



**BRITISH-IRISH INTER-
PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

**COMHLACHT IDIR-
PHARLAIMINTEACH NA BREATAINE
AGUS NA hÉIREANN**

TWENTY-SIXTH PLENARY CONFERENCE

24 and 25 March 2003

Kilkenny Ormonde Hotel, Kilkenny

OFFICIAL REPORT

(Final Revised Edition)

(Produced by the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association)

IN ATTENDANCE

Co-Chairmen

Mr Brendan Smith TD
Mr David Winnick MP

Members and Associate Members

Mr Harry Barnes MP	Rt Hon Andrew Mackay MP
Mr Henry Bellingham MP	Mrs Rosemary McKenna CBE MP
Mr Johnny Brady TD	Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP
Rt Hon the Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville CH	Mr Michael McMahon MSP
Mr Alistair Carmichael MP	Mr Kevin McNamara MP
Senator Paul Coghlan	Senator Martin Mansergh
Dr Jerry Cowley TD	Dr John Marek AM
Mr Seymour Crawford TD	Mr Michael Mates MP
Dr Jimmy Devins TD	Rt Hon Sir Brian Mawhinney MP
The Lord Dubs	Senator Paschal Mooney
Mr John Ellis TD	Mr Arthur Morgan TD
Mr Damien English TD	Senator Francie O'Brien
Mr Jeff Ennis MP	Mr William O'Brien MP
Mrs Margaret Ewing MSP	Ms Liz O'Donnell TD
Mr Donald J Gelling CBE MLC	Mr Jim O'Keeffe TD
Mr Brian Gibbons AM	Senator Mary O'Rourke
The Lord Glentoran CBE DL	Mr Séamus Pattison TD
Mr Dominic Grieve MP	Mr Chris Ruane MP
Mr John Griffiths AM	Mr David Ruffley MP
Senator Brian Hayes	Mr Alex Salmond MP
Mr John Hume MP	Mr Joe Sherlock TD
Ms Helen Jackson MP	The Lord Smith of Clifton
Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD	Mr Iain Smith MSP
Mr Tony Killeen TD	Mr Jamie Stone MSP
Mr Séamus Kirk TD	The Lord Temple-Morris
Mr Conor Lenihan TD	Mr Gareth Thomas MP
Dr Dai Lloyd AM	Deputy Michael Torode
Mr Steve McCabe MP	Mr Murray Tosh MSP

OFFICIALS

Joint Clerks

Ms Alda Barry, British Clerk
Mr Jim Mulkerrins, Irish Clerk

Secretary to the Body

Mr Colm McGrady

Delegation Clerks

Scotland – Mr Craig French
Wales – Mr Peter Kellam

Committee Clerks to the Body

Committee A: Sovereign Matters

Mr Colm McGrady
Mr Huw Yardley

Committee B: European Affairs

Mr Mike Clark
Ms Marianne Bolger

Committee C: Economic

Mr Colm McGrady
Mr John Whatley

Committee D: Environmental and Social

Dr Christopher Johnson
Ms Marianne Bolger

Secretariat

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Mr Anthony Day
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BRITISH-IRISH INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY

COMHLAUGHT IDIR-PHARLAIMINTEACH NA BREATAINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN

TWENTY-SIXTH PLENARY CONFERENCE

Monday 24 March 2003

The Body met at 9.40 am.

PLENARY BUSINESS

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): Welcome to the twenty-sixth plenary conference of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body in Kilkenny. I have some brief announcements to make. First, I remind everyone to turn off pagers, beepers and mobile telephones, and to put all newspapers aside. Secondly, I remind Members that the proceedings of the Body do not attract parliamentary privilege.

I am pleased to inform the Body that Mr Alistair Carmichael MP has been nominated to replace Mr Lembit Öpik MP. I welcome Mr Carmichael to the Body.

In accordance with rule 2(a), the following Associate Members have accepted the invitation of the Steering Committee to assume the powers and responsibilities of Members for the entire sitting: Henry Bellingham MP; Dominic Grieve MP; Steve McCabe MP; Chris Ruane MP; David Ruffley MP; Alex Salmond MP; Gareth Thomas MP; Brian Gibbons AM; Michael McMahon MSP; Jamie Stone MSP; Deputy Michael Torode from Guernsey; and Senator Paul Coghlan from Seanad Éireann.

I should inform Members that a group photograph will be taken at 3.30 pm in the rose garden in Kilkenny Castle. The sunshine has been organised for the photograph.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): I ask Co-Chairman Winnick to move the adoption of the proposed Programme of Business.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): I so move.

Programme of Business agreed.

RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): It would be helpful if Members who wish to speak in the debate, and who have not already given their names to the Clerks, would do so as soon as possible, or otherwise indicate to the Chair that they wish to speak. The Steering Committee proposes to limit speeches to four minutes, with 10 minutes for the opening and winding-up speeches.

The proposed amendment to rules is the third item on the Programme of Business. The amendments were agreed by the Steering Committee at its meeting last night, and copies of the proposed amendments have been placed on the document table. Members who wish to table further amendments should do so before the end of this morning's meeting.

Mr Jim O'Keeffe TD: I beg to move

That the Body reaffirms its support for the Good Friday Agreement, which was democratically endorsed by the people of Ireland, both North and South; believes that the full implementation of the Agreement is necessary to ensure peace, stability and sustainable political institutions in Northern Ireland; welcomes the intensive efforts of the two Governments, in consultation with political parties in Northern Ireland, to secure rapid and full implementation of the Agreement, including the restoration of devolved government in Northern Ireland; calls upon all parties involved to redouble their efforts to achieve a successful outcome to this process; and looks forward to the prospect of the Agreement being fully operational and in place before the Assembly elections on 29 May.

It is clear that both Governments have been engaged in intensive discussions with each other and with the parties in Northern Ireland since the suspension of Northern Ireland's devolved institutions in October 2002. These discussions have been fruitful, and they culminated in the recent talks at Hillsborough Castle. It is clear that substantial progress has been made and that it has been possible to bridge or substantially close the gaps in several key areas. At this stage, although all parties have not signed up to every detail, there is nonetheless a shared understanding of the steps needed to achieve the required acts of completion on all sides.

9.45 am

The two Governments have consistently aimed to provide clarity and certainty and to set down the obligations and commitments needed to restore full confidence and trust. The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach will return to Northern Ireland in early April. I expect that they will publish their detailed proposals at that stage.

The discussions at Hillsborough have once again demonstrated the parties' ability to engage in the process in a serious and committed spirit. The will to achieve the full and effective implementation of the agreement is strong, and I hope that all parties will continue to work towards that goal.

The Assembly elections will now take place on 29 May. The idea behind the short four-week postponement is to give the parties the opportunity to consult fully on and assimilate the detail of the Governments' proposals prior to the commencement of the election campaign. The postponement will also provide the parties with the necessary opportunity to discuss those proposals with their colleagues and others.

It is almost five years since the agreement was signed. During that time great progress has been witnessed in Northern Ireland. Positive changes occur daily. The core principles of the Good Friday Agreement are taking root, both in deed and in mindset. An examination of the way that issues are being discussed reveals that previously contentious issues are increasingly being treated on a consensual basis. Decommissioning is one of the issues — it is not the only one — that is being discussed. There is no place in any future arrangements for paramilitaries of any hue or illegal weaponry of any kind.

I believe that the outstanding difficulties can be overcome and that the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland will be restored. That will lead to the rapid implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in all its aspects. I urge the adoption of the motion, which reaffirms the support of the Body for that process.

The Lord Temple-Morris: I am flattered to be called so early — almost too early to prepare for my speech.

We are now entering the last chapter. I agree with what Jim O'Keeffe said and the tone with which he said it. We are coming into the finishing straight, but often that part of a long race — getting over the finishing line — is the most difficult to accomplish.

One thing that has always given me confidence — and I want to associate the Body with that too — is the greater unity that exists between our two Governments. We have thrown off the historical chips on our shoulders that have impeded our efforts for so long. In that context, I welcome the new composition of the Body, which is now wider and stronger. For those Members who have joined us recently, I state my belief that the Body has contributed to the removal of those historical chips at

parliamentary level. It has worked on the basis of complete equality and will continue to do so in the future. We have made a contribution towards strengthening the relations between the two Governments. After the two general elections in 1992 when the Anglo-Irish Inter-Governmental Council met for the first time with new Ministers, of the five Ministers in the room, three — both British and Irish — were former Members of the Body and were on Christian name terms. It is important to remember that fact as those Ministers then carried out their all-important work.

Mr O'Keeffe mentioned decommissioning and the fact that there was no place for weaponry of any kind. In addressing that issue, it is sometimes almost impossible not to veer to one side of the argument. I have made speeches in the Body and elsewhere that could be construed to have been very Green, pro-Nationalist and almost pro-Republican. However, more recently, I have made speeches that could be construed in the opposite way. If one places the emphasis on one side or the other, it simply reflects the situation at that time. If one side makes a gesture, the other side does likewise, but that can be frustrating, as they often do not give enough.

With regard to decommissioning, I do not believe that the IRA poses a danger to the peace process. It has contributed to the peace process for some years, and if it had not participated, we would never have been able to begin the process, let alone get to where we are today. However, having given the IRA credit for that and for some of its recent pronouncements, I say that it cannot have it both ways. Sinn Féin cannot claim the benefit of a constitutional position and a role in a process and in Government while at the same time being closely affiliated with a military wing that has not disarmed. Therefore, the IRA must make a choice. It has to make a major gesture, which must be part of a process. I sympathise with my Prime Minister's call for the IRA's disbandment. I wish it would disband, but I do not believe that is necessary or realistic. However, total decommissioning and an effective de facto disbandment from military activity is perfectly possible and practicable, and it is necessary.

Finally, until the IRA is big enough to realise that the process is not just about the IRA — and it is not just about looking at its own position and its own navel — it will have to consider that it takes two to tango. The IRA has to consider that Unionism is divided and is completely unable to deliver because of its rejectionists and extremists unless the IRA is seen to have discarded the military option. Until that happens we will not see the full realisation of the Belfast Agreement. The ball is in IRA/Sinn Féin's court. I call on the IRA to behave in the same spirit as it did when it helped to start the peace process.

