do something in the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill for the 400,000 low-paid workers in Scotland. It did that at a time when it also rejected removing zero-hours contracts and introducing equal pay audits, both of which would have made a difference.

We know that poor employment practices have a disproportionate effect on women. Almost 64 per cent of those who are paid less than the living wage are women.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must draw to a close, please.

Jackie Baillie: Women are also more likely to be on zero-hours contracts and in part-time work.

There are areas in which this Government can already make a huge difference. I do not think that we are using all the powers that we have to do that. I urge the minister, in her summation, to talk more about what the Scottish Government can do to make a difference.

12:44

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I thank John Wilson for giving us the opportunity to debate this important issue. I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate and apologise for having to leave before the minister responds.

Too much of a child's life is set by the happenstance of where they are born, yet we know that children who are born into low-income families do not start without high aspirations. Some 97 per cent of mothers in low-income families want their children to attend university, but there is a continuing and persistent attainment gap and immense barriers to what we call social mobility.

Of course, the vast majority of people who are born into poverty make a brilliant success of their lives. They become dedicated partners, loving parents or great friends and they have successful careers. No one should be stigmatised because of the economic situation into which they are born, but it is important to look at the barriers that children face.

Looked-after children provide a stark example. Care leavers have poorer educational qualifications than their peers and poorer health outcomes and are notably more likely to have contact with the criminal justice system. That is not the case in Finland, where the attainment gap for looked-after children is far less stark. That achievement is likely down to a complex mix of reasons, but one that is highlighted is the education system's focus on support for teacher attainment and qualifications. We have to learn from good practice in other countries.

The child poverty map of the United Kingdom is a useful way to see how child poverty plays out across the country. For a decade we saw a notable drop in child poverty, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and others, but as we know, that improvement is being reversed rapidly: we are going backwards. Child poverty is predicted to rise and an estimated 600,000 more children will live in poverty by 2015-16.

The motion refers to

“finding effective ways of offsetting the recent changes to the welfare system”.

I agree that we need to do that. The economics of austerity and welfare cuts are having a particular impact on women and on children as a result. The Fawcett Society tells us that a fifth of British women’s income comes from benefits, whereas for men the figure is a tenth, so the loss of benefits and services hits women hardest. Women are more likely to be employed in public sector jobs that are at risk of austerity cuts. As state services are withdrawn, women tend to fill the gap as, for example, unpaid carers.

A fair social security system is vital and social security should be devolved, but welfare is not the core solution to poverty. We have to think about poverty in terms of equality and the redistribution of power and money to close the gap between rich and poor. We need political will to tackle zero-hours contracts and we must address fuel poverty. Affordable heating and affordable rents are essential.

We know that for the first time more than half of people in poverty live in a working family. People are working, often in demanding jobs, but are being paid wages that keep them in poverty. Governments subsidise that situation and the companies that pay poverty wages with corporate welfare.

The fair solution is a living wage. The national minimum wage needs to be raised to living wage levels immediately. The living wage commission estimated that that would benefit 5.2 million people across the UK, or 17 per cent of the working population. Our election manifesto will include a new minimum wage of £10 an hour for everyone by 2020, a wealth tax on the top 1 per cent and company-wide pay ratios. That is a package of measures to truly tackle the UK’s persistent inequality and poverty. We need to create a fair and sustainable society for all our children.

12:48

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I, too, thank John Wilson for securing the debate—if “thank” is the right term, given the subject matter. I appreciate that he has brought the debate before us.

In 21st century resource-rich Scotland, the fact that any children live in poverty—let alone the numbers that we see—is a disgrace. There are far too many, and the problem is particularly acute in some parts of Scotland, as John Wilson’s motion says. For example, the local authority area in which my Cumbernauld and Kilsyth constituency is located—North Lanarkshire—has a particular issue regarding the numbers of children who live in poverty.

We know that poverty in the early years can limit life chances. Save the Children reminds us that children who live in poverty are twice as likely to be born underweight and more likely to experience bad health, live in a cold home, miss out on regular healthy meals, fall behind in the early years and achieve less well than other children at school. Those outcomes are determined by the happenstance of birth that Alison Johnstone spoke of. She is correct to say that we should not pigeonhole or stereotype people, but it would be wrong to ignore those statistical correlations.

The presence of food banks, which John Wilson referred to, is a visible demonstration that we have child poverty in our midst and that the UK Government’s welfare reforms have failed. As the Welfare Reform Committee’s deputy convener, I am particularly aware of that issue. We know that the welfare reforms are impacting on children in particular. Save the Children reminds us that 22,000 children accessed food banks in Scotland in the past year. Just this week, CPAG, Oxfam, the Trussell Trust and the Church of England published a report stating that they found that gaps in the social safety net are forcing people to turn to food banks for help.

When the Welfare Reform Committee reported on food banks, its findings were similar. Sadly, the UK Government has refused to acknowledge that point. Neil Couling, a DWP official, came before our committee and told us that food banks are demand led. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland came before our committee and blithely said that more research is needed into the causes of uptake at food banks, although the UK Government will not take forward such research. Food banks and the children and families who use them are a visible demonstration of our society’s failure to do enough to ensure that people can feed themselves.

I will close—as ever in members’ business debates, we do not get a lot of time—by saying that, although I said that child poverty limits life chances, we should not think of it as limiting the ambitions, hopes and dreams of the children who are in poverty. Children 1st has published its new report, “Wishes for Scotland’s Children”. It gathered the wishes, hopes and aspirations of the

children and families it works with. I will read out a few of the wishes:

“‘take away poverty’

‘A culture that prioritises family rather than the economy—the gap between rich and poor to be reduced’

‘That no child should go to bed hungry’ ...

‘All children would have enough living space indoors and outdoors’

‘Enough to eat, enough love and nurture, enough play, warm and comfortable homes’”.

We have to commit our efforts to making sure that those hopes, ambitions and aspirations can come true.

12:52

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): It does not surprise me that John Wilson lodged a motion on this topic. I have known him for well over 30 years. In all that time, he has retained his passion and his determination to tackle issues such as child poverty and inequalities in our society.

Jackie Baillie mentioned a number of areas across the west of Scotland where she worked. Like her, I worked in that area for a number of years, in the 1980s—a time of massive deindustrialisation and huge increases in poverty. I worked as a welfare rights officer in communities such as Pollok and Priesthill, in Dumbarton and the Vale of Leven, in Greenock and Port Glasgow, and in Drumchapel. It was stark in those days to see just what poverty was doing to decent men, women and children across the west of Scotland. Of course, the west of Scotland was no different from other parts of Scotland. It was debilitating, it was demoralising and it was dehumanising.

The irony is that in those days, bad as we thought it was, we had a more flexible benefits system. There were single payments and weekly additions to basic benefits, and social work departments could afford to use sections 10 and 12 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 to help the families in the worst circumstances, whereas now, when we see increases in poverty, we find that local authorities are constrained financially and that the benefits system is becoming much more rigorous and is harder on the poorest families.

In those circumstances, it is in some respects harder for families living in poverty to cope now than it has ever been. Alison Johnstone—it is unfortunate that she has had to leave—mentioned that, for a decade, child poverty dropped. However, she should have reflected on Jackie Baillie’s comment that that drop did not come about by accident. It came about because of

political will and political determination by a Labour Government to do something about it.

It is no accident that child poverty is increasing yet again now that the Labour Party is out of power at Westminster and out of power in Scotland. We now have two Administrations that are complacent about the rise in child poverty and which pay lip service to tackling it.

If there is one criticism that I would make of John Wilson, it is that he should have used his opportunity to speak to prick the cosy consensus that exists in here on child poverty. In a debate in October, Patrick Harvie accused me of one of the worst examples of cynicism that he had ever heard in this Parliament. That was because I pointed out that, since 2007, each and every one of us sitting in this chamber has done very well from the decisions that the Scottish Government has made, but the people I represent—the people on maximum council tax benefit, for example—have not received a single extra penny of help.

Politicians who talk about tackling child poverty but fail to realise that it is the result of political decisions and political will are the cynical ones if they simply say that they are willing to do something about it but do the opposite by their actions or do nothing. That is the challenge for each and every one of us.

12:56

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): It is not always easy, but I would like to continue the spirit of consensus that we have had today in the Scottish Parliament.

There are key issues surrounding poverty, and child poverty in particular, to which I think it is vital that we pay some attention during the course of this debate. One of the things that I have taken from looking at the poverty map is the surprising level of child poverty that exists across the whole of Scotland. Certainly there are areas where it is more serious—members have spoken about their areas where it is a problem—but it came as something of a surprise to me to see the significant levels that exist in some of the wealthiest areas of Scotland, such as the area that I represent, particularly when we take into account housing costs, which of course can be higher in such areas.

At the same time, we have to understand what we are talking about. Some of the Labour Party members have been slightly disingenuous during their contributions. Jackie Baillie highlighted the excellent figures for child poverty that existed in 2007, which was at the end of 15 years of continuous economic growth and only three years before the Labour Party left office in Westminster with the key under the mat and an empty purse on

the sideboard. Given the recession that we experienced then and the recovery that we are now only tentatively beginning to see, it is perhaps dishonest to claim that there were political reasons for that change, when the Labour Party was responsible for some of the economic reasons for the problems that we face.

Other issues have been raised here, such as the suggestion that perhaps the devolution of welfare powers will somehow get us over the problem that we face and reverse the trend. I suggest that the devolution of those powers might simply move the fiscal constraints that currently exist at Westminster right into the hands of a Scottish finance minister and a Scottish welfare minister—and fiscal constraints there will continue to be.

My concern is about how we deal with poverty. I commend the Scottish Government for the work that it has done in difficult circumstances to find additional resources to alleviate some of the problems that it has identified. I also pay tribute to the work of third sector organisations that have done a great deal to overcome these problems. However, I am concerned that too often we talk about how we solve these problems in the short term and how we make up the difference that is required to bring people up to an acceptable level. Perhaps too often the outcomes of that are welfare dependency and a further continuation of the cycle of poverty.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his last minute.

Alex Johnstone: Along with the hard work that is being done by the Government and others, we must never forget that we need to ensure that those who are growing up in some of the most difficult areas in Scotland enjoy equality of opportunity, and that the chance will exist for those who go to some of Scotland's less well-performing schools to eventually achieve the results at school that give them the opportunity to go on in education and training.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should draw to a close please.

Alex Johnstone: We need the flexibility that will deliver labour mobility to ensure that those who are in our high unemployment areas can take up the jobs that we are creating in Scotland but are unable to get our unemployed to move to take up.

There are so many opportunities, so, in spite of the failures that have been described, we have the opportunity to go ahead and make a difference in the long term.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In view of the number of members who wish to speak in today's debate, I am minded to accept a motion under rule 8.14 to extend the time allowed.

Motion moved,

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

Motion agreed to.

13:01

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): There is no subject more important than child poverty, and I congratulate John Wilson on securing the debate and all the work he has done over many years on the subject of poverty.

One of the things that brought me the greatest pleasure during the early years of the Labour Government was when Tony Blair announced that child poverty would be abolished in 20 years. Good progress was made from 2000 to 2012, which went right into the years of recession. I do not have time to rebut everything that Alex Johnstone said but, given that poverty is a relative measure, there is no excuse for it being derailed by recession.

Now, however, the figure has gone into reverse and we can see the appalling levels of child poverty in Scotland and across the United Kingdom. It was interesting to see the recent figures that nine of the 16 worst constituencies for child poverty are in London. Of course, connected with child poverty is a whole range of appalling disadvantages as highlighted by the Save the Children briefing. Poorer children are more likely to experience bad health, to live in a cold house, to miss out on regular healthy meals, to fall behind in their early years, to achieve less well than other children in school, and so on.

One of the new features of child poverty is the fact that we can no longer say that the route out of poverty is work. Of the children who live in poverty, 59 per cent live in families in which at least one parent is working. That is where issues such as the living wage are so crucial. One example of a way of stemming the decline is to support the introduction of the living wage, and members know that Labour has been campaigning on that for a number of years.

John Wilson: The living wage is one of the tools that can be used to raise earnings, but does the member accept that the current benefits and tax credit system penalises those who might benefit from the living wage?

Malcolm Chisholm: I am going to go on to talk about the benefits system because I am critical of that as well. However, it is important to repeat the point about the living wage and the action that we

have called for to change public sector procurement contracts to include a duty for employers to pay the living wage across all public contracts. That is very important.

The changes to the benefits system have also adversely affected families who have children. Children in low-income families are among the groups that are losing the most as a result of cuts to benefits and tax credits, and I am certainly very critical of that.

The other factor that is driving up child poverty and has most impact on children is costs, and food is the most obvious of those costs. We are all appalled by the rise of food banks. Contrary to what some Conservatives say about welfare having nothing to do with that, we read today that the sanctions that are applied to many parents in the benefits system are a key factor in driving people to food banks.

There is plenty of action for the UK Government to take but there is also much for the Scottish Government to do. We have the Scottish Government's strategy against child poverty. However, although Save the Children has welcomed individual measures in the strategy, it highlights a lack of detail on who will play key roles in delivering the strategy over the next three years and on what the overarching goals are. In short, Save the Children thinks that the vision is yet to be "turned into practical action".

Without measurement of progress at ground level, it is difficult to assess how policy is benefiting each area. As Save the Children pointed out,

"There is an emerging trend towards the development of strategies at a local level ... this is welcome but we must ensure there is drive and progress in all local areas, given the child poverty map showed child poverty existed across Scotland."

The development of reliable data on delivery and progress at a local level will be key, and I look forward to that happening as the strategy moves forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to come to a close, please.

Malcolm Chisholm: The UK social mobility and child poverty commission and Save the Children have both highlighted inequality in attainment. Save the Children points out that part of tackling the long-term cyclical issue of child poverty is to ensure that it is prevented, and it recommends that the Scottish Government focus on that.

My time is up, so I will conclude on that note.

13:06

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Child poverty is a subject to which we keep coming back. Many of us wish that we did not need to do that, but it is right that we continue to talk about the issue as long as it exists—and, sadly, child poverty shows no sign of going away. I thank John Wilson for securing the debate.

Last night I attended the graduation ceremony at Glasgow Kelvin College, at which Henry McLeish spoke very well. He said that inequality is poisoning our society—a phrase that I thought was excellent.

The Child Poverty Act 2010, which was passed while I was at Westminster, contained a commitment to abolish or eradicate child poverty by 2020. Even at the time, there was major disappointment with the Labour legislation. First, achieving the target on abolition or eradication would still mean that 10 per cent of children were left in poverty. Secondly, there were no new resources to make that happen. I think that that is the kind of lip service to which Hugh Henry referred.

Four years later, I fear that there has not been much progress. More than one in five children in Scotland—some 220,000 children—are officially recognised as living in poverty. The level is significantly higher than the level in many other European countries. In 2012-13 the proportion of children in Scotland who were experiencing poverty increased from 19 to 22 per cent. The most recent modelling by the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggests that up to 100,000 more children will be pushed into poverty by 2020, with the proportion of children who live in poverty in Scotland forecast to increase to 26.2 per cent by 2020.

What are the effects of all that? As we heard, by the age of five, children in poverty lag between 10 and 13 months behind their more affluent peers in terms of school readiness and attainment. Three-year-olds in households with incomes below £10,000 are two and a half times more likely to suffer chronic illness than children in households with incomes above £52,000. Children who live in low-income households are also nearly three times more likely to suffer mental health problems than their more affluent peers.

There used to be an assumption that work was a certain route out of poverty. However, as members said, it is clear that that is no longer the case. I am sure that paying the living wage more widely would make inroads into poverty at all ages. However, although the approach has maximum support from the public sector, it remains voluntary for large sections of employment.

At best, a voluntary living wage can be only an interim step. The longer-term answer has to be an increase in the statutory minimum wage, not just to £8 by 2020, as Labour disappointingly suggested—

Neil Findlay: Will the member give way?

John Mason: No, I am sorry, but I do not have enough time.

The statutory minimum wage should be raised to the level of the living wage, and that should happen as soon as possible. The country can afford to do that. As it says in one of our briefings, this is a country in which the most affluent households in Scotland are 273 times richer than the poorest ones. Something very wrong is going on here.

Jamie Hepburn referred to the report by Children 1st, “Wishes for Scotland’s Children”, which I think has just been published. The report sets out a range of children’s wishes, ranging from the humorous to the deadly serious, especially in the “Included” section, from which Jamie Hepburn quoted.

Good things are happening, not just in relation to finances. For example, the getting it right for every child policy will facilitate a more joined-up approach to supporting children and vulnerable families. In particular, I welcome the named person approach, which I think can help families from poorer backgrounds to pin down the person who can answer their questions.

I fear that this will not be the last time that we debate child poverty. We certainly need to keep such topics on the table. I hope that we will see progress.