Senator Paschal Mooney: I would like to diverge slightly from the context of the motion to tell our British colleagues how much we valued the engagement of Prime Minister Blair at a difficult time for him and his

colleagues. I would also like to convey the sympathy of the overwhelming majority of Irish people to the families of those who have lost their lives in recent days in the Gulf. In the debates that have taken place in this country in recent weeks, it has become evident on all sides of the political divide that the personal commitment of Tony Blair has advanced the peace process far beyond what could have otherwise been possible. The fact that those debates have been taking place at such a difficult time is appreciated by those of us on the Irish side. There is also an acknowledgement of a growing confidence in Mr Trimble. At last, he seems to be getting some of the monkeys off his back within the Ulster Unionist Party. The hope is that he will engage with his own constituency in the coming weeks, aided by both Governments in the proposals that they are bringing forward that will allow normal politics to dictate the pace of events leading up to the postponed elections.

I also acknowledge the leadership roles that Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness have continued to play. There have been developments, and I hope that the proposals will reflect an even-handed approach that will address Republican fears and concerns as much as it will address Unionist ones. As Peter Temple-Morris said, it is about see-saw and give and take.

I also hope that in the light of ongoing developments Sinn Féin will find it beneficial to engage with the Policing Board. It might be useful to remember something that Martin McGuinness said recently, which was not widely reported. He said that he hoped that the day would come when a Nationalist from the Bogside would step out of his door wearing the uniform of the Police Service of Northern Ireland with pride. However, he did not believe that that moment had yet come. Those remarks show a major shift in the Republican movement's attitude towards policing, which is a key issue, and one which I am sure that our Sinn Féin colleague will address in his contribution.

As a democrat, I find the structure of paramilitarism on the Loyalist side unacceptable. There are regular references on television and in the print media to "B company this" and "A company that" as if they were somehow a standing army. With all due respect to those who criticise the IRA, at least it is not in our face. As Peter Temple-Morris noted, the IRA has, to a large extent, moved away from a position where it is a threat. I wish that there would be an acknowledgement that the paraphernalia and architecture of militarism that is constantly portrayed is totally unacceptable, and that it causes grievous offence to the Nationalist population in Northern Ireland.

I reiterate the sentiments expressed by my colleague Deputy O'Keeffe in his opening remarks, and I wish the process well.

The Lord Glentoran: When I first read the motion, I thought with great disappointment that, for the first time in my attendance here, it was a motion with which I could completely agree. It seemed to be so bland as to be

hardly worth debating. As the Co-Chairman will know, for some years I have been pushing this Body to debate more confrontational and exciting motions in order to breathe real life into the place again. Having said that, I read the motion again with a little care, and I believe that a small amendment should be made. I respect Arthur Morgan who sits here with us, but I would like to change the line in the motion that

"calls upon all parties involved to redouble their efforts".

I would simply like paramilitaries to disarm and go away for ever. I hear what Paschal Mooney has been saying about Loyalists. However, there is a difference. I entirely agree with his point about the Loyalist paramilitaries. They are unpleasant, awful gangs of mobsters, but they are no longer directly affiliated to any political parties, whereas the IRA is clearly seen to be linked to Sinn Féin. We have a clear and positive message to Sinn Féin/IRA, and I hope that the Sinn Féin part of the Sinn Féin/IRA partnership, as the body supporting it, will see that. I believe that the democrats in that organisation wish to see the disbandment of the army so that we can finally agree the agreement, put this process to bed and get on with democratic, devolved government in Northern Ireland.

10.00 am

Senator Paschal Mooney spoke about David Trimble's having moved position. I spoke to him recently, before he went to America, and I believe that he has nowhere to go. Regrettably, the Unionist Party is not present. It is in considerable disarray and if, according to my suggested amendment, we do not see clearly that the "war is over", the Unionist Party and David Trimble will not be able to sign up to the agreement.

The right message to send is that we believe that Sinn Féin wishes to carry on the democratic process, and I hope that it is embarrassed by its relationship with its army. We must support Sinn Féin in whatever way we can in order to get that army disbanded and have it disappear from the Irish scene. That done, I also call for a sufficiently strong security force, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, so that those who call themselves the "C company of the Shankill", who are nothing other than bands of criminals, are properly dealt with, arrested and put away for a considerable time. Then those criminal aspects that have hung on to the edge of this political war — for that is what it has been for 30 years — can also be wrapped up. I beg to move that amendment.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): Lord Glentoran, if you are proposing that amendment, it must be moved formally in writing.

The Lord Glentoran: I will then withdraw the amendment and suggest that others might like to refer to it.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): I call Members' attention to the fact that Committee B (European Affairs) will now meet at 2.00 pm in the Slaney Suite on the lower ground floor of the hotel rather than tomorrow morning. Members will also note that the Steering Committee, at its meeting last night, appointed a new chairman, the Rt Hon Andrew Mackay MP.

Mr Conor Lenihan TD: We all wish that the sort of pragmatic flexibility demonstrated by Lord Glentoran was reflected in other Unionist groupings and parties. We should not hope for too much.

I associate myself with Senator Paschal Mooney's strong remarks of gratitude to Tony Blair for his role in the process that we are engaged in. I also express the Body's sympathy to the British Members and to the British public on the deaths of their soldiers in Iraq. That is an unfortunate and terrible consequence of the road that we are taking. My only regret, which I expressed in the Dáil, is that the Irish are not there also. The inability to achieve agreement at UN Security Council level meant that the Irish Army is not participating in the venture. Many people in Ireland are offering support, solidarity and sympathy to the war effort in Iraq.

We are at a key junction in our process where, rather as in Iraq, disarmament is what we want to achieve right across the political spectrum in the North of Ireland. In the next month or two, I believe that we will see movement on that. Both in the Body and in the wider peace process that we are engaged in, I am struck by the fact that this is a robust process that has lasted the best part of 10 years — it is nine years since the IRA's 1994 ceasefire. That is a great credit to the institutions, to the two Governments and to the process itself. Some people become process-junkies, but this process appears to be working. It has had its setbacks, but it continues.

There are two issues, the first of which is general disarmament by paramilitaries. A balance to be applied to that is whether we will see some guarantee of good behaviour from certain political groups that have so far failed to implement the Good Friday Agreement or have been grudging in their approach to its implementation. We all seek that balance so that we have an assurance that the process will work and deliver for citizens, North and South.

Sinn Féin appears to be consulting its membership base, in both its wide and narrow definition. That is good, and it should be given the time and space to do that without the usual rhetoric that the conflict produces.

Much of what we decide today and of what will be decided during this process will be driven by the election results. We will probably have a much different view when we meet again, because the elections in the North of Ireland will tell their own story of how power is distributed in that society.

Mrs Margaret Ewing MSP: I will speak only briefly because I am concerned mainly with the international perspective. My last visit to Ireland was to a North/South community project at Rosscarbery, which had the theme of peace, truth and reconciliation, and was addressed by Charl de Villiers, who was one of the major figures in the South African process. He spoke about the difference between forgetting and forgiving, which is an issue that we must all address in the context of the history of Ireland.

I want to make a plea to our friends in the press. At home, so little of the constructive work is reported. If there is an atrocity, a killing or something to do with guns, it will be reported. However, very little of the hard work of organisations, such as the Body and the many voluntary organisations, north and south of the border, in their attempts to build that process of forgetting and forgiving, is ever reported.

Lord Glentoran asked us to refer to his proposed amendment. I am glad that it is not being moved. I would have found that very difficult because the amendment makes it sound as if everything is one-sided. We have been vocal in the press at home to ensure that people recognise that it is not one-sided; there are many culprits in what has happened in Ireland over many years. Therefore, I ask the press to ensure that meetings such as this are reported not only in the various Irish papers. The coverage must be much, much wider so that people realise that all of us, from our different political perspectives, are trying to ensure peace for the whole of Ireland. It should not be forgotten that the other devolved institutions in the UK have a role to play, which they are willing to accept.

Mr John Ellis TD: We all want to support the Steering Committee's motion. In saying that, we must look back at the progress that the Body has made over the past 10 or 12 years. I remember — just as Lord Glentoran probably does — that during the Body's early days political debate would come close to fisticuffs because people were absolutely entrenched on different sides. Since then, people have come to realise that accommodation is much more beneficial than confrontation, something that has also been accepted by all the political parties in Northern Ireland.

Prime Minister Blair and Taoiseach Bertie Ahern have made tremendous efforts over the past couple of months to get the Assembly back up and running. In doing so, they have helped to move the process forward. We now face the May elections, and we accept that the various political parties will become entrenched in their own territory and will not want to move too far until they are over.

The Unionists, as Lord Glentoran said, appear to have problems, as do all the other parties across the spectrum. We spoke about that earlier with regard to policing, and we see regularly that there is trouble in Belfast on both sides of the peace line. The people involved must be realistic, and, basically, they will have to accept the police force that will be put in place. The sooner that that issue

is progressed the better. Quite an amount of progress has been made in the past 12 months, but much more progress needs to be made as soon as possible.

Paramilitary activity is still prevalent, and we have seen it recently in Belfast and in south Armagh, where there were situations that no one could condone. People taking the law into their own hands cannot be condoned either. People need to realise, however, that they will have to live in a civilised society.

It is important that people who are not directly involved in the May elections remain neutral. I hope that, following the May elections, we will see representatives from the Unionist parties of Northern Ireland at the next plenary session of the Body. That is the last stone to be put in the wall. Every group is represented bar the Unionist groups. I hope that they will take a positive view of the Body. Behind the scenes, many Unionists have taken positive steps and actions to bridge the gap. That goes for all the Unionists and all the parties in Northern Ireland. They now talk to each other and discuss matters where there is mutual ground. However, they still have a problem in that many of their supporters need to be told that they now have to live in the real world and accept the fact that democratic politics is the way forward and that the days of boycotts and paramilitarism are over.

Mr Andrew Mackay MP: First, I thank Senator Paschal Mooney and Mr Conor Lenihan for their remarks. In some ways our discussions today are overshadowed by the momentous and shocking events in Iraq, and it is difficult for many of us to concentrate on British/Irish relationships at this time. What those Members said was hugely appreciated and makes a great difference to our discussions.