13:10

Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I add to others’ my congratulations to John Wilson on securing the debate. As other members have done, I express my mixed feelings that we are once again having to have a debate about how we tackle child poverty in today’s Scotland.

Earlier in the week, I had the enormous privilege of hosting the Home-Start reception here in the Scottish Parliament. At that event, which marked the launch of Home-Start’s first-ever policy manifesto for Scotland, we heard from Professor Phil Hanlon, who is a professor of public health at the University of Glasgow, and from Home-Start UK’s chief executive, Rob Parkinson, both of whom spoke about the challenges facing public services and the people who work in them. They spoke about addressing the twin challenges of having to provide support to families whose lives have been devastated by poverty and inequality while at the same time being able to make the

investments and interventions that have been proven to make a difference and which will therefore, in the long run, reduce the human and financial cost of poverty in the future.

There followed a more powerful contribution from women whose families had been supported by Home-Start volunteers and whose lives had been changed by that help. Those women had been able to move forward, not only to become Home-Start volunteers but, crucially, to develop in their own right as individuals, with the confidence and self-worth to want to grow and to effect positive change for themselves, their families and their communities.

If my fellow MSPs have not yet had a chance to read the Home-Start policy manifesto, I urge them to do so. It highlights three main priorities: that all children should have safe places to live and play, that all children with a parent suffering from a mental illness should be supported, and that all children should be well nourished and protected from hunger and poor nutrition.

Achieving that will require a co-ordinated and sustained effort by government at all levels, and a willingness to think beyond departments or budget headings and to put tackling child poverty at the heart of service planning and delivery for all public agencies.

Reading the Home-Start manifesto, we find the same distressing and familiar roll-call of statistics, many of which mirror the findings of End Child Poverty as shown in its child poverty map. The manifesto cites the figure of 30,000 children living in families who cannot afford to eat properly.

John Wilson rightly highlighted the child poverty rate in Central Scotland, which is as shocking as the rate in Mid Scotland and Fife. I am alarmed to see that in some parts of Fife the child poverty rate is higher than 30 per cent.

The concerns about the changes to the welfare systems and the challenges of rising food and energy prices for families across Scotland are well rehearsed, but it is vital that we repeat those concerns often and loudly, and that we never let ourselves become inured to such statistics, because every piece of data describes someone’s life. If you are that person, the experience for you is not a statistic—it is your reality.

Nelson Mandela said:

“Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice ... poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.”

That includes us in this chamber.

We live in a country where 350,000 children will live in cold homes this winter. For 200,000 children, those homes will be damp. That is a

shame on all of us, and I sincerely hope that we begin to make progress in reversing the rising tide of child poverty in this country.

Back in March, we debated the Scottish Government's poverty strategy. I will not repeat my words from that debate, nor will I reiterate my amendments to the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, which sought to put tackling child poverty at the heart of service planning and delivery for all public agencies. However, I again highlight the need for the guidance accompanying the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 to address the vital links that are needed between children's services and tackling child poverty. It would be great to hear from the minister on that point at the close of the debate, so I look forward to her contribution.

13:14

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I, too, congratulate my colleague, John Wilson, on securing the debate. It is, however, with some frustration that I find myself debating the subject because we live in a very wealthy country in which there is absolutely no reason why there should be poverty.

I am happy to pay credit to those who have made efforts in the past to improve the situation, but we know that the United Kingdom is one of the most unequal countries in the world, and we know that that inequality is growing. That is reflected in the figures that we are discussing today. That said, it is absolutely the responsibility of everyone—the United Kingdom Government, the Scottish Government, local authorities and the national health service—to play their part.

It is clear that my preference would have been for independence and for Scotland taking full charge of its own affairs. We saw from the example of how the chamber dealt with the bedroom tax the consensus that can be built across it. I think that independence would have brought about a more humane regime.

We know that there are a number of contributory factors to the situation. I, too, thank the various organisations that have provided very helpful briefings to us. Low wages, for instance, are a contributory factor. My colleague John Wilson was quite right to highlight his constituency, because rurality compounds many of the factors that we are debating. Underemployment has been referred to as a contributory factor, and transport costs also have a significant implication.

On social security benefits, the universal credit is being trialled in Inverness, which is in my area. We also know about the sanctions. Simple things such as the cost of a telephone call have significant implications for individuals, and zero-

hours contracts bring about the real dilemma of in-work poverty. I certainly do not think that it should be the state's purpose to subsidise abusing employers who pay levels of wages such as they pay to their staff. To my mind, that is a catch-22 situation, as is the cost of childcare. We know, of course, that in the past six years, the cost of childcare has gone up by 44 per cent. Indeed, the minimum cost of raising a child—that might seem to many to be an unusual phrase—has gone up by 8 per cent since 2012 and by 11 per cent for a lone parent. During that period, there has been no rise in family benefits, of course.

Benefits are the subject of a lot of ill-informed comment. I want to comment on the level of unclaimed benefits in the UK. There is £10 billion of unclaimed benefits, half of which would go to working-age families. That money could be in individuals' pockets and spent in communities. The effect of that money not being used is not only on individuals, but on our communities and local economies. Whose interests are served by that? Those of the people whom we are charged with representing certainly are not.

I commend the other steps that have been taken—free school meals, for instance, although there are capacity issues for local authorities with respect to them.

I want to touch on fuel poverty in the short time that I have left. Our new First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said in relation to a report on fuel poverty:

“There is no place for fuel poverty”.

That is absolutely right. We know that there is fuel poverty if 10 per cent or more of income is spent on meeting heating standards. There is the much talked about situation in which people have to make the terrible choice between switching on the heating or the cooker. The growth in food banks is an unacceptable issue that is being faced across the country.

The national performance framework includes the phrase:

“Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed”.

That will happen only if there is genuine redistribution of wealth. A living wage is a part of that and progressive taxation is another important part of it.

We must do everything with the powers that we have to eradicate child poverty.

13:18

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I thank Mr Wilson for securing the debate.

I believe that poverty is the greatest blight on our society, bar none. It is a scandal, a shame and a national embarrassment that one in five of our children is officially recognised as living in poverty. An example in that context is a lone parent with two children with less than £269 a week to live on.

As members have mentioned, the numbers continue to rise. We are now up to 22 per cent of children in Scotland living in poverty.

It is not difficult to identify the source of the problems, of course, nor, indeed, the solutions to them. For example, unemployment saps morale, eats away at people's relationships and destroys community cohesion.

When I worked as a housing officer in Livingston and Edinburgh, I saw grinding poverty at close quarters. Families were unable to buy clothes for their children or to pay for school events or trips. Most disturbing of all was that families were unable to buy the basics, such as food and heating. Too many people felt that the system was working to deny them opportunities, and not to help them to get on. The bedroom tax is, of course, the most vindictive example of that.

When people are able to get into employment, they need some stability; they need to feel that they have some worth and value, and some job security. The zero-hours low-pay culture that sees a person as just another cog in the corporate machine, to be hired and fired on a whim, is demoralising. I spoke to a constituent recently who received a text from Jobcentre Plus to tell her to go to work in a food factory. When she turned up, she was employed for a few hours and then tapped on the shoulder and told that she was no longer required. She was asked whether she could go home and return later that evening for another few hours' work. She lives 20 miles from the factory and her public transport costs would have been £20 a day. That is not the way to help people to get back in to work. We have to end that sort of zero-hours exploitation. It is bad not only for people, but for our economy.

We have seen the Tories' ideological war on the poor, which has painted people as skivers and has relied on the politics of division. We have seen benefit cuts for the poor and tax cuts for the rich. Is not it ironic that, as the Public and Commercial Services union tells us, 40 per cent of the people who administer universal credit will themselves have to claim it because of low pay? We need a benefits system that helps people into employment and does not punish children for being poor. What on earth do Cameron, Osborne and Iain Duncan Smith know about poverty? They have not got a clue.

We need the Scottish Government to use the powers that it has and the powers that it will get to

put an attack on poverty, and child poverty in particular, at the heart of every Government policy. It cannot tackle child poverty if it will not redistribute wealth and power, and it cannot do it if it centralises power.

We cannot challenge child poverty without a living wage. It is to this Government's shame that it refused to act when the bill that became the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 was going through Parliament, and we should never forget that the new First Minister was the lead minister who took that bill through.

It is not possible to challenge child poverty by giving tax cuts to corporations, nor at a time when local government budgets are being savaged.

I bow to no one in my contempt for the Tory party, but there is a huge amount that this Parliament can do to address child poverty. We will see whether the new First Minister's conference rhetoric is matched by action.

13:22

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): Given that child poverty is such an important issue, which affects all our communities, I would have hoped that we could have had a bit more consensus from some Opposition members. I will respond to some of the comments, but first—

Neil Findlay: Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

Margaret Burgess: I will take an intervention from Neil Findlay later, but I will get into my speech first.

I congratulate John Wilson on bringing the debate to the chamber, as tackling poverty and inequality is central to the Scottish Government's vision of making Scotland a successful and more prosperous country. I assure every member in the chamber and everyone in the country that we are determined to address the root causes of poverty. We are not paying lip service to that—we are absolutely determined to do so in order to help people to overcome the barriers that prevent them from achieving their potential.

Neil Findlay: I have no problem working with anyone consensually where consensus exists. However, we tried to build consensus on the living wage and the Government did not want to know. Where no consensus exists, the minister should not try to fabricate some.

Margaret Burgess: I will respond to that point now, although I would have come to it later in my speech. I make it clear that the Scottish Government is committed to the living wage. We

are promoting the living wage, and we have funded the Poverty Alliance to do so.

We have made this Government's view on the living wage clear in the statutory guidance on the procurement process. We dealt with the issue legally. Neil Findlay can argue about it as much as he likes, but we could not put the living wage in the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 in the way that he wanted. However, we have made clear our position on the living wage. We want powers to come to this Parliament on the minimum wage so that we can increase it in line with inflation and, we hope, to the level of the living wage. That is important, because neither the previous Labour Government nor the current coalition increased the minimum wage in line with inflation after it was introduced in the UK. Families in Scotland are already more than £600 a year worse off simply by virtue of the minimum wage not being increased in line with inflation. The Scottish Government would very much want to do that.

We have heard how the changes to benefits will impact on those on the lowest incomes and how further austerity measures are predicted to put a further 50,000 to 100,000 children into poverty. Of course that is unacceptable. It is unacceptable to me that any Government can propose policies in the full knowledge that more of our children will end up in poverty. At Westminster, all the parties have signed up to austerity, which simply means that the poorest households will pay the highest price.

Jamie Hepburn: The minister talks of the changes to the welfare system. Does she agree that there is a certain inconsistency between Labour MSPs criticising those changes and a Labour spokesperson on welfare, in the shape of Rachel Reeves, saying that she would be tougher on welfare than the Tories?

Margaret Burgess: Jamie Hepburn highlights the difficulty that the Labour Party has because it says something different in Scotland from what its masters in London say. What is happening on the ground and what the Labour Party does and says throughout the UK do not match what it says in the Scottish Parliament.

I will say some of the positive things that we are doing on child poverty in Scotland. The revised child poverty strategy for Scotland is important. All the key players, such as the Child Poverty Action Group and Barnardo's Scotland—all the organisations that are on the front line of dealing with poverty—helped us to develop it.

The strategy has three key areas. It is about maximising household incomes. Unclaimed benefits, which John Finnie mentioned, are part of that. We need to ensure that households get

everything to which they are entitled, and we have put resources into that. The strategy is about improving life chances and opportunities. We have done a lot on that through our preventative work on our early years strategy and will continue to do more. It is also about providing well-designed, sustainable places. We have put another £200 million into the housing budget for affordable housing.

A number of members mentioned fuel poverty. We are contributing £79 million for energy efficiency measures throughout Scotland. Again, that helps the poorest in our society. We are also challenging the UK Government's changes to the energy company obligation because of the impact on rural areas.

The budget that John Swinney set out last week had three clear aims: to make Scotland a more prosperous country, to tackle inequalities and to protect and reform public services. That will shape everything. Every portfolio in the Government is about tackling inequalities, making Scotland a more prosperous country and protecting services.

John Swinney set out commitments to tackle the poverty and inequality that blight our society by maintaining spending on welfare reform mitigation measures—more than £296 million. That includes £23 million to help the most vulnerable who are in receipt of council tax benefit. If we had not stepped in with that, those people would be expected to pay more council tax.

We also have our Scottish social wage and the increased provision of free nursery education. We heard today that the First Minister is absolutely committed to increasing free nursery education to 30 hours a week if the Scottish National Party is re-elected in 2016. That is a huge commitment. It is about helping to reduce poverty and inequalities.

I wanted to say a lot more on that but I will say a bit about our proposals to the Smith commission. We want full fiscal autonomy and full powers over welfare and employment. We want those to enable us to ensure policy coherence so that welfare, employment policy and taxation can operate in harmony with one another. We need more powers in Scotland to ensure that work pays—we are all agreed on that—so we should be able to determine tax credit and benefit rates and the minimum wage. Finally, we need the ability to protect the most vulnerable in our society; we also need the power to create a fairer welfare system instead of spending money mitigating UK policies.

We want to create opportunities that meet distinctive Scottish priorities; we want to equip the Scottish Parliament with the powers to create more jobs, tackle inequality and protect public services. Instead of seeing tens of thousands

more children grow up in poverty, we want to use the additional powers to give Scotland's children the very best possible start in life in a fairer, more prosperous country. I am sure that we all want that.

13:30

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Food and Drink

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is a debate on motion S4M-11598, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on food and drink.

I call Richard Lochhead to speak to and move the motion. Cabinet secretary, you have around 14 minutes.

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): Food is something that we all enjoy and often take for granted. Today, we can reflect on its importance to Scotland and, indeed, to the world, because the world is, of course, changing. The world's population is expected to increase from 7 billion today to 9 billion by 2050. It is estimated that 12 per cent of the world's population, which is 842 million people, do not eat enough to be healthy. By 2030, the world is expected to need 40 per cent more water and 30 per cent more energy. Therefore, there is pressure on our resources like never before and, globally, food is and will remain a critical issue.

Here in Scotland we are fortunate because we are blessed with some of the most amazing natural resources anywhere on the planet. Our land, water and seas provide the foundation for the raw materials that underpin our fantastic food and drink industry, which is now one of the fastest-growing sectors in Scotland. However, it was not always like that.

Back in 2007, the Scottish Government started raising the profile of food and drink. It seems incredible today that, back then, there was no national food and drink policy. There was very little by way of a joined-up approach to growing an industry of such huge economic importance as food and drink. That position led to the first-ever national food and drink policy for Scotland—indeed, it was perhaps the first such policy in Europe—which was called “Recipe for Success—Scotland's National Food and Drink Policy”, published in 2009. At its heart was a desire for active change.

Since then, the policy has come alive through the work of highly motivated and ambitious people all over Scotland at every level of society and, of course, in the business community. That focus has paid huge dividends, as the industry's turnover is now £13.9 billion, representing the largest increase in turnover in Scotland, even outperforming oil and gas. Since 2007, there has been a 51 per cent increase in the value of food and drink exports and a 32 per cent increase in

sales of Scottish food and drink brands across these islands. Initial growth targets were smashed an incredible full six years early.

However, perhaps we should not really be surprised at that success, given Scotland's rich larder. Our Scotch beef and lamb are second to none and recognised by top chefs around the world. Our seafood from our pristine waters is also acclaimed worldwide. Our soft fruit, cereals and vegetables, including tatties, are renowned for their quality and taste. That is not all, though, because Scottish berries and oats are just two of our excellent products that provide particularly essential nutrients for our diet. For instance, Scottish porridge oats can help to maintain normal blood cholesterol and control our blood sugar levels, and berries provide an enjoyable and healthy addition to our diet, contributing to our five a day. In addition, in terms of drink, our famous Scotch whisky continues to be a global phenomenon, with an estimated 40 bottles per second shipped every day.

Importantly, that success is evident at the local level, with local sourcing and the celebration of Scottish produce also increasing dramatically. Indeed, there has been a 50 per cent increase in the number of farmers' markets in Scotland and 150 new local food initiatives in the past 10 years. Through our work with Scotland's Rural University College and our funding for a community food fund, we have seen 73 projects in the past two years alone celebrate our local produce the length and breadth of Scotland.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): The document "Becoming a Good Food Nation" refers to developing a children's food policy. Does the cabinet secretary agree that training and giving opportunities to get access to good food are important for the next generation of consumers, and will help to drive the market as well as improve health and wellbeing across Scotland?

Richard Lochhead: The member makes a good point. It is ironic that we have fantastic, nutritious food on our doorstep but not enough people, particularly our children, enjoy and have access to it. If we can make that happen, it will also be good for our economy.

Returning to the promotion of Scottish food, I note that, since 2007, we have seen a 50 per cent increase in Scottish products with protected food names, combined with an increasing interest in where food comes from and more local produce on our menus. It is not just the people of Scotland who are increasingly seeking the quality food and drink that we have, but visitors to these shores as well. In a recent visitor survey, 49 per cent of visitors cited trying local food as one of the top activities that they undertook, and more than two

thirds said that the quality of food was important when they chose Scotland as a destination. The world wants what we have, but we must not rest on our laurels. We must build on our success and continue to identify new markets.

It is amazing that a recent supplier development programme that cost less than £50,000 resulted in 35 Scottish food and drink companies benefiting from an additional £12.1 million in sales with one major retailer. With initiatives such as that, there is so much more that we can achieve. We must support businesses that want to grow their exports or start exporting, and the £4.5 million food export plan that was agreed earlier this year is a groundbreaking partnership between Government, the public sector and the private sector to support such efforts. It will direct our focus to priority markets and pool our resources to help industry to fully exploit the massive opportunities that are out there.

I am pleased to tell the Parliament today about two new additions to team Scotland. The first two of our new full-time overseas food experts are now in post in Toronto and Japan and are getting on with their jobs.

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): Can the minister confirm my suspicion that starting to export is far more difficult than carrying it on? Probably, most businesses struggle to see an overseas market because it is just not what they have done before.

Richard Lochhead: The member's suspicion may have some grounds. For many businesses it is daunting to get into exports, but those that have done so usually do not regret it and find that it is a lucrative marketplace. That is why a number of initiatives are in place to mentor and work with small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular, to help them to get into the international marketplace.

Of course, 2014 brought a huge boost to the reputation of Scottish food and drink. The eyes of the world were on Scotland, and our food and drink did not disappoint. We successfully delivered a fantastic offering at the Ryder cup, the Glasgow Commonwealth games and homecoming 2014. It is difficult to visualise, but more than 2 million meals were prepared for athletes, officials, media, the workforce and spectators at the Commonwealth games alone, and with such vast volumes of produce, Glasgow 2014 set a new gold standard in delivering major events in Scotland in a sustainable way.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): The cabinet secretary is right to point to the resounding success of those events. It has been suggested to me, however, that because of the sponsorship relationships at the Commonwealth games,

opportunities for Scottish food and drink producers were more limited than we had hoped earlier in the year. Will he comment on that?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, I can give you some time back for the interventions.

Richard Lochhead: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

It was certainly the case that we made huge strides with the Commonwealth games. Compared with, perhaps, every previous Commonwealth games, there was much more local food for sale. I have spoken to many Scottish companies that benefited hugely from Glasgow 2014. It is the case—as the member has perhaps alluded to—that what we managed to achieve with the Ryder cup was absolutely fabulous, as there was perhaps more control for Scotland over some of the issues. However, both platforms were used to maximum effect for Scottish food and drink and this country's reputation.

A legacy of Glasgow 2014 is the sustainable food charter, which was rolled out to the other major events, such as the Ryder cup and homecoming 2014, and which will feature strongly in the 2015 year of food and drink. It is no wonder that Cate Devine in *The Herald* called the food charter that we have developed—the first of its kind—“deeply impressive”. That is why we are now going to encourage the adoption of the food charter for every event, every organisation and hopefully—one day—every town and city in Scotland.

Along with those successes since 2007, there has been huge activity in other areas. Food is not just about sales and profit, and we have devoted unprecedented effort to food education, helping young people to understand the role that food plays in their lives and ensuring that they have the facts that they need at their disposal to make informed choices for their future.

We have also made real progress with the introduction of “Supporting Healthy Choices: A Framework for Voluntary Action” for the food industry to encourage consumers to make healthier choices, and we are working to ensure that the public sector is walking the walk and not just talking the talk. In 2007, the food in our schools and care homes was estimated to be 34 per cent sourced from Scotland; it is now estimated at just under 50 per cent, and that percentage is growing. Total expenditure on Scottish food and drink by the public sector in Scotland is now nearly £150 million.

As well as pupils, we want patients in our hospitals to enjoy good food. Scotland has led the way in the United Kingdom on developing and monitoring standards of nutritional care and

catering in our hospitals. We have made good progress, but we recognise that we can do more to drive up standards, which is why we will consult on whether nutritional and catering standards in hospitals should be placed on a statutory footing.

We are debating an undisputed success story. “Recipe for Success” has achieved exactly what it says on the tin and Scotland has some of the best food and drink in the world and our reputation is world class. However, there are areas of unfinished business. In part, that is about continuing to be ambitious for the industry, and we are not resting on our laurels. My ambition, which I know is shared by leaders in the sector, is that in 10 years' time Scotland should be well known throughout the world as one of the best places for food and drink businesses to be based.

More than that, there is something not quite right about our nation's relationship with food. That presents a profound paradox that I am confronted with every day of my life, not just as a minister with responsibility for food but as a member of the public and, indeed, a parent. Our food quality may be world beating, but unfortunately we are also beating much of the world on diet-related ill health. The average waistline of Scottish men has grown by 2 inches in a decade and two thirds of Scots continue to be overweight or obese. The current obesity trend is set to cost Scotland £3 billion by 2030, and fruit and vegetable consumption among the poorest 20 per cent of the population has fallen by 20 per cent since the recession.

The problem goes wider than that: it is also about waste. We still throw away about a fifth of all the food that we purchase, which costs us more than £1 billion. We can learn a lot from food waste recycling, such as happened at Glasgow 2014.

While too many of us are buying and wasting too much food, too many of our fellow citizens cannot afford to put food on their tables. Food poverty in 21st century Scotland is a scandal that we all have a responsibility to tackle—820,000 people in this country are living in relative poverty. Everyone should have access to affordable healthy food. We recently announced an extra £1 million over the next three years to help to combat food poverty in Scotland and we want to ensure that those who use food banks as a result of the United Kingdom's welfare reforms can access appropriate advice and support.

Our policy must also tackle ignorance, generally speaking, across the population, about what lies behind what we eat: where it comes from and how it is prepared. We have to create a culture that attaches greater importance to our food.

Today is not about reflecting on progress; it is about saying that we will no longer put up with all those paradoxes. That is why I am committed to

making Scotland a good food nation. Scotland is already well known as a land of food and drink, but we also need to become known for the quality of the food that we serve, eat and sell day by day. It needs to become second nature that everyone in Scotland serves, eats and sells fresh and tasty food with sound health and environmental credentials.

We want everyone to know what constitutes good food and why. All players in Scottish life—from schools to hospitals, retailers, restaurants and manufacturers—should be committed to serving such food.

We know that becoming a good food nation will not be easy. The challenge requires commitment from all to change. It will take time, but the impact will affect future generations. The Scottish Government is fully behind the aspiration, which will be pursued with vigour under our new First Minister, reinforced by new powers resulting from the current constitutional process. Above all, a broad coalition for change, involving many areas, will be required. That is why in June I launched a discussion document: “Recipe For Success: Scotland’s National Food and Drink Policy—Becoming a Good Food Nation”. Its purpose was to start this phase of the debate about our food future. It sought people’s views on what it would mean to be a good food nation and what steps would have to be taken locally, nationally, at grass-roots level and so on. The consultation process closed in late October and we are currently analysing the responses.

We must understand what people think about our food and drink culture. As a starter for 10, we think that public food, local food and children’s food are the right areas to focus on more in future. Of course, that will be in tandem with our efforts on exports and economic growth—those are not mutually exclusive aspirations.

There will be other important issues and we will shortly be ready to establish a Scottish food commission to help us with them. The commission will have two roles. First, it will advise on the key areas that need to be taken forward. Secondly, it will advocate the importance of food to Scotland’s health, environment, economy and general quality of life. For Scotland to become a good food nation, it is vital that we involve everyone from all walks of life, which is why the commission’s work will be supported by a network of local champions the length and breadth of Scotland.

I make no apologies for the fact that becoming a good food nation will be a challenge for us all. It will not happen in one fell swoop; it will happen as we create together good food communities, villages, towns and regions the length and breadth of the country. However there is no better time for this to happen than now, with 2015 being the

designated year of food and drink as part of the Government’s overarching tourism drive. That will provide further opportunity to showcase a fantastic industry, both at home and abroad, and to get people engaged in the debate.

A series of themes are being developed throughout the year and I hope that businesses and people across the country will harness all the opportunities available. Our food and drink sector is now well and truly in the spotlight and now is the time to capitalise on the strength of the industry—the provenance and the quality of our produce.

Becoming a good food nation and creating a good food culture will mean that, in 10 years’ time, when Europe or indeed the world thinks of good food, it thinks not only of Italy and France but of Scotland as well. That must be our aim and that is what we must achieve. I commend the motion to Parliament.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the achievements of Recipe for Success, Scotland’s first national food and drink policy; recognises the contribution that it has made to the unprecedented economic growth of the food and drink industry in Scotland and in export markets across the world; congratulates the primary producers and processors for their continued focus and commitment to quality and provenance; notes the increasing interest in local food and desire among consumers to know where their food comes from; welcomes the publication of the discussion document, *Becoming a Good Food Nation*, setting out the next steps for Scotland’s food and drink policy, and agrees that it must become second nature that Scots eat, serve and buy food that is healthy and environmentally sustainable if Scotland is to achieve the aspiration of becoming a good food nation.

14:45

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am delighted to open the debate for Labour. This is an exciting time for the food and drink sector and, as the recent Bank of Scotland report on the sector demonstrated, we are seeing not only strong export figures in key markets but a very positive approach across the whole sector, with companies planning for the future. That this success has happened at a time when there has been real economic pressure in other areas is a credit to all involved.

As we look forward to 2015, the year of food and drink, I give credit to the Government for working positively with the sector and promoting its importance in a modern economy. Success has come through increased partnership working with the Scottish Food and Drink Federation, Scotland Food and Drink, the Federation of Small Businesses and our further and higher education sectors, as well as key Government agencies.

Scotland has a fantastic larder. We have many unique products that reflect our history and heritage and which present opportunities for us to

share them with the world. As a Fifer, I am all too aware of our excellent locally produced products: from Pittenweem fish to Puddledub pork, Fife's food and drink is world class. It is a larder that many of us have grown up with and it is one that is synonymous with quality and excellence.

Reputation and trust are so important in the food and drink sector and Scotland's brand is strong. We must do all that we can to enhance and protect that. Our export sector is dominated by Scotch whisky, which is a Scottish and UK success story, as it is the largest food and drink export in both markets. Scotch whisky is a significant product that supports employment in Scotland and opens the door for other products to come on to the international stage.

Our food sector is led by another key product, with demand for Scottish salmon and seafood growing significantly in recent years. I want to see more products and companies being able to build on those successes, move into emerging markets and ensure that our brand can grow beyond industry leaders and iconic names.

As we head into the year of food and drink, we must look to build on the year that we have just had. A strong Scottish tourism sector can showcase our products on our own doorstep, and that was clearly demonstrated at the VisitScotland event in Parliament last night. We have seen excellent growth in visits to Scotland and our food and drink sector plays a key part in that success.

However, we must also address the challenges in the sector and in the country. As the Bank of Scotland report highlights, producers are facing challenges in relation to rising costs, the integrity of the supply chain, food security and meeting global demand. Within the space of a year, expected growth has almost doubled. The potential within the sector is evident, and we must now ensure that that potential is realised—and even exceeded—and that the social and economic benefits are not just experienced by those in the sector but by the workforce and the country at large.

In a world that is seemingly getting smaller—with advances in technology from shipping practices through to food preservation—and with the flourishing of countries in regions such as Asia, where the middle class expected to grow from just over 500 million to more than 3 billion by 2030, new and exciting export markets for Scotland are emerging.

Global interest in food and its provenance is increasing. In tough economic times, the food and drink sector has bucked the trend and seen positive returns. The opportunities for expansion are clearly there. The questions that we must ask ourselves are: how do we create and maintain the

conditions for the sector that will enable us to meet that potential; how do we take advantage of emerging markets; and how do we ensure that there is a legacy for the industry for years to come?

I welcome the export plan and the route map that it offers and I welcome the update from the cabinet secretary. The proposals are practical and responsive and I look forward to their implementation.

Last night at the VisitScotland event, I spoke to somebody from the FSB who works with artisan producers in Fife. When we look at international food trends, we can see that there is a lot of potential in such products, but the producers need a bit more support to grow their businesses. Nigel Don raised that issue. Some smaller businesses just need a bit more support to take the next step. Those businesses deliver additional benefits. For example, they provide employment in rural areas, support local tourism and innovation and enhance Scotland's reputation. It is perhaps an area that could do with a wee bit more focus.

When promoting food and drink and Scotland's reputation, we also need to consider Scotland's health record. We have to address our reputation—fair or otherwise—as the sick man of Europe. I was pleased to hear the cabinet secretary raise that issue, which signifies that the Government has been listening to concerns that have been expressed over the past few years that the food debate has been a bit too narrow and that we need to take a much more inclusive approach to it.

Our obesity levels are far too high. It is estimated that in 2030, when we should be taking advantage of the expected 3 billion members of the Asian middle class, we will be facing the £3 billion cost of tackling obesity at home. It does not have to be that way.

Our food and drink export policy has produced clear successes in economic terms, but I welcome the expanded focus of the consultation on "Becoming a Good Food Nation", including the focus on children's diet, which Stewart Stevenson mentioned. There are challenges in producing an overarching, inclusive food policy across Government. If it is to be truly inclusive, it is not just up to Richard Lochhead to deliver it. I was pleased to see that Michael Matheson supported the motion, but we need greater commitment from across Government if we are to make progress in these areas. We need to make greater connections between the food and drink sector as an economic driver and the importance of food and drink as a public health issue. With such a magnificent larder, great export figures and quality on our doorstep, we should not be facing significant failings in addressing food poverty, poor

health and obesity. We must find solutions to those challenges.

The Scottish Parliament has led on public debates and policy around smoking and alcohol, but we need a serious debate about food. Food in Scotland is an emotive issue; it is much easier to talk about the negatives of tobacco and alcohol. When my colleague Richard Simpson spoke about a soda tax, which has been introduced in France, he got pretty negative coverage—the press mainly saw it as an attack on our other national drink. Tax as a mechanism for changing behaviour is pretty challenging, but we need to have the space in Scotland to have an honest debate about it. I welcome comments about the establishment of a food commission, which might help provide the space for that debate to take place.

By improving Scotland's diet, we would not only improve our citizens' health and life chances but enhance our reputation abroad, supporting the message that we are a land of food and drink.

Sustainability, alongside provenance and traceability, is becoming increasingly important in Scotland and internationally. Scotland has a good story to tell in terms of good animal welfare standards and shorter supply chains, but it feels as if the global food market does not always value that. Food and drink is an intensely competitive sector. In recent years there have been consolidations, mergers and acquisitions in Scotland. Recently, the number of independent chicken producers in Scotland fell as the contracts with Hook 2 Sisters were cancelled.

Alongside the desire to promote local, we have to recognise the financial pressures that many families face when it comes to food. My own research shows that a pound—roughly 400g—of sausages at my local farmers market cost me £3.24. At a high street butcher's in my region, a similar weight of sausages cost me £3.18. A pound of own-brand pork sausages in a big supermarket that offers a whole range of differently priced sausages was £1.38. That is quite a significant difference. Although there is clear evidence to suggest that a cultural shift would be a good thing for Scotland, we need to recognise that part of the debate must be how we ensure that low-income families are not excluded.

When it comes to food safety, we must always be vigilant. We are only too aware of how one food scare can have very negative consequences for a whole industry and that it can take years, if not decades, to recover fully from it. It is so important to maintain reputation. The horsemeat scandal a few years ago exposed the complexity of the food market and its vulnerability to food fraud and criminality. The news this week about bird flu in England is leading to pretty confusing reports for the consumer about the risks to human health. We

cannot be complacent. We must also have robust science in order to build consumer confidence and a good understanding of any threats.

The Parliament is currently considering a new food standards bill—the Food (Scotland) Bill—which will create a new food body to take over from the Food Standards Agency and establish new food law provisions. We should use that as an opportunity to bring in robust regulation for the food sector that will ensure consumer confidence and trust.

As the sector grows, it is important that it does so with a long-term, high-quality workforce in place. For the benefit of the industry, our economy and our society, we need to attract future generations into the industry. Earlier this year, I visited a fish manufacturer that is based in West Lothian. It sits on the boundary between Bathgate and Livingston but it still finds it difficult to recruit young people from the local area. We are facing real challenges from youth unemployment, but there is an outdated perception of what working in the food sector involves. When I went to the fish factory, I found that the jobs were fairly paid and secure and involved producing a high-quality product. We must do more to attract young people into the sector.

We also need to ensure that future generations gain the relevant skills to be successful in the global marketplace. Although business programmes remain popular, Scotland is still pretty behind on language skills. Our approach to languages in education is still centred on the traditional languages. We must ask how we can reflect the modern workplace and the business world. If we are talking about Scottish products moving into bigger export markets, we need that flexibility in languages. At recent food and drink events, I have seen a growth in translation services provided by companies that are setting up to help others with that expansion.