I also agree with Members who spoke earlier when I say that I am delighted that the process appears to be moving forward again, and I pay tribute to the British Prime Minister and the Taoiseach for the sterling work that they appeared to do at Hillsborough a few weeks ago. However, I urge a little caution; expectations are now very high in the Province, and, if they are dashed this time, the situation will become extremely dangerous.

I echo what Peter Temple-Morris and others said about the responsibility that Sinn Féin and the IRA now have to genuinely decommission and to come up with a message that everyone, including the Unionist community, can believe about the war being over. If that were to happen, we could have open and truly democratic elections for the Assembly at the end of May. If that does not happen, we will have a distorted election with a distorted result, which means that when the Body next meets in October there will be real difficulties and problems to deal with. I hope that the Body sends out a message that there must be decommissioning, that there must be a clear message from the Provos and that action must be taken against the Loyalist paramilitaries. I endorse what my colleagues have said about that. If that message gets across, we can

have proper elections in May, and when we meet again it will be in a much happier place.

10.15 am

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD: As the most northerly Ulster TD or Member of Parliament, I agree with the motion, but I look forward to the day that it states only:

“That the Body reaffirms its support for the Good Friday Agreement, which was democratically endorsed by the people of Ireland, both North and South”.

I have said quite often — and I tend to be parochial on the matter — that I see as clearly as anyone, and more clearly than most, the difference that the agreement is making on the ground. We will have succeeded when we get to the stage where all politics is local. I too regret that no Unionists — Ulster Unionists, the DUP or others in the Unionist family — are present. As Margaret Ewing said, much good is going on at a local level and, indeed, at all levels. Therefore I see no issue surrounding their involvement in the Body.

At the previous meeting I mentioned the car-ferry service across the Foyle. Unionists were involved in working with us — for the north-west region — to provide the basic infrastructure, and the service has yielded 198,000 passengers in its first six months. That represents a success: that is peace and reconciliation; that is people working together. One side is gaining an advantage from the other, and it does not matter whether that is County Derry, County Antrim or County Donegal. It does not matter what that advantage is. For example, the advantage gained may be an increase in tourism or benefits from the price of petrol. What matters is that people are interacting in a real and genuine manner. The service is a success and it benefits the economy.

At a previous meeting of the Body, I mentioned the wind farm that was proposed for the Foyle. That yielded peace and reconciliation between all parties in the north-west, in that they came together to oppose the proposal. There have been beach protests, and, as a result of the car-ferry service, people have been able to work together to express what they want in their area. I look forward to the day when those concerns can be brought to a local Minister; I look forward to the day when Assembly Members are back in charge of their own destiny. That is the only way in which we can move forward.

As we approach the election, I look forward to all the pro-agreement parties reaffirming their support for the agreement. Those who have issues still outstanding must take a hard look at themselves. There is only one option and — for want of a better phrase — there is only one show in town, and that is the agreement. It must be fully implemented and people on all sides must stand four-square behind it.

I look forward to the discussion on the common fisheries policy tomorrow. Had the Executive been back in

action, and had the two Administrations been working together with Scottish parliamentarians and the Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for fisheries in England, our fisheries might not have experienced such a disaster. We must bring peace by restoring local politics.

I met with a group from the Shankill in Belfast, which is twinned with my area. People asked me what we had in common. The answer is: nothing on one level and everything on the other. A point raised at the meeting was that money is being thrown at problems in order to solve them, and I said that I would raise that issue today. It is important that we have a situation in which local representatives look at how money is spent.

The Body meets twice a year and looks for solutions to problems. We look forward to the Good Friday Agreement being endorsed and, by magic, everything on the ground being resolved. However, until five-year and 10-year projects are put in place and properly funded, we will not change the mindset. To drip-feed or scatter money for the sake of it will not solve problems. We must take a hard look at the funding that groups receive. As Margaret Ewing said, much good is being done on the ground. However, some of that is wasted because it is only for one year or three years; it needs to be more concerted.

I support the motion and look forward to whatever May brings. It is important that the election takes place and that the Executive are back in action. I ask all those who can contribute to the full and successful implementation of the agreement to take a hard look at what they can do to bring that about. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Kevin McNamara MP: I thank Conor Lenihan and Paschal Mooney for their statements of sympathy about British losses in Iraq; they are appreciated. I also appreciate Mr Lenihan's point that there are no Irish troops in Iraq because there had not been a second United Nations resolution. I too am sorry that there was not a second United Nations resolution authorising that activity. I might then have been able to vote with my Government last week. I say that lest it should be felt that there is unanimity of opinion. I would not have raised the issue had not Mr Lenihan done so. However, it is important that Irish colleagues should understand that just as there is deep debate about the situation on this island, there is even deeper debate about it in the United Kingdom.

I want to turn to some of the comments that colleagues have made. I understand the attention that is being paid to acts of completion and to the need for arms to disappear. The reported finding in Belfast yesterday of a large arms cache, which is associated with the Provisional IRA, did not help that situation. Having said that, I think that it is important to realise that acts of completion are needed on all sides. For example, in the United Kingdom Parliament on Wednesday and Thursday of this week we will complete our second Police (Northern Ireland) Bill to install those bits into the Police Service of Northern Ireland

arising from the Patten Report that were eviscerated by a former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I cannot help feeling that if that had not happened, we would not be in this position and that we would have advanced much further than the current situation. So not all of the problems are associated with Sinn Féin.

We must also bear in mind that the Official Unionists have, rightly or wrongly, collapsed — or caused to collapse — the Northern Ireland Assembly on three occasions. The quid pro quo for completion on one side is a firm undertaking that there will be no future collapsing of the Assembly, because there is a real fear that, as concessions are made on the Nationalist side, they are put into the pocket by Unionists and something else will then be demanded in another way against the threat of collapsing the Assembly in the future. That suspicion, on the one hand of the aspirations of Sinn Féin, and on the other hand of the intentions of the Unionists, is causing many of the tensions.

We are, in a sense, debating in the dark, because we do not know the contents of the documents that the two Governments gave to the parties when they last met, although we have a fair understanding of what we anticipate being in them. We are still waiting to see the final papers that the two Governments will present to the parties in the near future and to see the parties' reactions to them. I join with all my colleagues, however, in hoping that the suspicions on both sides can be overcome for the good not only of the people of Northern Ireland but for the people of all these islands.

We have been concentrating on the Unionist position, the weaknesses of Mr Trimble and the threats posed to him by the DUP, but we should also look at the SDLP's situation. It is sad that we have not paid sufficient attention to the pivotal anchor role that the SDLP has played in all the discussions. The SDLP does not have guns under the bed, and it does not pose a threat. Rather, throughout the troubles, the SDLP's powerful threat to us all was the challenge that it presented — one of peaceful, determined, constitutional, Nationalist politics. One of the reasons that we are able to sit here is due to the work of the SDLP. It is interesting that Mark Durkan and his colleagues are carrying out the same important anchor role as that carried out by John Hume and Séamus Mallon in previous negotiations. The BIIPB owes a lot to those brave people in the SDLP who, through their leadership, were responsible for bringing together the parties that signed the Good Friday Agreement. Let us not forget them.

Senator Mary O'Rourke: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the Steering Committee motion tabled by Jim O'Keefe. I listened with interest to the Members who have spoken, and when Lord Glentoran said that the wording of the motion was bland, I thought that it was a good day when we can have a bland motion rather than one of daggers, spikes and all sorts of other instruments. That very blandness clearly indicates that we have arrived

at a staging post on the important passage of almost five years of the Good Friday Agreement.

It is with some nostalgia that we remember the euphoria that greeted the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. There was a belief that it was all over, that it was going to be plain sailing and that joy abounded. However, history shows that that is never how matters evolve after the signing of such agreements. There are always staging posts, but there are always hiccups, ups and downs, valleys and peaks. That has proven to be true of the Good Friday Agreement. It must be remembered that the agreement was not the end; it was only the beginning of a process founded on democracy. However, the difference is that the process was founded on a democracy that affirmed its validity, in the North and in the South. In times of difficulty we cling to that — and that is a good idea. We cling to the fact that people went out in large numbers and voted for the validity and the sustaining of the Good Friday Agreement, from which much has unfolded.

One of the gravest difficulties in the present situation is that the democratic institutions — although great efforts have been made to keep them in place — still lack the depth and undertakings that were envisaged in the Good Friday Agreement. We hope that they will emerge again.

The BIIPB is meeting at a time of great difficulty in other ways, because the Assembly is in suspension. As we approach the proposed elections of 29 May, people are watching their political corner and looking over their shoulder in order to see who is gaining ground or losing ground, or who is emerging. That gives this meeting a double edge and an edge of validity, because we are continuing the normal processes. By meeting in this way, we are affirming our belief in what has been agreed, but as we are meeting in a partial state of suspension, we do not know what the proposed election date will bring in its wake. Therefore, although we meet today in harmony — and hope to continue to do so — it is also with a sense of uncertainty about what lies next.

10.30 am

Kevin McNamara mentioned that we do not know what is in the documents and the proposals that each party put forward at the last talks, which are, we hope, due to be reaffirmed soon. At the same time, we have a fair idea about what will be included. All sides will have to come forward, give up and recommit to the cause of democracy — all of which will be difficult. I do not say that in a mourning or pessimistic tone; however, it will require much faith on all sides for those steps to be made against the background of uncertainty surrounding the impending elections. Spirit and optimism will be required from the parties that are engaged in the process.

We meet today in the historic city that saw what were then thought to be the beginnings of all-Ireland democracy in the Statutes of Kilkenny and the first Irish Parliament. It

is a historic time, a staging post leading to the proposed election date at the end of May, which, I hope, will bring another dawn in a process that will have many false dawns in times ahead. Onward movement is the key point, and the reaffirmation contained in the Steering Committee's motion would be effective and timely. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Jamie Stone MSP: I am pleased to support the motion. At our meeting in Manchester I mentioned the fact that my wife comes from County Armagh. I want to remind everyone of what has changed there. I have known County Armagh since the late 1970s, and I remember how Armagh, that beautiful city, was bombed to bits. One woke in the night to the sickening thud of yet another bomb. One even heard gunfire. I remember well the Tynan Abbey murders of Sir Norman Stronge and his son Jim. Jim Stronge was my sister-in-law's godfather. Their murders were, therefore, very close to home.