We also need investment in research and new product development. For example, there is no more traditional product than oatcakes, but Nairn's has diversified into gluten-free biscuits and crackers. The United States of America is the company's most successful market, and gluten-free is its fastest growing export range. Although businesses have the responsibility to invest, there is also the potential for greater collaboration with our further and higher education sectors to bring new products to the market.

With that positive example, as we move into 2015, we can look forward to a year of celebration and of raising the profile of Scottish food and drink. However, the Parliament has much work to do if Scotland is to become a truly good food nation.

I move, as an amendment to motion S4M-11598 to insert at end

“; further recognises the importance of promoting training, skills and apprenticeship opportunities across the sector to encourage future generations into the industry, and believes that an overarching and inclusive food policy that puts accessibility, affordability and sustainability at its heart is key if Scotland’s larder is to be of benefit to all”.

14:56

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): As debates of this nature go on and draw to a close, there is usually a degree of repetition. I am sorry to say that we are only at speech number three and a certain amount of repetition is going to take place. I make no apology for that because, whatever our political or constitutional differences, no one can take away from the undoubted success of the Scottish Government’s food and drink policy.

Stewart Stevenson: Is the member not aware that political debates are not over when everything has been said? They are over only when everyone has said it.

Alex Fergusson: If Mr Stevenson is accusing me of accusing him of being repetitious, I will reserve judgment on that until later in the debate.

Not for the first time, I am more than happy to applaud the Government for recognising the sector’s potential and for delivering the mechanisms and structures—particularly through recipes for success—that have allowed it to flourish during the past few years, even as other sectors have struggled with the economic pressures that were brought about by the worst economic depression in the so-called developed world since the 1930s. It is a massive testament to all who are involved in the food and drink sector, from the smallest artisan producer to the industrial-scale processors of some of our best-known products, that that is the case. Their efforts have brought about the real success that is Scotland’s food and drink industry, and we should all applaud them for it.

We should also recognise the role that has been played by Scotland Food and Drink since it was established in 2007. Initially, it was tasked with

“growing the value of Scotland’s food and drink sector, making it more profitable and delivering greater global success in a challenging and competitive environment.”

It set about its task with such determination and focus that it has set a new goal of increasing the sector’s turnover to £16.5 billion by 2017, having achieved its original target six years ahead of schedule, as the cabinet secretary noted. If only every Government initiative could boast that level of success, we would be living in a much happier world. However, it is surely to the great credit of

the management team at Scotland Food and Drink that that success has been achieved. I note with some sadness that Ray Jones, the chair of the organisation, will step down from his role at the end of the month. I am sure that I am not alone in wishing him well. Alex Salmond’s shoes are not the only ones that will take some filling as 2014 draws to a close.

The figures that enable us to measure that success are impressive, as the various briefings that members received prior to the debate indicate. There were overall sales of £13.1 billion in 2013. Exports are playing an increasingly important role, with some 60 per cent of Scottish companies looking to expand their overseas markets. Food manufacturing grew by more than 20 per cent last year, and there is the potential to create almost 10,000 new jobs in the sector over the next five years. Who could fail to get excited about statistics and prospects of that nature?

However, there are concerns, such as the rising cost of new materials; sustainability and security of supply; the burden of regulation; and the crucial need for innovation and improvement in food production—an area in which small and medium-sized enterprises play such an important role.

There are other, wider concerns. The export record and potential of farmed salmon is spectacular, but the industry continues to provoke serious environmental questions, on matters such as sea lice and the shooting of seals, which remain unanswered. The sector is left a little vulnerable while those questions remain unanswered.

I was horrified to hear RSPB Scotland say, in evidence to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee last week, that it harbours serious concerns that too great a proportion of common agricultural policy support will remain targeted at the most productive areas of Scotland after CAP reforms are in place.

I hotly contest the RSPB’s suggestion, as would most of my constituents in the productive agriculture sector. If we fail to support our productive areas we could lose the critical mass of some of our national products, such as our wonderful Scottish beef, and thus begin to reverse the huge successes that we are highlighting today. We can maintain those successes only if we maintain a balance on all the issues.

Next year will be the designated year of food and drink. I very much welcome the initiative, which has great potential. I add a slight caveat. Alongside the year of food and drink, we will be taking forward the consultation, “Recipe for Success: Scotland’s National Food & Drink Policy—Becoming a Good Food Nation”. I have no quibble with the vision that lies behind the

consultation, but I have sympathy with NFU Scotland's view that the vision might be more holistic than tangible and might prove difficult to measure. I hope that the NFUS is wrong.

If we are truly to become a good food nation, we have to tackle the fundamental problem that the cabinet secretary and Claire Baker mentioned. It is a problem that I see vividly at too many secondary schools in my constituency, in the shape of the fleet of fast-food vehicles that park as close to the school gates as they can get during the lunch hour.

We all know the dreadful statistics on obesity and heart disease and on other lifestyle issues that are all too common in Scotland today, and we all know the stress that those issues place on our health services. It has to be a great irony that as we designate 2015 the year of food and drink and work towards becoming a good food nation, we are simultaneously and not terribly successfully trying to deal with a population that suffers from some of the worst diet-induced health problems in the western world.

Perhaps that should spur us on towards becoming a good food nation. There is no doubt that the health and environmental benefits of doing so are unquestionable.

I have reservations about the proposed establishment of a food commission, but those are for another debate, and I am out of time.

Conservatives welcome the success of Scotland's food and drink sector and wish the sector well in future. We will support the amendment and the motion.

15:03

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in today's debate on food and drink, not least because, as members can probably tell, I am no stranger to the first-class food and drink that Scotland has to offer. The cabinet secretary said that waistlines have increased by an average of 2 inches in recent years; in my case it is sadly well above that average, but there is always hope—and, of course, willpower.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government's recipe for success has indeed been a success since 2009. I look forward to the becoming a good food nation initiative being rolled out, along with the whole-hearted participation of everyone in Scotland, which will be necessary.

My constituency of Falkirk East—and the wider Falkirk district—plays its part already: we can boast an impressive number of notable food retailers and producers. In Falkirk East, there are companies with international operations such as

Caledonian Produce in Bo'ness, part of the Bakkavor Group, which produces ready-made salads solely for Marks and Spencer using locally sourced ingredients. The state-of-the-art Whyte and Mackay bottling plant is in Grangemouth.

The cabinet secretary will recall visiting Bakkavor-Caledonian Produce following its further expansion in 2012, and I hope that he will also be available to visit Whyte and Mackay's state-of-the-art bottling plant at some point in the near future, as I have recently received confirmation from the chief executive officer that the plant will remain in operation following the purchase by Philippines-based Emperador Distillers.

My constituency is not just a home for industrialisation and big business; it is also home to a wide range of small food and drink companies and new starts, such as the Grangemouth-based Caledonian Cheesecake Company, the Tablet Company and a new whisky distillery outside Polmont, which was made possible by a generous grant from the Scottish Government. The Falkirk Distillery Company, which has the plant half-built at the moment, is expected to provide 86 full-time jobs and to attract 75,000 visitors, on the back of the world-class attractions of the Kelpies, the Helix and the Falkirk wheel.

When debating Scottish food and drink and the Government's plan for Scotland to become a good food nation, we must remember all aspects of our food heritage, good and bad, and acknowledge the impact that they have on our culture.

Falkirk is, famously, the original home of Scotland's other national drink, Irn-Bru. It is now produced in my colleague Jamie Hepburn's constituency but, originally, it was produced in Falkirk, from 1901. The drink is enjoyed by millions worldwide and is a true Scottish success story but, arguably, it does not meet the healthy standards that are encouraged by the Scottish Government.

Nor, I suspect, would one of Mathiesons' legendary sausage rolls. Mathiesons Bakery has been trading in the Falkirk district since 1872 and is now based in Larbert, near Mrs Tilly's traditional Scottish confectionery and Malcolm Allan the butchers. With encouragement from the Scottish Government, Malcolm Allan has produced a healthier burger and a lower-calorie sausage, and sells more than 1 million pies and more than 20 million Lorne sausages each year—some of which I have to confess have been consumed by me, but purely in the interest of supporting the local economy.

The list of successful food and drink companies in Falkirk district goes on. It is one of the most industrialised areas in Scotland, right in the middle of the central belt. The food and drink industry in Scotland is in a very healthy position, and these

good news success stories of companies large and small, old and new are in no small part due to the support of the Scottish Government through initiatives such as recipe for success and the forthcoming 2015 year of food and drink.

However, there are challenges to overcome, and more can and should be achieved. As a former wholesale and retail butcher, I know at first hand that food and drink is an industry with a keen eye on price. Profit margins can be small, which can be challenging, especially in manufacturing, as supermarkets can negotiate ruthlessly and then take up to three months to pay out.

As we move into 2015 and launch the year of food and drink, we must keep it in mind that, by volume and value, Scotland has some of the largest protected food names in the European Union, with high-value products such as Scotch beef and Scottish farmed salmon accounting for around £700 million in sales.

Sadly, revenue generated by Scotch beef and other Scottish red meat could be much greater, if only the Westminster Government would give Scotland a fair deal. Members will recall my motion last year and the debate earlier this year regarding the red meat levy. It highlighted that the Prime Minister and the UK Government have refused to return the levy paid by Scotland's livestock producers who have cattle, sheep and pigs slaughtered in the rest of the UK. That is believed to cost Quality Meat Scotland £1.4 million a year. I thank the members who supported my motion. However, I was disappointed that it did not receive cross-party support.

Red meat is not the only area of food and drink where Scotland would be better off if we could get a fair deal from Westminster. Scotland exports vast quantities of whisky around the world, in particular to developing markets in the BRIC countries—Brazil, Russia, India and China. These exports of a product that is entirely made in Scotland with Scottish ingredients see more than £4.3 billion going to the Westminster Exchequer. That is a travesty, which I am sure the Scottish Government will continue to work to correct.

It is time for Scotland to stop hiding its light under a bushel and to step forward to claim its rightful place as one of the world's best food and drink producers. Scotland's food and drink tourism industry is worth around £2.5 million per day, as we heard earlier. It is a market with great potential for growth, and it is one that I am sure the year of food and drink and the approach in "Becoming a Good Food Nation" will greatly improve.

As always, I have more to say but, sadly, my time is running out, so I will draw my comments to a close.

15:10

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I, too, am happy to support the motion and the proposals in the discussion document "Becoming a Good Food Nation". I also support Claire Baker's amendment and hope that we can achieve unity in the chamber, as the amendment simply adds to the motion and recognises the importance of a £13 billion industry—Alex Fergusson talked about that—that employs almost 400,000 people. The amendment highlights that there should be opportunities for skills, training and apprenticeships in that industry.

I will highlight a few points about health, the importance of food, and obesity.

I heard it said and read recently that the impact of obesity on health is similar to the impact that smoking had. The Government in Scotland rightly agreed to take action on smoking. We need to look carefully at that impact, and the document starts to take us that way.

As a food grower—I enjoy my allotment up in Kelty—I think that it is important that we look right across Government. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill, which is currently being scrutinised, has a part on allotments. A lot more can be done. I certainly eat healthy food for a big part of the year. I grow it myself and give it away to many other people. Joined-up government is needed, and I like some of the ideas that are coming through.

I read the briefing from the retailers. There is no doubt that the retailers are employing a lot of people and doing a lot of work, but we need to consider food poverty. I was amazed to read that the industry wastes 3.9 million tonnes of food each year—that is before that food even gets near the shopping basket. That is quite scandalous when we have food poverty in this country and poverty across the world.

Scottish homes throw away 630,000 tonnes of food and drink every year, most of which could have been eaten or drunk. Each year, that waste costs us up to £1 billion—£470 for the average household.

Local authorities must be a clear partner in the strategy. They are doing a lot of work. I know that there are now food waste bins in Fife and in my constituency. That brings home to individuals the levels of waste that there are. We certainly have to do a lot more about that.

We also need to recognise that, in this day and age, food poverty has to be tackled. The Scottish Government's own figures show that, from April to June 2014, the Scottish welfare fund gave out £980,000 of grants for food. That is not relative poverty; it is absolute poverty. Somebody asked

me recently what poverty is. I said to them that absolute poverty exists where a person cannot meet their very basic needs. A very basic need of every human being is to feed themselves. With the levels of waste in Scotland, the levels of waste through the large supermarkets before food even gets near the food baskets, and the levels of waste in our own households, we should not have food poverty.

Food banks have not been mentioned yet. The information from the Scottish Government is that almost 71,500 people, including almost 23,000 children, have been provided with food from a food bank in the past year. We see the levels of waste and the levels of poverty in our country, and they simply do not add up. We need to address those issues.

FareShare, in its submission to the Welfare Reform Committee's food bank inquiry, stated that

"There is enough surplus food in the Scottish food industry to feed those suffering food poverty in Scotland"

and called for

"'joined up' government"

to address the issue.

I want to highlight some of the positive actions that can be taken in partnership with local government. For example, the Fife community food project, which operates in my constituency, does a range of work with the 16+ learning choices programme, engaging with low-income families, homeless groups, mental health groups and people with additional support needs. It is an excellent local project that addresses some of the issues around food poverty.

In my own constituency, a youth worker called Lorraine Mullen is actively involved in delivering 10-week cooking skills programmes to ensure that people are able not only to get fresh produce but to use it.

There are major issues. The document is welcome, but we need to do more at a local level to encourage healthy eating and healthy growing. We need to tackle the obscene levels of food waste that exist in Scotland and elsewhere while there is poverty at home and abroad.

15:16

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I must first compliment the cabinet secretary, for it is thanks to his ambition and drive in implementing our food and drink policy that the sector has undergone a revolution since 2008. That work has paid off beyond all reasonable expectations, with a growth in turnover of 14.4 per cent between 2008 and 2011—the strongest growth of any sector in Scotland.

Targets on turnover and exports have been exceeded, with a 51 per cent growth in the value of food and drink exports between 2007 and 2013. By any standard, that is a remarkable success story.

I have had the opportunity of witnessing that amazing phenomenon at first hand across the Highlands and Islands, and I have seen a huge improvement in the variety and quality of the food and drink available.

Presiding Officer, please allow me take you on a brief culinary tour of the Highlands and Islands: a two-day whistle-stop food fest. Arriving in Argyll via the gateway of Inveraray, we could breakfast at Loch Fyne Oysters and sample the amazing array of high-quality seafood and the other foods available.

It might be best then to fortify ourselves with a dram in Campbeltown where the Springbank distillery is the oldest family-owned distillery in Scotland, and—I understand—the only one that still carries out the full process on one site. We should also visit its sister distillery, the Glengyle distillery, which is the first of a number of new distilleries built in this millennium. Heading north, we could fortify ourselves further—if we needed it—with some Islay malts, and then on to Oban and lunch at the Eusk restaurant.

Alex Fergusson: Given the legislation that we debated earlier this week, I wonder about the wisdom of visiting two distilleries and then continuing to travel north.

Mike MacKenzie: I was assuming that neither of us was driving.

We should lunch at the Eusk restaurant, which has a selection of great local foods available that are prepared to a consistently high standard. Before leaving Oban, we should call in to speak to the inspirational John Forteith, who has performed a remarkable service for local producers and local caterers alike and helped to launch brands such as Argyll venison as well as organising local food-and-drink trade shows.

Next, let us take the ferry across to Mull and sample some Isle of Mull cheese; some of the excellent biscuits produced by the Island Bakery; and some handmade chocolates at the Tobermory Chocolate Company.

At this point, Presiding Officer, I suggest that, being busy people, we recruit the services of our friend and colleague Stewart Stevenson and ask him to fly us to Stornoway to sample some of the world-famous black pudding, which has now been granted protected status by the European Union. We will then fly onwards to Orkney, where we will be literally spoilt for choice among high-quality local produce, from locally made crisps, cheese,

ice cream and oatcakes to the finest roast beef that I have ever tasted and the best steak that I have had since the one that I had in France a decade or so ago. Indeed, it is hard to find a butcher on Orkney who has not won a prestigious award for the quality of their meat.

After an evening meal in one of Orkney's many quality restaurants, we could take the overnight ferry for Shetland. Shetland is the place for fish—at which it excels above all parts of the Highlands and Islands—but also for wonderful oatcakes and cheese.

For breakfast, I recommend the smoked haddock and free-range eggs. I have never tasted better. Before we head home, we could have lunch in Frankie's fish and chip shop in Brae and a quick trip up north to the island of Unst to the UK's most northerly brewery, the wonderfully named Valhalla brewery, for some of Sonny Priest's heavenly beer.

In the short time available, I have inevitably missed out more producers of excellent food and drink than I can possibly mention. There is much more to sample and feast upon.

Scotland's high-quality, locally produced food and drink add greatly to the visitor experience and, therefore, bring quality and added value to our important tourism industry. They add to Scotland's exports, which are vital in shoring up the UK's balance of trade deficit. Local consumption of local food and drink saves on food miles, which helps to reduce our greenhouse gasses. Our healthy food contributes to our health and wellbeing. The provenance of our food and drink enhances Scotland's brand worldwide.

There is no doubt that food and drink are a success story for Scotland. However, the really good news is that we have barely scratched the surface. There is much more to be discovered. It is hard to think of a part of the Highlands and Islands—or, indeed, the whole of Scotland—where new producers are not emerging and recognising the added value of bringing their quality produce to markets at home and abroad.

For many years, we failed to recognise the many opportunities afforded by our wonderful food and drink. Thanks to the Government and the cabinet secretary, that is no longer the case.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr MacKenzie. I am glad that I managed to fit in lunch today or this debate would have been agony.

15:22

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): After that, the chances of Mike MacKenzie keeping the increase in his waistline to less than 2 inches in the next few months are limited. The advisability of

at least three drams before lunch time is also open to question.

Like others, I welcome the debate. I welcome the sentiments that the cabinet secretary expressed, not least in pointing up the paradox of the natural resources that we have at our disposal and the issues that we face on diet—I include myself in that.

The cabinet secretary is right—we are all right—to acknowledge the success of the Government and the strategy. It would be slightly disingenuous to adopt a year-zero approach; it is fair to acknowledge the work of his predecessor, my colleague Ross Finnie, in developing the strategy for agriculture, which was a necessary precursor to the valuable strategy on food and drink. I will perhaps touch on that later.

Those of us who were at the VisitScotland reception last night had not only a demonstration of the interconnection between tourism and the food and drink sector but an indicator of the quality, confidence and success that characterise the sector. I see evidence of that locally, as Mike MacKenzie mentioned—I will come on to that—but it is evident at a national level, too.

It is not difficult to see why that is the case. Other members have commented on the briefing from the Bank of Scotland, which illustrates the extent of the success against a backdrop of challenging economic circumstances. The sector has weathered the storm. It grew to £13.1 billion last year, and everyone expects 2014 to be a highly successful year.

The food and drink sector is the largest manufacturing sector and is clearly ambitious to grow further, not least through the export market. That applies as much to microbusinesses and SMEs as to the largest manufacturers. The signals are all very good.

As I said, it is difficult to see how we could have a food and drink strategy without an agriculture strategy. The National Farmers Union Scotland's briefing suggests:

“without farmers, a Good Food Nation simply would not exist.”

I do not think that any of us would dispute that. Farmers and crofters across the country grow the crops, fruit and vegetables and raise the livestock that underpin our food system. They are working to improve the environmental and welfare standards. As Claire Baker suggested, it is hoped that increased consumer awareness about those issues will translate into greater success for quality-assured produce, whether through the Scotch beef, Scotch lamb and red tractor marks or whatever else.

There are challenges, too, as we would expect. In tough economic times, it is perhaps no surprise that consumers revert to buying on the basis of price. Alex Rowley made a number of pertinent points on that. One hopes that, as wages start to rise, that issue will begin to be addressed.

The NFU has pointed to concerns that the proposed food commission risks duplication and overlap with other regulators and advisory bodies, but we will wait to see the details. There are challenges, too, for the retail sector. As the NFU makes clear, our supermarkets' actions

"can influence consumer behaviour, diet profiles and also the sustainability of supply chains."

The good food nation requires sustainable pricing to be embedded in supply chains.

Unfairness in the supply chain not only hurts businesses but runs the risk of stifling investment. The setting up of a grocery code of practice and appointment of an adjudicator are welcome innovations at UK level, not to promote a confrontational relationship between retailers and primary producers but, I hope, to encourage a more positive and constructive relationship. It would be wrong of us to lay all the blame at the supermarkets' doors. They help to promote and sell upwards of £10 billion-worth of Scottish food and drink to the rest of the UK, which remains our largest market.

I turn briefly to the local situation, which is a microcosm of what is happening nationally. I commend Orkney Food and Drink's work and particularly Edgar Balfour's personal efforts. The food and drink awards in Orkney have been initiated. I hope that they continue and that success is celebrated locally. Exemplars include top-quality beef, lamb and seafood; Orkney cheese and ice cream; Stockan's oatcakes; fudge; Orkney preserves; Highland Park whisky and Scapa whisky; and the Orkney brewery and Swannay brewery. All are award winners and are ambitious to grow and to meet the demand locally, nationally and internationally.

The cabinet secretary was right to say that he would not rest on his laurels and that he would look at what further support could be provided. I welcome that and I offer examples. The high costs pointed out in the Bank of Scotland briefing are an all-too-evident challenge that faces isles-based businesses. Transport and energy, as well as poor broadband connections, come up repeatedly.

On ferry services, there are concerns that Orkney producers are not entitled to access the road equivalent tariff, unlike those in the Western Isles. As Edgar Balfour said:

"we do not benefit from RET and find it hard to understand why there is this distinction between island communities."

On air services, we have seen cuts to the air discount scheme. Orkney Food and Drink points out:

"The cost, for Orkney food and drink businesses, of doing business in the UK is expensive in any case—without making the first leg of the journey even more expensive."

The cabinet secretary might want to reflect on and take on board those issues.

On postal services, we need to take seriously the Royal Mail's warnings. On skills, Claire Baker's amendment points to issues that not only young people but people of all ages face, which involve attaining the skills to keep them in and raise the quality of the sector, which they might need to go off-island to secure.

On food labelling—the Bank of Scotland raised that—perhaps I can follow up the issues with the cabinet secretary.

Locally and nationally, the food and drink sector is a success story. We should recognise and celebrate that and thank and support all those across the sector who are achieving that success. In the year of food and drink 2015, and to fall foul of the cabinet secretary's paradox, I very much look forward to microbrewery month.

15:29

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I, too, am pleased to take part in the debate. It follows the successful VisitScotland event that was held yesterday evening, which focused on Scotland's year of food and drink 2015. That year has had a good kick-start through the high-profile events that have been held this year, including the Commonwealth games and the Ryder cup.

The importance of the document "Becoming a Good Food Nation" to the whole of Scotland is evidenced by the huge number of briefings on the subject that have been sent to MSPs in the past few days. I thank all the organisations that have sent those briefings. By any measure, the cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government are to be congratulated on the prominence that they have given to the food and drink sector since coming to office in 2007. They first published "Recipe for Success" and are building on that.

To many people, Aberdeen and the north-east are known only as the centre of the oil and gas industry, but we are by no means a one-trick pony. Before oil and gas were discovered, agriculture and whisky were the mainstays of the economy, and even today, the food and drink sector supports 22,000 jobs in the region and accounts for about a fifth of Scotland's food and drink activity.

In the past year, Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce has surveyed the sector and found that 37 per cent of respondents reported export activity, in comparison with only 29 per cent in 2011, and that over a third of revenue came from countries outside the UK. It is encouraging that 78 per cent of businesses expected to grow and expand and that over 17 per cent expected to retain their existing scale. However, the fact that 37 per cent report export activity shows that there is still huge potential for growth, and about 55 per cent of businesses were looking to invest for growth.

Challenges exist in the recruitment of senior managers and sales staff, and the competition with industries in the region that pay higher wages is acute. I therefore pay tribute to the many people from other parts of Europe who have come to work in the sector in the north-east. They are vital workers in a tight labour market and an example of why the UK's exit from the EU would be disastrous for Scotland.

There is the potential for more growth, and it is hoped that the upcoming inquiry by the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee on exports and the inquiry of my committee, the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, on all forms of freight transport will identify opportunities and challenges for Scotland's businesses. Most freight is carried on scheduled passenger flights, and much is exported through direct routes to the middle east—to Dubai and Doha. When new routes are developed for passengers, it is important that we also think of the potential for exporting our products in the holds of the aircraft.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Does the member agree that, within Scotland, it is important that freight is moved increasingly from road on to rail? She will know the arguments for doing that as well as I do.

Maureen Watt: Yes, of course. That is one aspect that we will look at in our inquiry.

The north-east is not just a food larder; it has huge potential as a food destination. The chamber of commerce has joined with the region's three destination marketing organisations—Visit Aberdeen, Visit Royal Deeside and Banffshire Coast Tourism Partnership—and with Aberdeenshire Council and the regional tourism partnership to submit a bid for funding to the VisitScotland 2015 food and drink growth fund. I hope that that bid is successful. This morning, I met Philip Smith, the regional director of VisitScotland for Aberdeen city and Aberdeenshire, and I sincerely hope that the initiative is successful. There is much to build on, not just the annual taste of Grampian event—I am sure that my colleague Christian Allard will speak about it—but the many agricultural shows and

festivals that could be showcases for the region's food and drink.

A huge improvement can be made in the hospitality sector. Skills development there was a main part of my conversation with Philip Smith this morning. Hospitality, with its potential for career progression, used to be a sought-after sector, and it needs to be so again.

I welcome the fact that "Becoming a Good Food Nation" does not concentrate only on food and drink production and food tourism but deals with the wider importance of food. I welcome the recent announcement on improving food standards in our hospitals. Although the food that is served in schools has improved, much still needs to be done to persuade our children and their parents of the long-term health effects of eating healthy and nutritious food—I see that, unfortunately, the school group has just left the public gallery.

There are still opportunities for councils and health boards to examine their procurement practices. Bulk buying from afar might not always be the most cost-effective option, and local producers can be competitive and more responsive to their needs.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must draw to a close.

Maureen Watt: In conclusion, the need for families to have access to better food has been mentioned. It is welcome that the NFUS briefing for the debate said that the achievement of a good food nation requires a growing and sustainable economy that promotes the growth of the disposable income of all our citizens, so that they can buy that better food.

15:36

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the motion and, in particular, in support of Scottish Labour's amendment, which stresses the importance of an inclusive food policy—a food policy that puts accessibility, affordability and sustainability at its heart; acknowledges that every step of the food supply chain impacts on our environment; considers how we produce, grow and catch our food; and assesses how that impacts on our wildlife, soil, oceans, air, resources and climate.

In Dunfermline and across Fife, we certainly have a lot to be proud of in terms of local food and drink production and the promotion of good-quality local produce. Last year, I had the pleasure of attending the opening weekend of Abbot Brew House, which is located in the heart of Dunfermline's historic centre. Beers are brewed on site to historical recipes, so people literally have the chance to enjoy a taste of history in Scotland's

ancient capital. I am not normally a beer fan, but I can confirm that I was impressed by what I sampled. I strongly encourage anyone visiting Dunfermline to take some time to sample the local beers from this 17th-century-style brew house.

Dunfermline has the privilege of hosting at the glen gates on the second Saturday of every month Fife farmers market, which offers a wide range of fresh produce from Fife's finest producers. Just last week, Dunfermline hosted the world Scotch pie championships, a competition that highlights bakers and butchers from across Scotland who create top-quality pastry products—maybe Angus MacDonald should have come along to sample the produce.

Last week, Dunfermline's exciting venture street initiative was launched, and I was pleased to discover that one of the units—Soup a Men, which trades from Bruce Street—will sell quality soup that is made from fresh, local products that are sourced from local farmers. To return to beer, Dunfermline's annual beer festival is another huge success, with record attendance again this year, allowing visitors the opportunity to sample more than 60 of the country's best ales and ciders. Those are just a few examples of how the food and drink market is flourishing in Fife, although they are not all the most nutritionally sound examples.

There is no doubt that the food and drink sector makes a huge contribution to our economy. All the briefings that have been provided for the debate show that the sector is exceeding expectations for targets and turnover. It supports 360,000 jobs across Scotland and—hopefully—even more in the future. I am pleased that the Scottish Government has decided to make 2015 the year of food and drink in order to celebrate and promote Scotland's produce, because we certainly have the best natural produce in the world and have a lot to offer.

It is pleasing to see an explosion in the local food movement. There are 150 new local food initiatives and many more food education projects in our schools.

A really welcome development is the fruitful schools initiative, which supports schools in growing, maintaining and enjoying orchards. In its aim of ensuring that every child gets the chance to pick and eat fruit straight from the tree, it is a great way of not only teaching children where food comes from but encouraging healthy eating.

However, it is not enough just to celebrate our excellent local and Scottish produce or take comfort in the sector's strength. As the cabinet secretary has acknowledged, everyone in Scotland needs access to high-quality, affordable and healthy food but, despite all the positive

developments, Scotland still has some of the highest levels of diet-related poor health in the world.

A report on this morning's news estimated that obesity costs the UK £47 billion a year; that its global costs are the same as those for smoking, and that it probably has a greater impact on the world than climate change. Closer to home, an NHS Fife report revealed that one in five primary 1 children in Dunfermline is overweight or obese; that one in three adults in west Fife is obese; and that two thirds are overweight.

Although we are rightly proud of Scotland's food and drink, the reality for many Scots is that the products that we are proud of and which Mike MacKenzie described so vividly are out of reach. Too many families rely on ready meals and takeaways because of a lack of time, a lack of money or a lack of confidence in cooking. In its briefing, the NFUS pointed out that, because of the cost-of-living crisis, many of Scotland's agricultural products are out of the reach of too many Scots. Austerity is still the reality for too many consumers, who have no choice but to focus on the cheapest deal and not the most ethical or most sustainable one.

While families in communities across Scotland are struggling to make ends meet and to juggle the demands of work and family, too many of us are relying on diets that contain too much sugar and too much fat and which are accompanied by too little exercise. Health professionals have warned that children are being condemned to a lifetime of ill health and to being a generation destroyed by junk food and lack of exercise.

This is a ticking time bomb that we cannot ignore. We need concerted action to ensure that every family in every community across Scotland has access to high-quality, affordable and healthy food, and we need more action from the UK and Scottish Governments as well as local government on tackling food poverty and ending the scandal of children going to school hungry and mums going without their tea so that they can afford to heat their homes.

I note that, according to Home-Start's recent report, one in four adults in Scotland skipped meals in the past year so that someone else in their household could eat, and 30,000 children in Scotland live in families who cannot afford to eat properly at all. We all know constituents who have had no choice but to turn in desperation to food banks. However, as Alex Rowley pointed out, while families are going hungry across Scotland, millions of tonnes of food are being wasted and thrown away every year.

It is easy to blame the UK coalition Government for its welfare reforms, but we in Scotland can still

do a lot to tackle poverty and give families a better and healthier life. I encourage the cabinet secretary and other members to have a look at Home-Start's excellent manifesto for families in Scotland, which outlines a number of actions that the Scottish Government could take now to make life better for our children and protect them from hunger and poor nutrition.

The RSPB has provided a helpful guide for today's debate, and I endorse its view that we need a food system that provides

"environmentally sustainable, healthy and affordable food for all"

rather than the "expensive exception". In fact, we need a food system that is not only environmentally sustainable but socially just. Only when we meet that aspiration can Scotland truly proclaim itself a good food nation. I know that we all share that objective across the chamber and I hope that, in the new spirit of co-operation and unity, we can achieve that goal.

15:43

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): Many of the themes that have already been highlighted might well, as Alex Fergusson has suggested, be repeated. However, I want to home in on this excellent proposal to make Scotland a good food nation. The Scottish Government is aiming at a 2025 horizon—or roughly three Parliaments from now. That shows vision; indeed, it is necessary to think in such terms if we are to create a long-lasting and effective policy. If we are to be a land of food and drink, we must look not only at what we produce but at what we buy, serve and eat ourselves, and that is why I believe that "Becoming a Good Food Nation" will be the key document for achieving those aims over the next 10 years.

The policy was launched in June as an addition to "Recipe for Success", but it hinges not on exports and lucrative niche markets but on the target that by 2025

"people from every walk of life will take pride and pleasure in the food served day by day in Scotland."

It comes at a time of huge financial challenges for the thousands of working-poor families who require to use food banks every month, as members have said. What the policy proposes is nothing short of a food revolution. As the discussion document states, the ready availability of what constitutes good food requires that all sections of

"Scottish life – from schools to hospitals, retailers, restaurants and food manufacturers"

commit to serving it.

On that point, social justice and food justice in this country require that food producers get paid a fair amount of money for what they produce, as well as it being affordable for the people who buy it. The problem is that the supermarkets always ensure that they get their profits first. We must ensure that the grocery adjudicator that has been mentioned is effective and that we finally see some supermarkets being hauled up.

We can see that, as times get tough, the supermarkets are losing custom at the top end. Indeed, the Lidl's and Aldi's of this world are making inroads into the supermarkets' custom partly because they serve things in a fashion that people can afford. However, it does not seem to me that they have as bad an effect on producers as the supermarkets do or that, indeed, they always go for the apples that look the prettiest. The reason for the waste of food that occurs is supermarkets' selection of what vegetables, for example, they think people will wish to buy. Folk who go to farmers markets know that they will get knobbly potatoes and carrots, and so on. We have to get away from the emphasis on the look of produce and be more concerned about how it tastes.