As Cecilia Keaveney said, things have changed enormously. One sees the huge benefits of tourism today. Tourists travel from Cavan and Monaghan into Armagh on round trips. They may well buy their petrol on the southern side of the border. There have been real benefits, and Armagh has totally changed. We all know that. Today, one can buy good wine in Armagh — God help us all. One can buy good food. My brother-in-law is doing a roaring trade in the bed-and-breakfast business. I hope that, when the good people of the Six Counties go to the polls in May, they will consider the benefits that the peace process has brought to Northern Ireland.

I believe that all colleagues of all political colours would agree that the Scottish Parliament has brought real benefits to Scotland. Legislation is open to scrutiny. What was, in the past, done with the flick of a mandarin's pen is now subject to the proper democratic process. When I look at our Public Gallery on Wednesdays and Thursdays, I can see that the people of Scotland take a huge interest.

I make no apologies for repeating that the peace process and the Northern Ireland Assembly can gain from what has been done in Scotland, but I believe that all of us have slightly missed the trick. How many times have MLAs visited the Scottish Parliament? Not many. However, if that were to be encouraged, we could build on it and help. Getting out of the "looking-over-one's-shoulder" ghetto mentality has much to offer. I hope that, God willing, things go well in the elections in May, and that we will do much more during the next few years to increase links not only among the devolved Assemblies but with the Dáil and with Westminster.

In conclusion — and there is a certain amount of self-interest in this — mention has been made of fisheries. Undoubtedly, more mention will be made of them tomorrow. I believe that, if we can join hands with TDs and MLAs, it would be a great way of pulling the more outlying parts of the British Isles together, and of singing from

one hymn sheet. Whatever way we do it, it is great to be able to bring a little more pressure to bear on Westminster.

Senator Martin Mansergh: Mary O'Rourke is right to remind us that this is a parliamentary city. Its last Parliament sat during the civil wars of the three kingdoms. Today, two kingdoms, a principality and a republic each have healthy and stable Parliaments or Assemblies of their own.

I would like to associate myself with the remarks and expressions of sympathy made by Senator Paschal Mooney and Conor Lenihan TD. Members of the British Parliament, and one or two Members of the Oireachtas, have family members in Iraq at present. We all fervently hope that the war will be short, and that the minimisation of loss of life will continue to be a high priority.

In the small decisions that we have had to make here, an undoubted factor was the immense commitment shown by the British Government and Prime Minister and by the American Administration to the peace process in this country. Certainly, in the American case, it was far beyond any call of interest or obligation.

I hope and believe that the breakthrough achieved at Hillsborough two or three weeks ago will be confirmed over the next while. As has already been pointed out, it is right to talk about acts of completion. They are needed on not just one but several fronts. Having made his point, I praise Lord Glentoran for withdrawing the amendment. It is obvious that a somewhat peremptory focus on one side of the argument does not help to achieve the desired result. As far as I am concerned, the war is over, and people actually saying so cannot add very much to that.

More concrete acts of completion are needed. I attach a great deal of importance to people joining the police force, because, in the areas in which the police operate, that makes paramilitary activity completely redundant. My sympathy goes out to the people of Scotland, where certain paramilitaries have sought refuge.

I met a couple of Unionists in Washington last week, including a former Executive Minister. They expressed concern that what was proposed, or what would be done, would not be enough. I said, perhaps a little caustically, that that was exactly the sort of language I might also expect to hear from Sinn Féin. Always in these negotiations, there is a tendency to hear from different sides that not quite enough is being given. However, it is important that Northern Ireland gets back to stability, particularly in an economic sense. Presumably Unionists most of all want Northern Ireland to be a stable and workable political entity. That lies, to a significant extent, in their hands.

I cannot understand the position of certain anti-agreement Unionists who, no matter what the terms, do not seem to want the Assembly to be restored. The Assembly seems to me to be the only basis on which Northern Ireland can work.

We would probably be deluding ourselves to think that even if things go according to plan, everything will run smoothly in future. Elections are scheduled for the end of May, the results of which might create other situations that need to be resolved. However, let us keep moving forward to face the difficulties of one kind or another that will inevitably continue to arise; let us deal with those, and gradually we will get there.

Mr Alex Salmond MP: I admire the way in which Lord Glentoran moved and then "de-moved" his amendment in one speech. I have always wondered whether the House of Lords had anything to teach me about parliamentary technique, and I have learned something today.

I wish that Lord Glentoran had pursued his amendment, because I would have had enormous pleasure in voting against it, basically on the grounds that have already been stated: it would be seen as partial, one-sided and not the best thing to do at present. As Senator Mansergh just reminded us, Scotland is particularly preoccupied with Loyalist paramilitary-offshoot thugs at the moment. The majority of Members of the Body would wish to continue with the even-handed approach that has brought results and that is making progress.

I note the optimism of some Members such as Jim O'Keefe, and I desperately hope that that optimism is correct. I hope that the breakthrough at Hillsborough Castle leads to a huge and substantial advance. However, the history of the process shows that substantial advances are accompanied by significant setbacks. The real issue is that progress happens by inches over time. We can appreciate how far things have come only when we look back over the years and see the enormous distance that has been travelled. I am sure, and I hope, that major advances are about to be made. I am certain that there will be setbacks as well, but I do not think that such setbacks should in any way dissuade people from their determination to drive the caravan onward.

Therefore I hope that we pay attention to what Cecilia Keaveney said about what she described as the mindset — the undergrowth of politics — and how it is changing. Jamie Stone also spoke about his experience of this. I have some experience of the school exchange programme and east-west dialogue. I cannot think of anything more important than changing the colour of young people's thoughts through mutual experience on that programme; not only North/South but east-west, and involving all the countries represented here today. It is disappointing, therefore, that there are problems with funding for those visits. If a school receives funding for a visit one year, it cannot qualify for funding the following year. Bodies such as ours might wish to pay some attention to such programmes, which are concerned with the undergrowth and the mindset — the background and the future — of politics to ensure that investment is secured for the future.

Every one of us who has constituents in the line of fire at the moment appreciates enormously the remarks of sympathy and solidarity that have been made for what those soldiers are facing in the Gulf. However, support for the troops, or sympathy and solidarity with them, should not be confused with support for the enterprise itself. I associate myself with the remarks of Kevin McNamara in that respect.

Mr Séamus Kirk TD: I take the opportunity to add my advice and support to the motion. As Members who made earlier contributions have said, substantial progress has been made at Hillsborough Castle. There is a clear indication that there is a satisfactory level of engagement in the process by the various parties, but there are disappointing aspects to it as well. All in all, it is about steady progress.

It is fair to say that, in the past seven or eight years, peace has come slowly to the North. The commitment of the parties involved and, in particular, of Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern, who have made a tremendous input to the process, cannot be doubted. Despite the regular difficulties and inevitable pitfalls, Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern never tire and are prepared to meet again and again to ensure that the process continues and that the prospect of re-establishing the Assembly is kept on track.

It is hoped that the Assembly will return after the May election. It is our earnest wish that we will celebrate that return at the next plenary meeting of the Body. Time will tell, and the election results will determine, how easy it will be to re-establish the Assembly.

10.45 am

Several areas, including acts of completion, continue to cause considerable concern. I am sure that the exchange of documents between the parties at the Hillsborough talks was to ensure that those acts of completion are carried out as quickly as possible.

Other obvious areas such as policing cannot be overlooked. The sooner there is full acceptance of the new, recognised policing arrangements north of the border, thus ensuring an end to punishment beatings, the better. I hope that, in the context of getting a final agreement in place, all the parties with an obligation in that area will realise the importance of implementing the policing arrangements as were agreed.

Building trust in the process has been slow, tedious and painstaking, but we are on track and must continue. There is no alternative to the Belfast Agreement or to the institutions and establishments that it proposes. It is our earnest hope that when we meet again in six months, we will be able to celebrate the re-establishment of the Assembly.

I join with my party Colleagues — Conor Lenihan, Paschal Mooney and Senator Martin Mansergh — in

extending sympathy to the families of those British Army personnel who have lost their lives in the Gulf.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): I advise Members that we propose to have a 15-minute break at 11.10 am.

Mr Henry Bellingham MP: I thank Séamus Kirk, Paschal Mooney and Conor Lenihan for their remarks. There is an Irish dimension to the British Army's involvement in the Gulf. Many Irish citizens are members of the British armed forces, and there are a disproportionate number of Irish regiments in the Gulf. This may be incorrect, but I read that Catholics, many of whom are from south of the border, make up approximately 30% of the Royal Irish Regiment and 28% of the Irish Guards. Therefore, many people in the Republic of Ireland are concerned about what is happening.

Many people have remarked that the peace process has been unbelievably robust. That it has survived, despite the obvious setbacks, is extraordinary. Its survival is in no small part due to the will power and determination of those young people who have led relatively normal lives and have ambitions to build their careers, make money and work in the public sector or elsewhere. I endorse Jamie Stone's comments; the general mood in towns on both sides of the border is one of unbelievable optimism, which is extremely positive for the future.

The issue of exiles has been mentioned. The Conservative Party is totally opposed to any amnesty for terrorists who are on the run. However, if the issue is to be dealt with, it should be considered in conjunction with that of exiles from Northern Ireland, because they cannot be ignored at this stage of the process.

There has been talk recently about setting up an outside quasi-international monitoring body to examine whether particular actions are compatible with the whole process moving forward. My colleague who is making the winding-up speech in the debate may like to touch on that. I do not see how that international body could operate, and I do not see how it could gain widespread respect. However, that needs to be examined in more detail.

As far as policing is concerned, Senator Paschal Mooney spoke about extremist Protestant gangs. Those gangster groups are very much on their own. I spent a year on the Northern Ireland Select Committee, and we compiled a large report into organised crime and smuggling. The situation is appalling. Exceptionally robust, imaginative policing and intelligence are needed to deal with this appalling cancer, which cannot be tolerated in any civilised society. Very often it has nothing to do with terrorism; it is about people trying to make money for money's sake, and it has to be rooted out. That needs to be a major priority if Northern Ireland is to move forward within the peace process. This type of behaviour is completely unacceptable in a civilised society, and all efforts must be made to ensure that it is rooted out.