For children's wellbeing and reducing the prevalence of the most intractable diet-related diseases, we need an increasingly organic food industry. I would argue that, for that to thrive in Scotland, it must be based on our culinary heritage. I see the Scottish Government's role in tackling climate change as a key driver. I see land reform and community empowerment as the means to introduce the ability for more Scots to own and control the land that supports their lives. The vision of Scandinavian levels of fairness and social justice has been debated, particularly in the independence referendum process. Such ideas can energise this nation if we apply them here.

Respect for our soils, plants and animals—the balance of nature—is what is driving arguments about returning to one-planet living. Food for the mind and body is at the heart of a sustainable country and sustainable lives, and Scots can make that a recipe for success. We should look at some of the good examples in schools. I will host a food for life partnership event for schools again next February in the Parliament. Schools from East Ayrshire and South Ayrshire previously came to the Parliament, showing us what they produce for school meals, which was an eye-opener for the cabinet secretary and many other members who were at that event. As I said, a food for life event is coming again to the Parliament.

Crofting Connections is doing a great job in the Highlands with thousands of youngsters from primary and secondary schools, who learn how to grow things and then eat them. This is for Liam

McArthur's benefit, because he probably remembers the children from Sanday who grew pigs from little piglets until they were big enough, and then the pigs were killed and the children ate them. The children were cheering when they said that at our reception in the main hall in the Parliament. I think that that gives us a sense of how people are connected. It was a superb moment because everybody burst out laughing. It underlines the fact that people are reconnecting with the growing of food and eating it.

On exports, we should be very careful about whisky. At the moment, there is a contraction in markets for whisky, which is our largest food and drink export. The whisky markets in China, Singapore, the United States, Brazil and Mexico have been reducing. Some of us remember when distilleries were being closed in the 1980s, but we are not seeing anything like that. I am not being a scaremonger, but some of the expansion projects by multinational companies such as Diageo are being put on hold. The expansion of whisky exports is therefore not necessarily the best basis for the kind of policy that we are talking about.

Social justice is about making sure that our food policy fits what we need. As I said at the SNP conference last week, it is not just about the fare that is served in the excellent restaurants in Perth or Paris; it is about what is served on every dinner plate from Durness to Dumfries so that every Scot every day can live a healthier, fairer and greener life.

15:49

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):

Sitting in the chamber yesterday afternoon, I realised how much this nation has changed since I came to the country. This Parliament is responsible for a lot of those changes and, as we have heard this afternoon, the cabinet secretary is responsible for a lot of the good changes that have happened in the food and drink sector.

With the change of First Minister, yesterday was an historic day. We witnessed a modern leader taking charge of a modern Scotland. Scotland's new First Minister is a great communicator—she is always seen with her mobile phone in hand—and she might be able to help the cabinet secretary to promote the best of our local food. STV Aberdeen tweeted yesterday that our iconic north-east delicacy the rowie, or the buttery for people who do not know their loons from their quines, is now available as a phone cover. The iRowie is born, and it is an affa fine phone cover. A few warnings come with the iRowie: “Do not spread jam on this cover,” “Do not grill lightly,” and, “Do not eat. It will not taste good.”

This modern nation of ours is innovative when it comes to food and drink and has started to rediscover its food tradition. All who are involved in food production are adapting the fantastic food and drink that we have to modern Scotland. We are becoming a good food nation.

I have spent most of my adult life in the food industry in Scotland, and where better to taste the best food that we have to offer than the north-east? Members will find many rowies at the taste of Grampian food festival, which is held every year at the Thainstone centre in Inverurie. Maureen Watt was right when she said that I would talk about that. This year, I helped Jimmy Buchan, the star of the BBC's “Trawlermen” documentary, to cook Scottish langoustines in the seafood marquee. It was great to see Jimmy sharing his extensive knowledge of seafood with many young families who live in the north-east. The seafood marquee attracts huge crowds and is incredibly popular.

Food champions such as Jimmy, skipper of the Amity II, and Peter Bruce, skipper of the Budding Rose, promote seafood in schools under Seafood Scotland's seafood in schools programme, reaching tens of thousands of pupils every year. That is how we best promote the industry to future generations. We must ask the fishermen, the farmers, the food processors and the experts, and this Government is doing just that.

Despite my best efforts this year and in the past few months to promote free-range Scottish chicken, the industry in Scotland is in trouble. We heard a few weeks ago that major retailers would not renew their contracts to buy free-range Scottish chicken. I thank NFU Scotland for its briefing, and I agree that food producers are unfairly disadvantaged due to top-down imbalances in profit distribution from large retailers to producers. As Rob Gibson stated, the issue is about social justice for rural Scotland. When the best of Scottish produce cannot reach our local supermarket shelves, we all suffer. I ask the cabinet secretary to do everything in his power to help chicken farmers in the north-east such as Bob Hay from Turriff.

International demand for Scotland's food and drink is growing. We must thank Richard Lochhead for that, as he has travelled the world with our food producers, opening up new markets for Scottish produce. This modern nation of ours is not only rediscovering its food tradition but passing it on to future generations. We are becoming a good food nation. We need to both celebrate our food and drink heritage and promote our innovations.

The food and drink sector is an integral part of our culture and our identity. I learned that when I was very young. As the cabinet secretary said,

France is one of the most recognised good food nations, and in my home town of Dijon in Burgundy, the food and drink sector is celebrated every year at the foire gastronomique. It is the biggest event in the year for the region, with more than 200,000 visitors. It is on a par with our Royal Highland Show. My love of food will always be associated with the good family times that I spent at the food and drink fair.

As I am a son of a farmer and was a seafood exporter for many years, I would love to see Scotland's best food and drink on show in Burgundy in France. There is a way. Every year the show invites a guest country not only to sell and display its best food and drink but to promote itself as a tourist destination, showing off the best of its culture and its identity. Next year is Scotland's year of food and drink—what a great opportunity for VisitScotland. Let us show the world that we are becoming a good food nation. South Africa, Spain, China, Portugal and many other countries have been to Burgundy as the guest country over the years. Before anyone objects because we are not an independent nation, I should say that Quebec was the guest of honour in 2001.

I will finish by mentioning a local award-winning food producer, J G Ross of Inverurie. When he won his award earlier this year, he sent this message to all politicians:

"Politicians, if you want to know where the real engine rooms of the economy are and what will generate economic growth, look up your local family business. We are here, we employ, we invest."

15:56

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to speak in the debate. As we have heard, the food and drink industry is a huge part of Scotland's economy, which generated £13.9 billion in 2012 and accounted for 13.2 per cent of Scotland's total exports. The sector directly employs almost 118,000 people. With 2015 being Scotland's year of food and drink there has never been a better time to work to promote Scotland's quality and unique products around the world.

The industry is still growing and we must nurture and support it to capitalise on its opportunities. My speech will look at two aspects of the food and drink industry: the local benefit that it brings to Ayrshire and Arran and a few of the problems that SMEs face in growing their businesses in the sector.

From its farmers markets to its distilleries, Ayrshire and Arran is an excellent example of the food and drink choices on offer in Scotland. Food and drink constitutes around 16 per cent of total

visitor spending and in 2013 tourists spent more than £133 million in the local area.

One example of good practice in the Ayrshire area is the collaboration between producers. For example, the Ayrshire food network helps businesses to work together on issues such as distribution, marketing and export for their mutual benefit.

Taste of Arran is a partnership that brings together 11 food and drink producers on the island, including makers of specialist cheese, crunchy Arran oaties and delicious dairy ice creams, and provides its members with a single point of contact for sales, marketing and distribution.

It can be prohibitively expensive for a small business to export on its own because of the costs of pallets and containers. Taste of Arran works collaboratively with its members by sharing containers and other costs, which keeps costs down and enables members' goods to reach wider markets that they could not otherwise tap into.

When I spoke to Alistair Dobson from taste of Arran at the VisitScotland event last night, he said that for years he had been exporting from Arran to the mainland and that it made business sense to extend the principle behind taste of Arran to the rest of the UK and further afield. He also believed that its collaboration should be replicated across Scotland. In fact, a pilot is running now with around 20 SMEs, and early figures are encouraging.

I welcome the initiatives that the cabinet secretary mentioned today, but I am sure that many other small business could benefit from schemes like the Ayrshire food network and taste of Arran. However, companies have said to me that they would not know how to go about joining such schemes or who to contact to start the process. It would be beneficial if the Scottish Government could look into whether the Ayrshire and taste of Arran examples could be replicated across Scotland. If they were, we would enable many more small businesses to export their products and so help the Government reach its target of a 50 per cent increase in exports by 2017.

Another issue that came to my attention when the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee held workshops in Perth recently was that there is a lack of collaboration between Government departments. That led to one company missing a massive opportunity to export its potatoes to Russia because the governmental process was too slow. We need to get better at supporting businesses by having more cohesiveness between the many Government departments that are involved in ensuring that our food and drink

industry is able to produce its goods and transport them to a global market.

Although that example involved just one company, it begs the question, how many more missed opportunities have there been due to a lack of collaboration between Government departments? In that respect, I welcome John Swinney's comments at the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee during draft budget scrutiny last week, when he said that new initiatives will be launched to assist and support companies to export. I hope that the Government plans to streamline the process and make it quicker and easier for businesses to compete with competitors globally.

There is a logistics issue with exports, not only in terms of global connectivity but in terms of ensuring that, within Scotland, businesses can move their goods quickly and easily and that all the modes of transport link up effectively. That is a noticeable problem the further north we go in Scotland. I welcome the fact that Maureen Watt's committee is carrying out an inquiry into freight and logistics.

When dealing with perishable foodstuffs, it is crucial that the food can be transported quickly and in bulk and that the haulage and freight industry has the proper infrastructure to deal with capacity. According to the Freight Transport Association, poor rail lines mean

"weight limits and speed limits that put them beyond economic use",

and there are

"areas outwith the central belt which are lacking in capacity".

Collaboration and connectivity are key to expanding our food and drink sector. If we wish to be world players in this industry, we need to focus on investing in our infrastructure and helping smaller businesses to expand into local and global markets. Finally, we need to work to make sure that the processes are clear cut, streamlined and joined up to stop any unnecessary delays to the trading process.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

We are now tighter for time. I call Stewart Stevenson, who has up to six minutes now.

16:02

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I apologise to colleagues, as I have an engagement in Glasgow that means I shall be leaving before the end of the debate.

I congratulate Mike MacKenzie in particular for setting what may turn out to be a new record in that book that is compiled by a well-known Irish

stout manufacturer—the contribution to Parliament that achieves the greatest number of press releases. He is not alone in that particular endeavour, but I think that he trumps everyone else.

I advise Parliament that I am ready to fly colleagues all over Scotland in pursuit of good food and drink—it is never a hardship to do that. I will tell colleagues—as Napoleon asked for lucky generals—that they would be flying with a lucky pilot. I have come off a plane in an emergency on three occasions so far, and on 4 November 1975, I experienced parachute failure. I can experience all those things, but my colleagues will be perfectly safe with me.

However, to the matter of food and drink—the important matter that is before us. There are a couple of interesting points to make. Scotland is innovating in food and drink; it is not simply that we are picking up things that we find lying around and finding a way to export them. Do members know that we are now exporting garlic from Moray to France? We are also exporting snails from Scotland to France, and we are beginning to make serious inroads into the olive oil industry with our extra virgin cold-pressed oilseed rape oil, which was first produced for commercial purposes very close to Peterhead and is now produced in a couple of different places. It is a much better oil for cooking than olive oil; it can be heated to a higher temperature before it starts to break down and it is at least equal in flavour to that long-standing Mediterranean material. We are doing things that people are not necessarily aware of.

A Bank of Scotland survey tells us that 58 per cent of Scottish producers are planning to expand overseas in the next five years, which is pretty good news. Almost two thirds said that they would welcome assistance in marketing and developing brand awareness. The business of the brand is important: around the world there is very good recognition of the "Scotch" brand for our wonderful whisky. As I have said in the chamber before, in India there is a huge trade in second-hand Johnnie Walker bottles, which are not always refilled with Johnnie Walker whisky before being resold. That pattern is repeated around the world.

Brands are precious things that need to be managed carefully. An industry expert said that a brand is

"the evidence of a claim or distinction you make to your customers ... Brands are promises. When they are kept, customers keep them"—

they stay loyal—but "when they are broken", one loses those customers for a very long period indeed. International recognition for many of our products is important, but it is also important that we live up to those international brands. Our food exports depend on them.

There are good examples in my constituency, as there are in others'. One is Gourmet's Choice, which is a family-run business in Portsoy that exports smoked salmon and which won the exporter of the year award in 2009. The company smokes the salmon in barrels from the whisky industry—one can actually taste which whisky was in the barrel when one tastes the smoked salmon. I think that that is an ideal combination of the best of Scotland and I love having it on my plate. Commenting on the company's success, the sales manager, Henry Angus, said:

"We have the right skills and resource in place to succeed in a global marketplace and we have worked hard to develop relationships".

That is what we all have to do. Of course, salmon and other fish generally are among the healthiest things that we could possibly eat.

The Budding Rose has been mentioned. I was at a Seafish event last night in Edinburgh at which the Budding Rose was mentioned three times. Well done, Peter Bruce. The Peter Bruce brand is doing well. I look forward to the day when our fish products have the skipper's photograph and signature on the packaging—increasingly, fish products are sold in packaging—which would create an even stronger link from the person who is responsible for the first part of the quality right through the supply chain to the consumer. We want people to say that there is extra value in buying the Peter Bruce brand or in buying from many of the other skippers, from Liam McArthur's constituency as well as mine: I am generous in these matters.

Liam McArthur *rose*—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his last minute.

Stewart Stevenson: Liam McArthur has had his turn. That is all I can say.

There are a couple of things that we need to be aware of in relation to health, one being trans fats, which recent research has shown can damage the memory. Clearly I have avoided any of that thus far—or I just cannot remember having had them. It is one or the other; I am not quite sure which.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should draw to a close, please.

Stewart Stevenson: There are expectations that the industry will create lots of new jobs over the next few years. I, like a couple of other members here, come from the age of rationing, immediately post-war. Thank goodness we are now in a position in which the quality of our food enhances the stature and health of our people and creates a powerful economic driver.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much for that quintessential speech.

16:08

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I very much welcome this debate in the year of food and drink 2015. I hope that the year will highlight what is best about Scottish products. We have a lot to be proud of, as we have heard pretty much all afternoon. We have high-quality produce that is recognised world wide, and we have producers that aspire to excellence as well as to building on our traditional fare—and what is there not to like about whisky?

I was proud to pursue the EU protected geographical indication for Stornoway black pudding. When Brian Wilson discovered an Edinburgh butcher selling "Stornoway-style" black pudding, something had to be done. It was not only misrepresentation; it was a pretty shoddy imitation and nothing like the real thing. The campaign took off and I pay tribute for their hard work to the butchers who drew up the successful application, which means that the economic benefit of the high-quality product is kept for the good of the island of Lewis. They say that imitation is the most sincere form of flattery, but it is not when it damages someone economically, and it can also be a disadvantage if it damages someone's reputation and the reputation of their product.

The campaign attracted pretty much universal backing from the islands and beyond, as well as support from the Scottish and UK Governments. It took a number of years and a great deal of hard work to apply and to have the application granted, but it was worth while: Stornoway black pudding is now protected. Unique and excellent products need to be protected from poor imitations. Lessons can be learned from that and we now see that Dundee is following suit, with its famous Dundee cake. Orkney cheese and Arbroath smokies have already achieved success. It is important that we recognise where we have excellence and that we protect it.

We also have areas that revel in their pursuit of excellence, like Orkney. I mentioned Orkney cheese, but Orkney Island Gold is a well-known brand that covers lamb and beef but also encapsulates how the Orcadians market their food and hospitality: they aspire to excellence. The brand recognises the impact that joint marketing can have; people are not competing against each other but are competing jointly against everyone else.

Although they have many advantages, islands also have a natural disadvantage when it comes to communications. However, I am lucky that island

groups in my region are blazing a trail to show how they jointly market their excellent products to the benefit of the whole community. We need to learn from that for different products, including our wonderful shellfish, which is still exported to the continent when we should be using it at home. Many people come to Scotland hoping to experience it. We have done much, but there is much still to do.

As a Highlands and Islands MSP, I cannot speak in a debate about food and drink without mentioning whisky. Our region is home to the best whiskies in Scotland, whether one's taste is for the peaty malts of the west and the Argyll islands, or for the mild honey of a Speyside, there is something in the region for everyone. Whisky provides well-paid jobs throughout the Highlands and Islands, where well-paid jobs are rare. The export market provides income to the country and the excise duty helps to provide our schools and hospitals. It is an all-round success.

In recent years, Scotch whisky has been much in demand, leading to the creation of jobs, as distilleries work round the clock to meet demand. Maybe that expansion has peaked, but the jobs that it created were very welcome to people in some of the worst-off areas in our country.

We now have microbreweries growing successfully all over the Highlands and islands, and blazing a trail behind whisky is gin. Who would have thought that the Highlands would become famous for gin? Even Bruichladdich Distillery Company is considering marketing its own gin.

We have a lot to celebrate in 2015, our year of food and drink, and it will provide huge global marketing opportunities. However, what would give us real cause for celebration next year would be all Scots having access to good quality food. It is sad that while those of us who can afford it are celebrating this success, many of our constituents are living out of food banks, and even access to them is being rationed. It would be a real cause for celebration if next year we could eradicate food banks from Scotland.

If we are to do that, we need to tackle the cause. We need to drive up skills and pay in our food and drink industry, but also in our hospitality industry. Often, the people who are using food banks are working people, but they are earning low wages. It is important that we recognise that a fair day's work deserves a fair day's pay. We should aspire to every worker earning the living wage. We are some way towards that in the public sector, but we have to find ways of increasing wages in the private sector—more so in our food industry. If we are to aspire to excellence we need a motivated workforce who can afford to remain in

the industry, and who can build their skills and expertise.

The year of food and drink gives us opportunities and challenges. To reach excellence we need good produce and we need to market it. We need to ensure that we all have access to a good diet. We can meet those challenges if we work together.

16:14

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I was keen to speak in the debate, not just because I am a consumer of food and drink but because the industry is worth £2.5 million per day to the Scottish economy. The sheer size of the industry means that it has an impact in every one of our constituencies. International demand for Scottish food and drink products continues to grow, with exports at £5.4 billion a year, and Scotland's new food and drink export plan will capitalise on that.

Scotland is a successful global brand, but we can always do more and ensure that the Scottish Government promotes our products. After all, there are an estimated 117,900 jobs in the sector, which is quite a lot. Food and drink exports are a major part of the Scottish economy: in 2013 they accounted for 30 per cent of our total exports, as opposed to only 6 per cent of UK exports. The sector is five times as important to Scotland as it is to the rest of the UK.

It is important that we welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling our serious public health problem, which members have mentioned. Alex Rowley talked about the good work that is going on in Fife. When I was a councillor on Renfrewshire Council we had a lot of good schemes; in particular, we used licensing to ensure that mobile food vans could not be near schools. That was difficult from a legal perspective, but we got the policy through and we ensured that it was not easy for kids to get fast food at lunch time. We have all seen the scenes outside schools at lunch time, with chip vans surrounded by school students. Renfrewshire Council's approach helped.

Our grandparents knew more about food than we do; they knew how to buy and cook healthy food. Another of Renfrewshire Council's programmes involved helping families to budget and to sit down to eat as a family—it was not so much about what they ate. The families went on record to say that the programme had made a big difference to them. Sitting down together as a family to talk over a meal that was cost-effective and good for them had made a big difference.

I think that I have previously mentioned the programme that was run by St Mirren Football Club and Engage Renfrewshire, which taught

fathers to cook using the corporate hospitality facilities in the football club. Fathers are more likely to go to a place like St Mirren to learn to cook than they are to go to a community hall. It is about how we do such things. In that programme, the fathers and children would eat their meals together.

Education is a major part of ensuring that people in Scotland look differently at what we eat. That applies to every one of us. Members probably have among the world's worst diets, when we consider some of the things in the canteen. We could look at our own diets; I have been watching what I eat recently. People have told me that I am losing weight—I thank people who actually think that—but it is an on-going struggle to stay disciplined.

As we work towards becoming a good food nation, it is important that we engage with people in a way that is not condescending, but makes a difference to them by giving them something of value.

Presiding Officer, I can see from your eyes—I can see them from here—that you are wondering why I have not mentioned the great town of Paisley. [*Laughter.*] There is more to food and drink in Paisley than the Sherwood chip shop and East End Tandoori. There is Porrelli, which makes ice cream. The Porrellis are an Italian-Scots family, who came over in 1925. Unusually for Paisley, they came from San Biagio rather than Barga, which is the most Scottish town in Italy, where nearly every Italian-Scots family is from—including, incidentally, the family of Mr Nutini, who owns the Castelvevchi chip shop in Paisley and whose son is a rather famous entertainer. Porrelli makes all types of ice cream, from budget ice cream to the more expensive kind. The difficulty that such firms have has already been mentioned: having invested in state-of-the-art facilities, they have problems dealing with the big shops and trying to get into the market as small businesses. That challenge is on-going for such companies.

Paisley also has the Chivas Brothers bottling plant. Chivas exports all round the world. In 2012, the company invested in a new bottling plant so as to expand its specialised brands as well as its larger brands. That involves going to the international markets. We should think about some of the things that we have done in that regard.

Paisley has the largest beer festival in Scotland—the real ale festival in Paisley town hall, which consists of a Scottish hall and a foreign beers hall. It is always popular, and people come from all over to see the Scottish products that are available there. One of the real ales is Orkney Skull Splitter, which is quite popular, although people are only allowed a half pint of it.

There are many challenges, but the question is what we do. We have good stories to tell on food and drink. It will be difficult, and there are things for us to do, but I look forward to the 2015 year of food and drink, not just because I like both, but because it gives us an opportunity to see what we can deliver.

16:21

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):

I thank the cabinet secretary for securing the debate. I pay tribute to everyone who works in the food production industries—fishermen, farmers and crofters. We acknowledge some of the difficulties that they face in bringing us some of the superb products that have been highlighted today. There are also difficulties just in feeding the nation. To have an ambition for Scotland to be able to feed herself would be a fantastic target.

A number of factors reflect and give rise to issues around our food and drink industries, including land reform, communications, transport, legislation and tourism.

I will start with land reform. As I travel across the area that I cover, the Highlands and Islands, I see that there are land masses where the owners are absent. That presents barriers to people who would like to work that land.

Communications is becoming an important issue. As we know, massive investment is being made by both Governments, and BT is carrying out work. To get a feel for how important it is, particularly for some of the smaller producers, I will mention the example of a small chocolate company in Durness called Cocoa Mountain. Without good broadband, the company struggles, although it exports to more than 30 countries around the world. It has done that pretty much single-handedly. It has a superb product, and we need to recognise some of the difficulties that it has with distribution and exporting.

The same is true with transport. If we had not had the mackerel Klondike of the 1970s and 1980s on the west coast, when would our roads ever have moved from single track all the way from the east coast right up the north-west coast to Durness?

On the subject of education, I have a lovely story from a primary school, featuring a teacher whose eight-year-old pupil arrived late to class with the excuse that he had had to teach his granny how to use her iPhone. The teacher had a light-bulb moment and set up a class where many grannies came in to learn from eight and nine-year-olds how to use their new technology.

The payback from that initiative might interest the cabinet secretary. The grannies, in turn,

showed the children how to kipper a herring and how to make a ham hough and other traditional delights. That cookery class run by over-70s is still continuing to teach our children skills that they otherwise would not have.

There are a couple of issues that are threats to our industry. When he was the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Owen Paterson called on the EU to relax its stance on genetically modified crops. We are proud in this country that we try to produce quite a lot of organic food now, and we certainly have a good reputation for having a clean environment and generally fresh and good produce.

Our new Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Elizabeth Truss, has not made her view clear. However, in February this year, the EU licensed the GM maize variety pioneer 1507. That was the first new GM crop licence in 15 years. Nineteen states opposed the licence, but they were overruled by larger countries with more voting power. They were led by the United Kingdom and Spain. Therefore, we are not hopeful.

The Scottish Government is opposed to GM crops. It has stated:

“The cultivation of GM crops could damage Scotland’s rich environment”.

I certainly endorse that. We have to take as firm a stance as we can. Currently, there is no commercial cultivation of GM crops in Scotland.

Liam McArthur: Jean Urquhart will be aware that Professor Anne Glover, who is the former scientific adviser to the Scottish Government and, until recently, the scientific adviser to the European Commission, has had her services dispensed with in large part because of the position that she took on GM. Does Jean Urquhart support or regret that decision?

Jean Urquhart: I am sorry. I did not hear the last part of that question.

Liam McArthur: Does Jean Urquhart regret the decision to dispense with the chief scientific adviser to the European Commission largely on the basis of the stance that she took in relation to GM?

Jean Urquhart: There is a large amount of evidence against GM, and we are right for the moment to continue with the stance in this country.

The NFUS and the supply chain have raised the final issue that I want to raise. Farmers and growers are often unfairly disadvantaged due to top-down imbalances in profit distribution from large retailers to producers. A front page of *The Shetland Times* that will stay with me had the local dairy co-operative pouring milk down a drain when

there were sales of much cheaper imported milk. There is a real difficulty; I am not saying that the issue is easy. We cannot just dictate what products are in supermarkets, but a balance has to be struck.

Those are some of the issues that our food and drink industry faces.

On the tourism front, there is no doubt that our produce is highly prized and loved by people who come here. I praise Flybe for always offering Stoats, Tunnock’s and Walkers produce, and I criticise ScotRail for offering none of them.

16:28

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): This has been a long afternoon, but I will join the list of colleagues who have taken us around their constituencies. I hope that we will find that we have not only had a little lesson in geography but that I have gone somewhere interesting.

If I were to take a tour around Angus North and Mearns, I could start with Oatmeal of Alford. That sounds strange, because Alford is not in my constituency, but apparently the business, which produces organic cereals and foods, took its name because the nearest railway station was in Alford. There is now one in Laurencekirk. We find out strange things.

I could pop into Ella Drinks in Brechin for the Bouvage raspberry, blaeberry and strawberry drinks. I reiterate the point that the cabinet secretary made earlier: we produce lots of berries, which are very good for us. If we do not want to eat them, we can drink them as juice.

My colleague Graeme Dey, who is the MSP for Angus South, is not able to be with us this afternoon, but I know that he would have picked up on Angus Growers, which produces soft fruits across the whole area, including in Angus, Perthshire and Fife, and Mackays, which produces jams and marmalades in Arbroath from those very fruits. I am sure that he would also have wanted to point out the Arbroath smokie and in particular RR Spink and Sons, which was established in 1715 and produces Arbroath smokies.

Coming back to my own constituency, I must mention the Glencadam distillery in Brechin. We have many distilleries in Scotland, but no member has yet mentioned today that those distilleries are where they are because of the water. That is the bit that the industry tends not to transport, although Glencadam has nine miles of pipe to bring in its water from the springs of the Moorans.

Water is also exported from the Strathmore bottling plant in Forfar, which makes use of the fact that the spring is quite literally at the bottom of what must, once upon a time, have been the

garden. It is fascinating to see the pipe just appearing out of the ground, and that is, of course, where the water is bottled.

Those local businesses employ people and produce products that we enjoy and export. When I speak to people from those businesses, they pick up on one of the points that the Labour Party's amendment mentions, which is the need for skills. The food industry uses a wide range of skills that are not necessarily taught at home or in school. As a chemical engineer, I probably have the best qualifications for working in the food industry, because it is about process development and chemistry on a decent scale, which is exactly what I was taught to do.

As other colleagues such as George Adam and Jean Urquhart have mentioned, our generation does not, by and large, know how to cook. It was probably our parents who were the last cooks. Our children frequently have no idea of how to cook, and that is one of the issues that we must address if we are to deal with obesity and encourage the use of fresh food, because we are now dependent on processed food.

I will major in obesity as an issue, but first I will pick up on the issue of pollinators, which no other member has mentioned today. Members received a briefing from Buglife the Invertebrate Conservation Trust that pointed out that bees and their like are an extraordinarily important part of our food system. The cabinet secretary might want to consider, formally or otherwise, whether counting bees could be one of the national indicators. We count birds as a surrogate for biodiversity and fish as a measure of sea health. I wonder whether pollinators, as they are relatively big and countable, could be counted, or at least estimated, nationally as a national indicator of agricultural health.

Lastly, I come to the issue of obesity, which other members have mentioned. I took the advice of one of our national experts on the Scottish diet—members will know that I do that fairly frequently. Our difficulty is that the diet has not really changed much. Despite our best efforts, it is still far too easy for us to be overweight and obese. It is far too easy for us to eat too many calories—and, incidentally, to eat too much salt.

Although the figures might have stabilised, they are certainly not getting better. The Scottish Government is clearly ambitious in trying to tackle obesity, and I commend the cabinet secretary for raising the issue not only in the document but in some detail in the debate this afternoon. It is very easy to talk about our exports and products while ignoring an issue that is central to the nation's health.

Members have mentioned that tackling obesity is now probably as important as tackling smoking with regard to the costs to our nation. I commend the cabinet secretary for taking the issue seriously and for producing a standard for responsible marketing of food and drink. The industry will not like what we are trying to tell it, but it will have to get on board, as obesity is a problem that we have to sort.

We might need taxation, and we clearly need work on portion sizes, formulation and education, which is already going on. Those areas will all play their part, but the problem will be extremely difficult to crack, and everyone—including industry—needs to get involved. The profit motive is clearly not on our side. We need to find ways of persuading food businesses to go the extra mile to look after the health of the nation and—on occasion—to forgo that profit.

16:34

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): I always welcome the opportunity to promote Scotland's world-class food and drink, not least the vast majority of whisky production. Whisky is Scotland's leading food and drink export and valuable to our balance of payments, the international branding of Scotland and our economy.

The whisky industry is to be congratulated on growing the value of exports by 90 per cent over the past decade. Its planned capital spend of £2 billion over the next three to four years and the fact that new entrants are bringing forward around 30 distillery projects in addition to the 109 existing distilleries demonstrate the potential for significant further growth in the years ahead.

I am delighted that work has begun on a new distillery on Harris and I commend the efforts of Burr Bakewell, the founder and chairman of Isle of Harris Distillers Ltd. I also recommend the Kilchoman distillery on Islay, which I visited last year, and the artisanal Red River distillery on Lewis.

We have without doubt the finest hard-shelled prawns, lobsters, scallops and other shellfish of anywhere in the world. Orkney has been marvellous about marketing its crab meat. We also have wonderful game and venison, which is high in protein, low in cholesterol and delicious. We have wonderful fruit and vegetables. We now have a rapidly growing number of restaurants all over Scotland that make use of those indigenous ingredients and earn a great reputation for themselves and for Scotland in doing so.

Let us not forget our excellent Scottish smokehouses, such as those at Inverawe and Loch Fyne in Argyll or the Stornoway smokehouse

and the Hebridean smokery in the Western Isles. Let us also not forget the high quality of our farmed Scottish salmon, which supplies them.

We have had a good and constructive debate. It has allowed members to highlight the many successes, but there are also challenges. They include the impact of climate change, changes to agricultural support payments, skills shortages and the impact of international trade sanctions.

We have witnessed the last of those recently with the Russian ban on imports, which has hit our pelagic fishermen in particular, who have lost important Russian export markets for mackerel. I was in contact with the Scottish Pelagic Processors Association before the debate and was pleased that it informed me that, after the Russian ban was introduced, targets and strategies were identified. I was also pleased that some progress has been made in finding new markets and expanding sales to existing markets.

Russia took a larger grade of mackerel and it has been challenging to find another outlet for that size. Ukraine takes the same size, but problems existed in obtaining credit insurance cover in the present circumstances and I am pleased that insurance cover is being made available through UK Export Finance, which is part of the UK Government. Shipments have since been made to Ukraine using that facility, which is another tangible benefit that our food export sector has from being part of the UK.

Seafish has helped with trade exhibitions, and Scottish Development International's global network has given new sales leads in the far east. The personnel in Tokyo did a great job recently by getting a promotion of Scottish mackerel in a major Japanese retail chain, Aeon.

Although the industry is making progress, it faces major competition from Norway, whose pelagic industry has a spend of £7 million per year for promoting its products. Scottish suppliers have been displaced in Russia by suppliers from Iceland and the Faroes, who are not affected by the sanctions, and it might be hard to get that market back.

I agree with members who have argued that providing local food and delicacies to home consumers and tourists in Scotland is extremely important and potentially lucrative for local businesses. Research indicates that visitors spend about one fifth of their holiday budgets on food and are willing to pay up to 15 per cent more for food of Scottish or regional origin. Places in Argyll where delicacies can be found that have not already been mentioned include the seafood cabin in Skipness and at the Oban seafood hut.

I commend the work of co-operatives to support local food producers in my region, such as food

from Argyll, which promotes Argyll and Bute's fantastic game, drink, meat and seafood and organises farmers markets and local food stands at major events such as music festivals all over Scotland. I highly recommend the truly delicious Real Mackay Stovies Co's home-roasted lamb stovies, which are made from the farmer's own blackface sheep, which are reared on his hill farm in Argyll.