Senator Brian Hayes: Like other Irish colleagues, I would like to be associated with the remarks of sympathy to our British colleagues on the deaths of British servicemen in the Gulf since the outbreak of conflict in Iraq. As Henry Bellingham rightly pointed out, significant numbers of Irish citizens are involved in that conflict. The connections between the Irish Guards and many Dublin families go back many years. I know of a woman in my constituency of Dublin South-West who is very proud of her son who is fighting as a member of the Irish Guards. We should recognise the connection that the British Army has had in Ireland for many years and the significant role that it has played in offering a career path to many young people.

We are clearly at a very dangerous point in the peace process, and it is the obligation of the Body to give every support to the two Governments in encouraging and cajoling the parties in Northern Ireland to get over the end line and ensure that the agreement is up and working again. In that regard, I fully support the efforts in recent months of Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern. However, in many respects the decision is not theirs. Ultimately, the decision will rest with the parties in Northern Ireland, who must now make final acts of completion, not in respect of the issues that have been debated this morning but in respect of the Good Friday Agreement itself.

We want to see the Good Friday Agreement implemented, and it is therefore a matter of much concern that some six years after the agreement was negotiated, and accepted democratically by the people of our country, North and South, we are still in a situation where large sections of the agreement have been scuttled — unfortunately, in my view — by Sinn Féin. The issue of decommissioning can no longer be fudged. It is about time that the IRA and Sinn Féin told us that the war is definitely over once and for all.

Not only the Unionist and Nationalist communities but the vast majority of people in the Republic of Ireland need to know that the war is over once and for all. The commitments that were given on the two-year time frame when the agreement was first signed have been welshed on. The commitments that were given after the Weston Park talks — that acts of decommissioning would be completed within one year — have also been welshed on. It is now time for the issue to be resolved once and for all. I ask the Sinn Féin representatives on the Body, and other representatives, to be clear about that.

Last week in the Dáil, Sinn Féin attempted to amend the motion on Iraq. Its proposed amendment suggested that it is totally opposed to weapons of mass destruction and that the international community must put weapons of mass destruction “verifiably beyond use”. I put it to Sinn Féin that if it is good enough to destroy weapons of mass destruction in the international context, it must be good enough to destroy weapons of mass destruction at home, where Sinn Féin has some responsibility for those weapons. It is time that we moved to destroy all weapons

of mass destruction on our island once and for all, so that the agreement, which has been endorsed by our people, North and South, can be implemented.

Mr Jeff Ennis MP: I thank the many TDs and Senators for their kind comments not only on Tony Blair’s continued commitment to the peace process in Northern Ireland but on the Iraq conflict. I shall continue with the theme of the links between the Northern Ireland situation and the conflict in Iraq. There is no place that that is brought home more than in my home village of Grimethorpe in South Yorkshire.

Grimethorpe is a small mining community with a population of around 5,000. It is mainly famous for hewing coal for the past 100 years or so, but it is also famous for the Grimethorpe colliery brass band and for that great black comedy ‘Brassed Off’, which I recommend to anyone who has not yet seen it.

That link began in 1969 when a good friend of mine, Gunner Clifford Loring, was the second soldier to be killed in Northern Ireland. He was shot in the head at the age of 17. He was a great footballer and goalkeeper, and I had the privilege to play in the same football team as him at school. He is still sadly missed in the Grimethorpe community.

We lost another soldier, Lance Corporal Malcolm Atkinson, in the Falklands war. I learned over the weekend — although it has not yet been confirmed — that Grimethorpe has lost its first soldier in Iraq. That brings the situation home to us.

Turning to recent political developments, I believe that there is now a shared understanding on the way forward, certainly among the pro-agreement parties. It goes without saying that decommissioning and the complete cessation of paramilitary activities is needed. I fully support the decision to delay the elections to allow more time for all parties to digest the joint declaration.

It would be easy to go over many of the remaining stumbling blocks, but I shall focus briefly on two. Senator Paschal Mooney mentioned the first key issue, which is the future of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. It will be a great day when Sinn Féin gives a commitment to get involved in the PSNI. Great strides have been made in the recruitment of officers from both sides of the community divide. More women have been recruited, and that does not get the mention that it deserves. The situation would be further helped if we could get Sinn Féin involved.

The other less significant stumbling block, which has been mentioned many times in plenary sessions in the past, is the continued vetoing of the Body by the Unionist parties. Therefore I make a plea to both Sinn Féin and to the Unionists at different levels of the conflict.

We have made great progress in the past few years. Lord Temple-Morris used the analogy that we are now on the home stretch of the peace process. Being a racing

fan, I much prefer the analogy that we are going out onto the final circuit and that we are going cosily. We have had numerous false dawns in the past; therefore, I hope that, on this occasion, we can succeed for the benefit of the people of both Northern Ireland and Éire.

11.00 am

Ms Liz O'Donnell TD: I want to associate myself with the sincere condolences expressed by my Irish colleagues to our British colleagues on the loss of life in the Gulf and to wish the British Prime Minister all my support in this difficult situation where people in the UK and in Ireland have conflicting feelings about the war, its justification and its outcome. However, everyone supports those soldiers who put their lives at risk for their country.

I support the motion, and although it is bland, that should not obscure the fact that we are at a critical and final stage with regard to the credibility of the peace process. Everyone was disappointed that, despite huge personal effort and investment of time by the two Prime Ministers and the intellectual investment of their officials over many months, culminating in 30 hours of negotiation at Hillsborough, it was not possible to reach closure on those acts of completion. We know what those words mean, as they have become part of the glossary of terms of the peace process. It is clear that the final solution will be a composite package. It always is, because it is a cross-cutting, interconnecting process, dealing with various grievances felt over many years, which must be settled politically.

It is important that people do not wait until after the election to make these moves. The reason for the postponement of the election — and Governments are loath to interfere with planned elections — was to give time and space for people to come up with the goods to make those moves, to transcend their own constituencies and to make voluntary contributions of compromise to the process. It is important that the next few weeks are used well by the parties in Northern Ireland that have responsibilities in that regard. I have no doubt about the commitment of the two Governments to deliver, on their side of the bargain, the shared understanding that has been laid out at Hillsborough. Those of us who are pro-agreement must urge the pro-agreement parties to pull together and to transcend their own constituencies and help the other guy.

Although the process is robust, it is not indefinitely sustainable without that level of cross-community support for each other at this stage. I hope that when the electorate in Northern Ireland vote on 29 May, they do so knowing that they have institutions that are workable, sustainable and honourable; otherwise, it will be a disaster to allow the people of Northern Ireland to go to the polls without the choice of that optimistic scenario. If those moves have not been made before the elections, it means that, as people go into the ballot box, they are going to see a panorama of division, discontent and uncertainty. They will then vote

traditionally, as they always do, for the most fundamental position, for the most extreme position.

It is important that, in supporting our two Prime Ministers, we urge the parties not to waste the extra time that has been given to them to make those compromises and to cross those bridges. We have all stretched our political credibility over many years to keep onside with the process and, as the Prime Minister said last October, acts of completion are now needed.

After the negotiations at Hillsborough, the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach said that they were expecting people to return having carried out their consultation, having surveyed the scene and having made that commitment to reach a final political settlement — that ultimate embrace of democracy, which everybody needs.

Many people have issues that must be resolved. However, from my point of view, the suspension of the institutions was a natural outcome of the fact that there had been a huge loss of confidence within moderate, progressive Unionism. We need that confidence to make the whole project work. That confidence is absolutely dependent on having cross-community support. If that is lost or whittled away by a lack of credibility, by people being constantly disappointed or underwhelmed by progress, or by the progressive Unionist mindset being constantly disappointed, the whole project is going to be set at naught.

In supporting the motion — which is bland and very supportive of the two Prime Ministers, the two Governments and all the parties in the North — I believe that it is extremely important that we send a message to those who have the influence and the wherewithal to make those big moves over the next few weeks and surprise us all. They can endorse what has been a huge democratic investment in the United Kingdom and Ireland in politicians, and in the hope that politics will work.

Sinn Féin is brilliant at politics. Everyone who currently works with that party in the political spectrum will agree that it has brought to politics all the stamina and commitment that have sustained its struggle over many years. That is the point of the peace process. Sinn Féin members have come to politics and are good at it. They work to develop their Republican agenda — their legitimate political agenda — through politics alone. Everyone would rejoice and welcome them with great support if we are to cross that bridge, I hope, before 29 May.

Ms Helen Jackson MP: We meet at a sombre time. Members of the Body have learned that the building of a peaceful resolution in the Middle East starts only when a ceasefire has been established. We should keep abreast of that difficult process as we see military action unfold. We also know in the Body that having established a peace process, factors that threaten the implementation of an agreement are acts of violence and disruption at a community level. We must hope that in these last few months before acts of completion, we do not see acts of violence

that threaten the finalisation of a way forward in Northern Ireland as we move toward the Assembly elections.

I am happy to support the motion that has been tabled. Its acceptability calls into question yet again the strange decision that the Body is not inclusive in the sense that neither pro-agreement Unionists nor any of the Unionist family in Northern Ireland attends its meetings. It is incumbent on everyone who is party to the Body to do what they can to ensure that Unionists are brought into it along with Welsh, Scottish and other Members of the wider Body as it is now constituted. We need to hear the voice of Unionists here, and it is a pity that they are not present.

The only aspect that perhaps should have had a more specific mention in the motion is policing. If we look back a year, that is the area in which we see real positive progress and practical development in the communities of Northern Ireland. That must be part of the way forward.

We have a new Chief Constable, Hugh Orde; we have the recruitment system, which is well on the way to establishing a different style and feel to the Police Service in Northern Ireland; we have superb co-operation between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Garda Síochána in the South of Ireland, which is so significant in stemming violence; and we should pay a huge tribute to the decision of the SDLP to participate in policing to enable Catholics to come forward into the recruitment process. The key issue is that any party that proposes a political way forward must agree that that involves participation in a civil policing body. It is key that Republicans in the North must take that decision. Once they have done that, the inevitability of the war being over and other aspects become easier because of their movement and become something that simply should be accepted as necessary by our Parliament, across the parties, and by the parties in the Dáil.