I commend the Scottish Crofting Federation for helping to launch the crofting enterprise website earlier this year. That website showcases some of the tremendous crofting produce that is available, such as heather-fed Hebridean mutton and native Shetland lamb—nothing is more succulent. I hope that many more crofters will become involved in that welcome initiative as time goes on.

As I am species champion for the marsh fritillary butterfly, Buglife Scotland, which is a charity, asked me to highlight that our fruit industry relies entirely on pollination by insects. It is said that one in every three mouthfuls of food is pollinated by insects. The value of that free service is estimated at £12.6 billion a year.

Presiding Officer, how am I doing for time?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are virtually out of it.

Jamie McGrigor: To conclude, we welcome the opportunity to debate food and drink policy in the chamber. The transatlantic trade and investment partnership can further increase the successes of Scottish food and drink. A good TTIP deal could bring an additional £1.7 billion to the economy, and a large proportion of that would be thanks to increasing food and drink exports. We also might, I hope, see a lifting of the United States Government's import ban on Scottish beef.

We look forward to the Scottish Government putting in place pro-business policies and supporting our primary producers, such as farmers, fishermen and crofters.

16:40

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I am glad that the cabinet secretary has called the debate particularly, as many members have pointed out, as we move towards the year of food and drink 2015.

Members throughout the chamber have highlighted the huge importance of food and drink and the food and drink sector. We have some of the highest-quality products, from shellfish to Scottish whisky, which are exported all over the world. From the Springbank to the Valhalla breweries, Mike MacKenzie's tour is enticing. There has been a wee bit of competition between the different constituencies, not least Paisley of

course, about where the best tours might be. I simply suggest that members ask VisitScotland to put all the constituency tours on to its website, because I am sure that tourists and people in Scotland would much enjoy them all.

I take this opportunity to welcome the publication of "Becoming a Good Food Nation". As the cabinet secretary said in his ministerial foreword, it is vital that we address the paradox of having such high-quality food products while having a generally unhealthy relationship with food.

We must acknowledge and tackle food—and fuel—poverty, as that is a challenging issue for many families. As Rhoda Grant said, food banks must be made a thing of the past. We must make that happen in 2015. That is the responsibility of us all in the chamber and far beyond. As the cabinet secretary says, that is unfinished business.

In "Becoming a Good Food Nation", the cabinet secretary stresses the need for a commitment from all to change, emphasising public food, local food and children's food.

Liam McArthur highlighted the contribution of the previous Scottish Executive to the agricultural strategy. It is important to focus on how we produce food in the first place. Our farmers do us a great service by growing crops and raising animals on a commercial scale. The new CAP arrangements must allow them to continue to do that but in an increasingly sustainable way.

Many farmers have taken on the climate challenge. In the period leading up to the CAP review in 2017, it is essential that all farmers work to reduce their emissions. With 20 per cent of greenhouse emissions coming from agriculture, the use of public money through CAP payments means that there is an expectation that the public good is equally as important as production. That can be voluntary with the right Government support, but it will need to become mandatory if results are not seen rapidly.

I want to highlight smaller-scale food production models that other members have discussed as well. Those can yield positive results in many ways. Community growing projects can have a significant benefit for communities not just by producing food but by creating enjoyable spaces for people to congregate and by improving biodiversity. Biodiversity can be greatly improved by growing organic fruit and vegetables without potentially harmful pesticides such as neonicotinoids, meaning that bees and other pollinators are able to thrive, as mentioned by Jamie McGrigor and Nigel Don.

I am pleased to say that the Scottish Government has supported organic production in

its latest Scotland rural development programme, particularly as Scotland is at the bottom of the European table for organic consumption and near the bottom for production. With the organic market flourishing in countries such as France, where it has doubled in size over the past five years, I am sure that members will agree that there is some catching up to do.

Whitmuir Organics, in my region, has led the way with its commitment to organic produce, and the cabinet secretary was at the launch of its community farm share offer. Whitmuir has been able to develop living learning space as a resource to encourage schoolchildren, farmers and the general public to learn about sustainable food and farming. Peebles CAN is another group in South Scotland. It is a not-for-profit, community-based organisation with the aim of promoting local and seasonal food and reducing food waste—an important issue that is highlighted in the RSPB Scotland briefing for the debate. RSPB Scotland states:

"Post-plate wastage in the UK amounts to almost a quarter of the total food bought."

As Alex Rowley highlighted, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill will help with access to allotments and other community projects. It will also aid communities in purchasing land to grow on. The petition that is before the Scottish Parliament on the right to grow makes a contribution to that way forward as well.

As well as the production of food, the means by which it is distributed is important, as a number of members have stressed. As the Labour amendment highlights, fresh, affordable and local food is essential. The NFU Scotland briefing recognises the importance of short supply chains, especially to

"ensure more transparency and a fairer distribution of margin throughout".

Short supply chains, which connect producers more closely with consumers, bring many benefits and strengthen rural communities because producers retain more of the retail price and create more jobs per meal. They involve less-processed and often healthier products, and they can drive up the environmental and animal welfare standards because customers know more about how their food is produced.

Margaret McDougall stressed the importance of shared container arrangements from the islands through collaboration in taste of Arran. Members may be aware that Nourish Scotland, which has been instrumental in promoting short supply chains, has also argued for their use as a means of reducing food poverty by connecting low-income urban communities directly with primary producers.

The need to know how to cook fresh produce has been highlighted by many members, and it is a challenge in our busy lives. However, growing, preparing and cooking food can be therapeutic processes that help our wellbeing, whether they involve herbs from a window box or tatties from the allotment. When I taught at Abington primary school, we formed a parents and kids group for cooking. That is one way forward that is replicated in many constituencies and should be supported by the Scottish Government.

Rob Gibson highlighted the Soil Association's food for life Scotland initiative. There will be further reports on how many councils are now gaining the food for life gold standard for school meals when he holds his event in the near future.

In relation to integrated vertical supply chains, co-operatives are an important way forward. Scottish shellfish farmers on the northern coasts bring their products to a factory in Bellshill. That is an effective co-op with control of operations by members making decisions.

I invite the cabinet secretary, in his closing remarks, to say something in response to Alex Fergusson's comments about the aquaculture industry and whether its targets still fit with sustainable development. I seek reassurance on that.

Protected status is essential, as is highlighted by the example of the Stornoway black pudding, which was mentioned by Rhoda Grant. As Stewart Stevenson said, brands are promises. From whisky to microbrews and from salmon to steak, we have a fine food story to tell. Nevertheless, in closing, I recall the words of Cara Hilton:

"we need a food system that is not only environmentally sustainable but socially just. Only when we meet that aspiration can Scotland truly proclaim itself a good food nation."

I believe that 2015 is the time for that to happen.

16:49

Richard Lochhead: I thank all the members who have spoken in this debate on what could not be a more important issue for Scotland's future and the wellbeing of our people. The fact that so many members mentioned the food culture of their local constituencies as well as of wider society, and the successful food and drink industries in their constituencies, highlights that we all recognise that the food and drink industry is massively important to Scotland's economy.

I particularly welcomed Mike Mackenzie's food and drink tour of the Highlands, which sounded nearly as good as what people would get if they visited Moray. Of course, as the MSP for 50 per cent of Scotch whisky, as well as Walkers

Shortbread, Baxters, Maclean's Highland Bakery and many other businesses, I pay close attention to the value to our local economies of the food and drink industry in Scotland, as was illustrated by many members around the chamber.

Whisky is not just an issue for the Highlands and Islands, the Western Isles or Speyside because, of course, the industry involves not only distilleries but bottling plants. I was struck by what George Adam, from Paisley, and Angus MacDonald, from Falkirk, said about the massive employment that depends on the bottling plants in those areas. Food and drink industries spread economic benefits throughout Scotland.

One thing that most speeches had in common was that they noted the fact that Scotland is experiencing a food and drink revolution. We can all see the evidence of that on our doorsteps and in the national statistics. Let us remind ourselves of what has been achieved in a few short years, as that should give us optimism and hope in relation to what can be achieved in the next few years.

Since 2007, turnover in the food and drink sector has increased and is now at £13.9 billion, which means that it achieved our growth targets six years early. There has been a 51 per cent increase in food and drink exports since 2007 and a 32 per cent increase in the sales of Scottish brands across retailers throughout these islands. Further, there has been a 50 per cent increase in farmers markets, and 150 new local food initiatives in the past 10 years alone.

Alex Rowley: Jamie McGrigor mentioned the transatlantic trade and investment partnership, and talked about the benefits that he sees coming from that. What is the minister's view on that in relation to future investment in other markets?

Richard Lochhead: That is a good point, which I will address shortly.

I have listed some of the key achievements since 2007. What is really exciting is what will happen in the future. The Bank of Scotland report, which many members quoted, states that 66 per cent of businesses expect to increase their workforce in the years ahead; that 75 per cent expect their sales and exports to go up by 15 per cent; that 58 per cent want to engage more with international customers; and that thousands of job opportunities are likely to be in the pipeline. That shows that the successes of the past few years are still only scratching the surface. There is massive opportunity left to tap into, not just in terms of international demand but in terms of demand on our own doorstep.

Some members mentioned the barriers that small businesses, in particular, face when leaving the domestic market and going into the export market. However, many companies have done

that successfully. For example, the Innis & Gunn Brewing Company, which we are all familiar with—it is based not far from Parliament—has been going for only a few years but, in the past four years, it has seen a 9,000 per cent increase in sales to North America and is now the second-biggest beer in Canada. That is a company that did not exist a few years ago, but just look at its achievements. That is a familiar story for many of the companies that we speak to.

We are holding events in Scotland with small and medium-sized businesses and are trying to encourage them to get into the export markets and meet international buyers who we invite to Scotland. For example, the showcasing Scotland event that was held in July set up 600 meetings in this country between local companies and international buyers. We have taken small businesses on learning journeys overseas to some of the big food and drink exhibitions as well. That is proving to be productive. We also have the likes of Paul Grant, who built up the successful exports track record for the jam producer Mackays and who is now working for the dairy industry in Scotland to show how we can add value to dairy products so that those producers can take advantage of the massive export opportunities.

I agree with many members that success in this area is down to a partnership approach. I join Alex Fergusson and others in paying tribute to Scotland Food and Drink, and particularly to James Withers, who is a fantastic ambassador for food and drink in Scotland. As its chief executive, he has achieved much. I commend all his efforts and join others in paying tribute to the outgoing chair, Ray Jones.

I also pay tribute to SDI. International companies and, indeed, Scottish companies that operate overseas are full of praise for SDI and all the fantastic work that it is doing to get us into new overseas markets, as well as for what Scottish Enterprise is doing here in Scotland. I pay tribute to the various sectors and trade associations that are involved.

Ultimately, of course, it all comes down to people—our farmers, our fishermen and our crofters, who as a result of their ingenuity, their hard work and the traditions that they have built up over hundreds of years are producing the raw materials that underpin our fantastic food and drink industry. That is why our agricultural policy, our wider food policy and our fishing policy are all aimed at protecting Scotland's food-producing capacity.

We are paying very close attention to TTIP, the international agreement that Alex Rowley has just referred to, because we do not want the European marketplace to be opened up to, for instance, cheap and inferior beef imports that do not have to

meet the same standards as our own domestic production. There are a number of other concerns about what might come out of the TTIP arrangements. As I have said, we are paying very close attention to it and are making our concerns known to the UK Government and the European Commission.

I pay tribute to our primary producers; our manufacturers; our scientists and innovators, who are helping to develop the new products that are going out into the international marketplace; and, of course, our entrepreneurs. There are a phenomenal number of entrepreneurs in our food and drink industry, and they are achieving amazing things. Just like Walkers over 100 years ago, many of those companies are starting out small, but one day they are going to be big and employ even more people in this country.

Those of us who were lucky to attend last night's VisitScotland reception will have enjoyed honey from Plan Bee, another new small business in Scotland, and they will also have seen IQ Chocolate, which is doing really well, the Wee Fudge Company and Taste of Arran, which some members have mentioned. All of those initiatives and companies are backed by entrepreneurialism and the talents of a few very ambitious, dedicated and passionate individuals. They are very inspirational, and we owe them a huge debt.

Last night's event also served to remind us of the huge role that the food and drink industry can play in tourism for wider economic benefit. Indeed, the most popular visitor attraction in my Moray constituency is Glenfiddich whisky distillery, and many people will be familiar with the benefits of food-related tourism in their own areas. That is why 2015, the year of food and drink, is such a massive opportunity for Scotland.

Of course, this is not just about exports and tourists coming to Scotland but about people here in Scotland being able to afford and enjoy more of their own larder on their own doorstep. That theme has run through many of the speeches in this debate. We are trying to do some things to promote that larder, such as taste the best, which is an accreditation scheme for restaurants, hotels and the rest of Scotland's hospitality sector. We are trying to get staff to explain to customers where the food is from and to ensure that more of Scotland's larder is put on the menu; if that happens, the hotel, restaurant or whatever will get the taste the best accreditation.

Our public procurement policy as well as the nutritional standards in our hospitals and schools are also now reflecting the larder on our doorstep. We will continue to take that work forward.

As this is all about our children and future generations, we need to focus on food education.

That is the real way to change this country's food culture, and food education is playing a greater role than ever before. That is why children's food is at the heart of and a new focus in "Becoming a Good Food Nation", the next phase of our food policy.

Claire Baker: The cabinet secretary has rightly mentioned the emphasis on children's food in the document, but the focus is very much on the public sector. Does he have anything in particular to say about the restaurant and café sector, where there are real issues about the range and type of children's food and portion sizes on offer?

Richard Lochhead: Yes. Our children's food policy must be about not just food education in our schools but what happens in the private sector. As the father of two young children, I get immensely frustrated when I take my children out and about in Scotland or elsewhere and I find the choice on the children's menu either very poor or very limited and quite often inappropriate. That is one reason why I am very keen for better children's food in Scotland to be at the heart of the next phase of our national food policy.

Many people have also raised the issue of affordability. Although a lot is happening to reach out to many people in our communities and give them more of an opportunity to enjoy affordable food, it is absolutely sickening to witness millionaire Tories around the UK Cabinet table in London taking money out of the pockets of families in Scotland, who now can barely afford to put food on their own tables. That, combined with the proliferation of food banks in Scotland—which is a scandal in itself—is one reason why welfare policy should be devolved to this Parliament as soon as possible.

I will ensure that on the food commission that we are setting up there are strong voices and people who have experience of food poverty in Scotland. That is what the food commission is going to be all about: looking at the big challenges facing our society over not just the next 10 years but beyond, whether it is food security issues, food poverty issues or others. We will appoint key people from Scottish society to the food commission to advise us, and there will be local champions in every community around Scotland taking forward the food agenda.

We have the vision to take Scotland forward in the "Becoming a Good Food Nation" document, and I think that we can all sign up to it. As I said in my opening remarks, when in 10 years' time people around Europe or the world think of good food nations, they will no doubt think of Italy and France but they will also think of Scotland.

I commend the motion to Parliament.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of five Parliamentary Bureau motions. I invite Joe FitzPatrick to move motions S4M-11583 and S4M-11585 to S4M-11588, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (National Health and Wellbeing Outcomes) (Scotland) Regulations 2014 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Prescribed Health Board Functions) (Scotland) Regulations 2014 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Integration Scheme) (Scotland) Regulations 2014 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Prescribed Local Authority Functions etc.) (Scotland) Regulations 2014 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modifications) Order 2014 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe Fitzpatrick.*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:00

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

The first question is, that amendment S4M-11598.1, in the name of Claire Baker, which seeks to amend motion S4M-11598, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on food and drink, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-11598, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on food and drink, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the achievements of Recipe for Success, Scotland's first national food and drink policy; recognises the contribution that it has made to the unprecedented economic growth of the food and drink industry in Scotland and in export markets across the world; congratulates the primary producers and processors for their continued focus and commitment to quality and provenance; notes the increasing interest in local food and desire among consumers to know where their food comes from; welcomes the publication of the discussion document, *Becoming a Good Food Nation*, setting out the next steps for Scotland's food and drink policy, and agrees that it must become second nature that Scots eat, serve and buy food that is healthy and environmentally sustainable if Scotland is to achieve the aspiration of becoming a good food nation; further recognises the importance of promoting training, skills and apprenticeship opportunities across the sector to encourage future generations into the industry, and believes that an overarching and inclusive food policy that puts accessibility, affordability and sustainability at its heart is key if Scotland's larder is to be of benefit to all.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motions S4M-11583 and S4M-11585 to S4M-11588, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (National Health and Wellbeing Outcomes) (Scotland) Regulations 2014 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Prescribed Health Board Functions) (Scotland) Regulations 2014 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Integration Scheme) (Scotland) Regulations 2014 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Prescribed Local Authority Functions etc.) (Scotland) Regulations 2014 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modifications) Order 2014 [draft] be approved.

Meeting closed at 17:02.

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