I hope that, by the next meeting in six months' time, two aspects that go together will have been completed. First, that policing includes all the parties that seek a political way forward in the North and, secondly, that the Assembly elections will have been held and a new devolved authority will exist.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): We will have our coffee now and resume at 11.30. I remind Members that the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association (BIPRA) is reporting these proceedings and will produce transcripts of them, which will be available in the near future.

The sitting was suspended at 11.13 am and resumed at 11.42 am

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): Some 15 people wish to contribute to the remainder of the debate as well as Michael Mates who will make the winding-up speech. We will have to adhere strictly to the deadline of less than four minutes for each contribution.

Mr Joe Sherlock TD: Go raibh maith agat. I associate myself with the sympathy that has been sent to all soldiers who lost their lives. I point out very clearly that Brian Lenihan TD does not speak for me or for the Irish people, if he is speaking for anyone.

Mr Michael Mates MP: Conor Lenihan.

Mr Joe Sherlock TD: Sorry, I mean Conor Lenihan. However, he does not speak for me or for the Irish people because the Irish are not there. The majority of Irish people are against the war.

I support the motion and I will give you the reasons, Co-Chairman. There has been condemnation of paramilitary units in the North of Ireland, but there was a situation in which children had to be escorted to school because of the attitudes of a certain section of the community. The adoption and implementation of the Good Friday Agreement would end that. The situation created an impression in the minds of people in the South of Ireland, but people in the North would understand it better. However, it was appalling to see parents depriving other children through sectarianism, and that should be condemned as much as paramilitary activity.

The implementation of the agreement and the continuation of the political process will put an end to that type of development. The motion is central to ensuring peace, stability and sustainable political institutions in Northern Ireland, and it may lead eventually to a united Ireland. Therefore, I give it my support.

11.45 am

Mr Harry Barnes MP: Although I am a Labour MP, I have often been critical of Tony Blair's leadership, never more so than over the issue of Iraq, which is important to me as I did my national service there between 1954 and 1956. The experience that I gained in Iraq clarified my political position as a democratic socialist. I am also critical of Tony Blair's adoption of the third-way approach, which seems to link two incompatibles: the freedom of the market, which often produces social problems, and social justice.

However, the third-way approach works fantastically well for Northern Ireland. It is an attempt to create an artificial centre in Northern Ireland politics; rather than adopting either a Republican or a Unionist position, an alternative approach is taken. Mr Blair and many others should be complimented for taking that approach. Given my criticisms in other areas, I thought that if I paid Mr Blair that compliment, he might let me back in the tent.

As politicians, we know that things seldom run smoothly, and when progress is made, as has been the case with the Belfast Agreement, it creates problems in different areas — countervailing developments take place. As was spelt out by Henry Bellingham, it was almost inevitable that paramilitaries would move to different Mafia-type activities centred on drugs and smuggling.

A big problem emerges with the election on 29 May. For the best of motives, which I support, there has been a move to establish identification for electoral arrangements in Northern Ireland. The new registration system for elections targets individuals rather than households, and it seems that millions of people are missing from electoral registers. To ensure that people have their democratic rights, getting the electoral register situation right is very important to the dramatic elections that are to be held on 29 May.

The British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body should deal with issues such as electoral registration and paramilitary developments. When politicians meet in Committees, they follow separate agendas. It is often the case that TDs and Senators, quite reasonably, push for Committees to deal with matters that tie in with their constituency interests. The same can be said of the Northern Ireland MPs on the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, of which I am a member.

The Steering Committee may help with this, but perhaps we need to consider how best to assist the further development of the peace process that we talk about continually. There may be issues in which we should be engaged. Many of those will be bread-and-butter issues, because we want normal politics to develop in Northern Ireland.

Senator Brian Hayes pointed out the peculiar situation in the Dáil when Sinn Féin looked for “verifiable” decommissioning in Iraq. I wonder sometimes who has been engaged in the highest proportion of decommissioning. Is it Saddam Hussein or P O’Neill? We should relate the two issues.

If Sinn Féin members in the Dáil are talking about “verifiability” in relation to weapons in Iraq, it may be that the matter is catching up on them, and they are beginning to understand some of the areas that need to be moved into. However, there may be even more significant areas than decommissioning to consider — for instance, the end of intimidation, and whether we need an anti-intimidation unit to tackle that matter. There is also the issue of exiles. No one should be on the run from the “on the runs”. If something is being done, or if some deal has been made, in connection with “on the runs”, those who are on the run from paramilitaries must also be dealt with.

I do not know when the BIIPB last formally approached David Trimble and the Ulster Unionist Party about their non-attendance at our meetings.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): It was about six months ago.

Mr Harry Barnes MP: The BIIPB should make that formal approach. David Winnick was recently interviewed in the ‘Irish Post’ and, at length, he put the argument for why we should be here. That interview would form a good basis for the formal points that could be put to David Trimble about attending.

Mr Arthur Morgan TD: Go raibh maith agat, a Chomh-Chathaoirligh. Many people have expressed their view this morning about looking forward — with the possible exception of Senator Mary O’Rourke, who rightly commented that people facing elections may well be looking over their shoulders.

Senator Mary O’Rourke: I know all about that.

Mr Arthur Morgan TD: However, people were looking forward in the main. I support the motion, but I look forward to a time when the primary debates here will be about issues such as enterprise or green energy. I would love to have the opportunity to discuss with parliamentary colleagues from all parts of Britain the recent British White Paper on energy — most of which, ironically, I welcome. Those are important issues that affect us here. However, with the peace process still developing and the talks to try to re-establish the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement ongoing, it is inevitable that those issues dominate.

Everyone knows — although I wonder if they do, given some of the comments that I have heard this morning — that considerable progress has been made in the recent talks at Hillsborough. Significant progress was made on difficult issues such as policing and justice, “on the runs” and exiles, even if those matters were not brought to a conclusion. The pieces of the jigsaw are on the table, and it would not take much to put them together in order to facilitate everybody in moving forward. If we cut to the chase behind the inevitable political waffle that most politicians occasionally get involved in, it is clear that most people accept that that is the case.

Other issues remain as “work in progress”. I feel obliged to comment on Lord Glentoran’s amendment, which was withdrawn, and his desire for the disbandment of the IRA, homing in exclusively on that one organisation. I could respond to that in several different ways. I would love to see the occupying army — the foreign army in this state — gone from Ireland; at least the IRA is indigenous.

I say that provocatively because it is easy to get back into the trench. I could make a powerful Republican speech that would make most people cringe and would excite Republicans right across the land. *[Interruption]*.

Army deafness prevented me from hearing that comment; perhaps someone could advise me of what was said later, but I am sure that it was interesting.

I am trying to be measured and analytical about the situation. Behind the politicking to which I have referred, most people are beginning to move, notwithstanding the public positions that people inevitably adopt — or think that they must adopt — because of the impending election in the North. My party would much prefer to see a deal in place. The election on 29 May will almost be an enthusiastic rerun of a strong selling point of the Good Friday Agreement. For several reasons, I am not

convinced that the election will happen then. If I state those reasons, it will look like I am on a political stool, trying to put down David Trimble or somebody else. Perhaps we will talk about that over dinner this evening.

The Body knows my view on policing, which I gave in Manchester and which has not changed. I welcome the proposed amendments to Patten's legislation. They offer a considerable prospect of progress on policing. However, I am also concerned about electoral registration, an issue that was raised by Mr Harry Barnes. Between 70,000 and 80,000 people have apparently been delisted. Last week, colleagues in Newry and in south Armagh told me that when five members of a certain family applied to be included on the register, it was granted only to the head of that household. That is a big issue, and, although time is limited, I hope that it will be dealt with.

The Sinn Féin amendments to the Dáil motion on Iraq and the use of Shannon International Airport by US military aircraft asked for weapons of mass destruction to be decommissioned and put verifiably beyond use internationally. Senator Brian Hayes's contribution was not politicking: it was worse than politicking. It was the worst type of political hypocrisy. When he wagged his finger at me, he did not tell the Body that his party abstained from the vote on the amendment. They did not see fit to vote on it — *[Interruption]*.

I must get down off my political box. I am sorry about that. It is typical of us in the political world to be overenthusiastic in our response to issues such as Robin Glentoran's amendment. I will try to refrain from being overenthusiastic. I am also conscious that in Manchester I went considerably over the time that was allocated to me. I am anxious not to do so again.

The Lord Dubs: I add my thanks for the expressions that have been made about the troops who have been killed or badly injured in the fighting in Iraq.

There cannot be anyone here who has not visited some of the divided communities in Belfast on both sides of the peace line. There cannot be anyone here who has not seen the graffiti on the walls. Some of the Loyalist graffiti, which I saw a few weeks ago, is harsh, aggressive and expresses hostility. What must it be like for young people who are brought up in such divided communities? How can we expect them, when they become adults, to understand the Good Friday Agreement or the process of reconciliation when they live in a divided society in which they may not meet a member of the other community for years? They then demonise the other community. Hatred and passion is demonstrated in grotesque obscenities such as those that Joe Sherlock described that took place at Holy Cross Primary School. We should therefore not be surprised.

I visited some of Belfast's integrated schools when I was there a few weeks ago. They are in a minority, but they do brave work.

12.00

The integrated primary and secondary schools at Hazelwood in north Belfast draw on young people from divided communities and bring them together, teaching them that they can respect each other's beliefs and religions, but co-operate as friends and as fellow students at school, and then go out into the community with that spirit. Unless the young people have an opportunity to feel that way, we as politicians are asking a lot to expect them to behave differently from the way in which they have behaved over many years.

The way in which young people are educated, and with whom they are educated, will have an enormous effect on what I would call the hearts and minds of the next generation. If that works, we can stabilise the peace process by having it properly grounded in the consent of the next generation of young people. That is why I want to pay tribute to the teachers and parents, and to the students who attend integrated schools, sometimes in the face of enormous hostility from other young people in their own communities, and who do that because they believe that that is the way forward for a better future for everyone.

I am not saying that integrated schools should be the only pattern. All I am saying is that all parents should have the choice of whether or not to send their children to an integrated school. Those children would have their religious teaching as they would in a segregated school, but would work closely and daily with people from the other community.

When I was a Minister in Northern Ireland, I attended a meeting in Dungannon about a project in which young people — usually one Catholic and one Protestant — went to stay with American families for six weeks. During the reunion of several hundred of those children and their parents, I was shocked to discover that some of those parents had never sat down to have a cup of tea with people from the other community. That is the legacy that has to be tackled at all levels. Whether it is through the Good Friday Agreement, which I passionately support, or whether it is through local community projects or schools, everything possible must be done to ensure that the peace process is properly based and grounded with local people.

Mr John Hume MP: One point that we do not make often enough is that the most important thing about the Good Friday Agreement is that, for the first time, the people of this island have spoken clearly as to how they wish to live together, by coming out in strength in referendums, North and South, and voting for the agreement. That means that it is the duty of all true democrats to implement the will of the people. That is a point that we should make often, and, of course, it is a point that can be used to deal with other problems that are holding up implementation.

The fundamental principle of the IRA from its very foundation was that it was acting in the name of the Irish people. The will of the Irish people, having been expressed,

should strengthen Sinn Féin's role in bringing about total disarmament. I accept that the IRA is committed to the peace process. More important than decommissioning is that when the IRA say that it is are totally committed to the peace process and that its violence is totally ended, that it is totally true, because it could decommission on a Monday and secretly recommission on a Tuesday.

I am surprised that Unionists have not said that their major achievement in the Good Friday Agreement was that, for the first time, the whole of Nationalist Ireland accepted the principle of consent. It is a fundamental principle of Unionism that there can be no change without the consent of a majority of its people. What should be said is that if those Unionist parties that are opposed to the agreement and are attempting to overthrow it are allowed to succeed, they will have overthrown the principle of consent.

In future, if the Good Friday Agreement is overthrown, it will be simply a matter of the two Governments working together to resolve the problem. We cannot have a situation in which people can claim that they are only in favour of consent as long as the majority is what they want it to be.

Those are very important factors. Another important factor relates to the institutions being in place. According to the philosophy of our peace process and the agreement, the institutions are central to providing lasting peace and stability. There are three principles at the heart of the agreement. The first is respect for difference, with the identities of both communities fully respected and no victory for either; the second is the institutions that allow for that; and, most importantly, the third is working together in our common interest. That means real politics: no longer waving flags at each other, but working together on the socio-economic development of our community. The institutions were created to allow us to do that together: we have a proportional Assembly and a proportional Executive. As we work together, we become involved in the real and lasting solution to our problems, because by working together as we have never done before on matters of common interest, we break down the distrust of the past.

In one or two generations there will be a totally new society based on agreement and respect for difference, with no victory for either side. That is the strategy, but it is central to that strategy that those institutions are in place. Therefore the argument should be made in very strong terms that anyone who is against the restoration of the institutions is against lasting peace and stability.

There are some immediate issues such as policing. Certain people are not getting involved in the Policing Board. The basis of order in any society is agreement on how it is governed. The reason that we have systems of government is to ensure law and order. If there is disagreement on the system of government, as there was in Northern Ireland until the Good Friday Agreement, the police will be seen as being on one side, which they were.

Now that we have a system of government that has been agreed by all sections of the people, our Police Service reflects that. It was agreed that the Police Service would be drawn from all sections of the community. I do not understand why any party that is truly in favour of law and order cannot be fully involved not only in implementing it, but in developing it. I would like to see Sinn Féin join the Policing Board. However, if it wants more changes, those changes should be made by all sections of society in order to ensure that the Police Service continues to be a service for the whole community. As we move into a new year, I hope that the institutions will be put in place as soon as possible and that, following the elections in late May, the real healing process will begin.

Mr Alistair Carmichael MP: I wish to pick up on Lord Dubs's well-made point about the importance of integrated education for the future of Northern Ireland. It is impossible to overstate how important that is, and I place on record my appreciation of the tremendous work that is done by the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE).

I am a newcomer to the politics of Northern Ireland, and one thing that struck me as I got to know the different parties there was the remarkable amount of enthusiasm for the resurrection of the Northern Ireland Assembly. It is clear to me that a taste of normality has been given to the people and to the political process in the North, and there is an appetite for more of that.

Like everyone else, I was wary about the delay of elections until 29 May. On reflection, I am relieved that it is not a longer delay. It is clear that the current Assembly has run its course and that there is a need for a new democratic mandate. I detect a certain nervousness about the prospect of elections, but in the circumstances, and given the history, that is perfectly understandable. However, if we are to be true democrats, we must have confidence in the people. We have come this far because there is a genuine will among ordinary people for a peace that must be more than the absence of conflict.

Members have spoken this morning about the need for concrete acts of completion. As Senator Brian Hayes said, there is a clamant need for those acts to include an unambiguous declaration by the IRA that the war is over. I add my voice to the calls for the position of those who have been exiled from their communities by paramilitaries to be addressed. There will not be true normalisation in Northern Ireland until every person from those communities feels comfortable enough to live there in peace.

The issue of policing also dominated the discussion this morning. The remarkable progress that has been made in recruiting people from Nationalist communities should be placed on record. I hope that that is a sign of the success of the process of normalisation. If that is the case, some of the rather artificial practices that have been employed might be dropped, such as the fifty-fifty recruitment policy.

Members have spoken about the parallels between the current situation in Iraq and the situation in Northern Ireland. Senator Brian Hayes mentioned the position of Sinn Féin in the Dáil. That seemed to me to be a good point, but not knowing the detail of proceedings there, I am not going to commit myself to endorsing it at this stage. There is another perspective to that point: Tony Blair should be commended for the patience and commitment that he displayed in dealing with the issue of decommissioning in Northern Ireland. It is all the more puzzling that he was not prepared to be more supportive of exactly the same process in Iraq.

I join with other Members from the British Parliament in thanking our Irish colleagues for their expressions of support and sympathy. I endorse the remarks of Alex Salmond and others who have spoken about why we should be in Iraq; but now that we are there, I am sure that we would all agree that our principal concern should be to get out as quickly as possible and with the minimum loss of life.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): I remind members of Committee D (Environmental and Social) that their meeting will take place at 6.00 pm in the Slaney Suite.

Mr Seymour Crawford TD: I associate myself with the sympathy that has been extended to families and to the British and US Governments on the loss of soldiers in Iraq. Over the generations, thousands of Irish men and women have laid down their lives with the British armed forces in various conflicts, and many in Ireland are anxious for family members who are involved in the present war. I pay tribute to Tony Blair for affording so much time to the Northern Ireland conflict despite the situation in Iraq. Whether or not we agree with the conflict in Iraq, Tony Blair has given tremendous commitment and time to Northern Ireland.

Conor Lenihan commented on the time and space left before the election on 29 May. Since the Good Friday Agreement was signed, there has been much time and space. Many important issues were agreed at that signing, including policing, the release of prisoners and decommissioning. Along with Arthur Morgan, I believe that much headway was made at the recent discussions. I hope that that will allow Sinn Féin to support the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

12.15 pm

Many Catholics are now prepared to join the police force in spite of the historic difficulties, and that is a very important move. Prisoners were released, but decommissioning has not taken place. I was in the Chamber when Sinn Féin tabled the amendment, and I think Mr Morgan realised that the majority of TDs thought that it would have been strange if we had voted for it without a tie-in with decommissioning in Northern Ireland, because decommissioning is important everywhere. However, it is not that simple.

Last week, I met a couple who live a few miles away from me. They were aggrieved that they are now meeting released prisoners who were involved in burning down homes at the time of Senator Billy Fox's murder. That couple now feels somewhat left out. I am not trying to open up old wounds, but there are still many delicate issues to be dealt with. A lot of headway has been made, and it is tremendous that people can drive through Northern Ireland in peace and security with no sign of undue armed forces. The difference between now and 10 years ago is dramatic. However, there is still much fear and anxiety about the whole issue.

If the elections on 29 May produce the right results, that will bring about a lasting peace. However, steps must be taken between now and then, or there could be a very strong element of hard-line Unionists in power. Perhaps that is what some people want, but I would like to see those — from all sides — who were involved in the Good Friday Agreement getting their just reward. Recently DUP members were involved in the workings of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and they have been positive about that. It is important that the Assembly does work, but I urge and beg those on both sides of the divide to ensure that what is necessary to make the Good Friday Agreement finally work is carried out, and they know what that involves.

Mr Dominic Grieve MP: It is perhaps a measure of the success of the peace process that the first part of the debate this morning seemed to be bland. Everyone came out, not with platitudes — because they were heartfelt statements — but with a series of round-the-table agreements. It was only when Senator Brian Hayes started to refer to “welshing” that I thought we might get a more exciting debate on Gaelic/Celtic views of each other.

However, I detect that the mood has changed slightly, and I am grateful to Mr Morgan for his contribution because it seemed to help, and I want to concentrate on that. I was minded to vote for Lord Glentoran's amendment. I am glad that he withdrew it; however, it still represents in my soul part of the frustration that exists over Sinn Féin's ambivalent attitude towards the disbandment of the IRA.

Mr Morgan made comments about the problems on policing, justice and the return of exiles, and I accept all that. Those are all political issues and they need to be resolved, but none of them justifies the retention of links with a paramilitary organisation by a mainstream political party of a democratic country or, for that matter, the existence of that paramilitary organisation. The only other example of that in Western Europe is Herri Batasuna and ETA, and that is not a happy example.

In contrast, the Protestant paramilitaries are low-grade thugs with mercifully very little political impact at all. The status that Sinn Féin seeks is what distinguishes it from other paramilitary organisations. My plea to Arthur Morgan is this: please, let us get on with it. I cannot see

what the possible downside is for Sinn Féin. The beneficial consequences would be enormous. Nor do I see that it would in any way lead to the disappearance of the Republican tradition. Just as in the Scottish Borders where my family comes from, I am quite sure that if that approach works, and when some of the wounds have healed in 50 or 100 years — and I do not mean this flippantly — there will be European grants for interpretative museums and, for all I know, competitions for finding the Kalashnikov in the thatch. That is where we must get to, because democratic politics cannot have that sort of input and subtext of violence. To my mind, Robin Glentoran's proposed amendment typified that sense of impatience. It is one of the key missing jigsaw pieces. May we please have it as soon as possible? When we get it, everyone will find that the peace process will suddenly move forward much faster than expected.

Mr Johnny Brady TD: I too would like to be associated with the vote of sympathy and extend my sympathies to the British Members on the death of their soldiers over the past week. All we can do is hope and pray that this war comes to an end very quickly.

In supporting the motion, it is also vital that we support the intensive efforts of the two Governments to achieve a successful outcome to the process. I spent last weekend in Northern Ireland, and I saw that enormous progress has been made in some towns there. There are no check-points or look-out posts. It is great to see development and cranes and so forth and building workers rebuilding their towns. I hope that that continues. To see people going about their business calmly and peacefully is also very welcome.

I respectfully suggest that the parties supporting the Good Friday Agreement should consider how best this agreement can be moved on and refrain from taking part in what is becoming the blame game. Go raibh maith agat, a Chomh-Chathaoirigh.

Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP: I wish to raise some new points that I believe are within the footprint of this general motion. In the Programme of Business, Arthur Morgan has tabled a question to the Minister for Foreign Affairs about whether Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly or Westminster Members should have the right of audience in, or to attend, the Oireachtas. That is a constitutional matter for the people of the Irish Republic. As a parliamentarian, I believe that our *raison d'être* is to believe in parliamentary systems. The people in Northern Ireland are suffering on bread-and-butter issues as a result of the level and extent of representation from Northern Ireland in Westminster. That goes right across the spectrum. Sinn Féin is not there for well-understood and well-known reasons. There is a problem regarding attendance by Members on bread-and-butter issues, and I want to demonstrate that in several ways.

First, I was very pleased to join with Gerry Adams and, funnily enough, Jeffrey Donaldson, in welcoming

to Westminster the Belfast-based group Families Bereaved Through Car Crime, which pleaded with UK Ministers to do something about the level of sentencing and so on. While there is direct rule, issues such as these should be raised on the Floor of the House of Commons, but they are not being sufficiently articulated.

Other issues will suffer even more as a result of the growth in Northern Ireland politics of almost institutionalised dual mandates. Two leading Unionist MPs are seeking election to the Assembly, and that will be matched by the DUP and our colleagues from the SDLP who served in the past. Almighty God could only be in two places at the same time on two occasions in the Bible, but we are asking Northern Ireland politicians to do so day after day. That system should go. It does not matter how grand or distinguished the Members are.

I want to demonstrate that fact. I remember Alex Salmond and other colleagues from Scotland, Wales and England attending a fisheries debate. It dealt with bread-and-butter issues, but there was not one representative from Northern Ireland at that debate, despite the fact that fishing is a major industry there. Recently, I served on a Committee that dealt with the Draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Continuance of Part VII) Order 2003. Part VII of the Act relates exclusively to Northern Ireland, but there were no representatives of Republican or Nationalist interests there. The Northern Ireland Assembly Elections Bill was taken through all its stages in one day in the House of Commons only two weeks ago, but not one representative of Republican or Nationalist interests voted or spoke on it. That is not satisfactory.

New electoral arrangements have been mentioned today. The flawed legislation that deals with the electoral register, which we passed in good faith, will return to haunt us. We tried to address what was seen as widespread abuse of the electoral registration system in Northern Ireland, but now the pendulum has swung too far the other way. I join with colleagues who have referred to the matter. The equivalent of one Westminster MP's electorate has disappeared from the Northern Ireland electoral register. It is clear that young people who are away from home at colleges and universities, and who are entitled to be registered, are not going to register.

The UK should not be smug or sanguine about the matter because, for the first time, the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) will monitor the elections in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and it will apply European democratic rules. Although we acted in good faith, we have not dealt with the matter satisfactorily, and we should revisit the question of registering the electorate in Northern Ireland with vigour.

The Steering Committee should now move with the two sovereign Governments to explore the possibility of making the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body treaty-

based. One of the fears, objections or excuses that Unionists give for not attending is that they see the Body as being based on the old Anglo-Irish Agreement. For that reason, and to improve the Body's status, we should try to establish a new treaty or make the Body subject to two new statutes in the Oireachtas and the Westminster Parliament. That might overcome some of those difficulties.

Members of Committee A went to Belfast and met colleagues from across the political spectrum. Denis Haughey, an SDLP Assembly Member, raised a matter that I was embarrassed to say that I had not understood, and I agreed to raise it here. I was unaware that the SDLP has been arguing for proportional representation for Westminster elections in Northern Ireland. I have an open mind on the issue, but that demonstrates the lack of communication among some of our colleagues over there and those of us who are interested in these subjects.

That is the SDLP policy, and I am told that John Hume raised the matter elsewhere before the last election. However, the SDLP has not been banging on the door to raise the matter either at Westminster or with our guest colleagues from the Oireachtas. That is something that could, and should, have been in the frame for discussion because there have been several opportunities at British-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference meetings and when agreements have been reached. The issue should have been flagged up.

I understand the pertinence of the matter of proportional representation, because, with regard to elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly and Westminster, the so-called Greening of the west could create new imbalances, frustrations and difficulties. It would be worthwhile for the two sovereign Governments to examine the matter. At our next plenary, the Body could examine a paper on whether it would be appropriate for Northern Ireland elections for Westminster seats to be fought on a proportional representation basis.

Mr John Griffiths AM: Diolch yn fawr iawn, Gyd-Gadeirydd. I wish to address the matter of welshing, which Dominic Grieve spoke about earlier. The bonds between the Celtic nations are far too strong to allow a little matter such as using language without thinking too much about it to upset us. However, our English colleagues may be more upset because the term comes from the inability or failure of an English Prince of Wales to pay his gambling debts. *[Laughter]*.

12.30 pm

My mother is Irish; she is from County Kerry. Many of my Irish colleagues would perhaps agree with me that having endured many so-called Irish jokes over the years, it is wonderful that because of the fantastic and impressive success of the Irish economy, few of those jokes are heard now. In Wales, we hope very much that we will be able to emulate that success before too long, especially now that we have our National Assembly for Wales.

As with some of my Scottish colleagues, it is my fervent hope that the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Parliament, the Isle of Man Parliament and others can play an effective role in progressing the peace process, especially in interacting with a reinstated Northern Ireland Assembly. We have touched on those matters on several occasions since the devolved institutions became Members of the Body, and the Steering Committee discussed them also. However, nothing very concrete has come forward as yet.

It is timely that the Steering Committee and the Body return to those matters and consider how things may be structured formally to enhance the interaction between the devolved bodies, which have much in common. The devolved bodies are fairly new, and they face common challenges and share common experience, although the Northern Ireland Assembly has many special factors. Nonetheless, we can learn much from each other. In doing so, some of us can address those matters with less historical baggage and perhaps bring a fresh approach to progress, which is what we all want.

To facilitate that interaction, I request that a fresh and urgent examination is undertaken to make the activities of the Body more structured. We can build on many links not only at parliamentary or Assembly level but throughout civic society. It is great to see young people from Wales, Scotland, the Isle of Man and elsewhere visit Northern Ireland and vice versa.

My mother is from Valentia Island. Many people in Wales have ancestral and other links with Ireland. My colleague and friend Brian Gibbons, a doctor in Wales and fellow Assembly Member, is Irish. He will speak later. I see Chris Ruane looking at me; he will speak next. So many of us have Irish links, and there is much to build on. We must take things forward on that front because although we have discussed it several times, we have not done anything structured about it.

I know that time is limited, but I join others in reflecting on the situation in Iraq and the tragic loss of life there. That situation casts a long shadow over everything else that is happening. It is right that we should mark the tragic loss of life in Iraq, and I hope that that situation ends as quickly as possible with minimal loss of life.

Mr Chris Ruane MP: I also extend my condolences to the servicemen and their families, not only those from the UK but those from the USA. I also extend my condolences to the innocent families in Iraq that have suffered losses.

One of our colleagues said that it is so easy for the media to concentrate on negative elements such as the repeated breakdowns of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the frequent beatings and pipe bombings. However, it is incumbent on us, as elected representatives, to remind ourselves of the successes over the past five years, and several colleagues have done that today. Jamie Stone mentioned the success in cross-border tourism in Armagh, which is bringing prosperity and breaking down barriers, and our colleague Cecilia Keaveney from Donegal reminded us

of the ferry service that is bringing prosperity across the border there.

We should also remember that there are policemen, soldiers and civilians who are alive today because we went down the path of peace five years ago. We should also remind ourselves of the confidence that is developing in the Northern Ireland economy, with domestic investment and foreign inward investment, which is only happening because there is stability. Investors and venture capitalists will not invest in an area where there is great political instability.

We should pay tribute to the leaders over the past five years — Gerry Adams, John Hume and David Trimble. They have faced particularly difficult tasks, especially those who represent the hardliners on both sides. They are like captains in the Armada. The Armada had to sail at the speed of the slowest ship; if it did not do that, slow ships were lost. That is what has taken place over the past five years. The speed has not been as great as we would have wanted, but had concessions been made too early by those leaders — who know their own communities — we might not be here today. A concession made three or four years ago might have taken us back to the troubles, so we ought to appreciate the perspective that those leaders have of their communities.

We ought to be careful about finger pointing; we need to get the balance right. It is not right to point only at Sinn Féin time after time after time and mention policing and decommissioning. There are problems across the political spectrum, and we ought to be even-handed about them. To be fair, progress is being made on those issues. Sinn Féin hopes to see the day when young Catholic people can join the Police Service of Northern Ireland and be proud; that situation has not been reached yet, but it might happen in the near future. Those are successes that we should be proud of.

Many Members mentioned breaking down barriers and building links. That is what the Body should concentrate on. It meets only twice a year, but it is setting a precedent for inclusiveness and for breaking down barriers. I commend the work of my colleague Gareth Thomas, who is the Parliamentary Private Secretary to Paul Murphy, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and who takes delegations of British MPs over to Northern Ireland. Lord Dubs said that there cannot be a person in this room who has not been to Northern Ireland and seen the progress that has been made there. I have not been to Northern Ireland, so it is incumbent on me to get over there. I must get my airfare together to do that.

Arthur Morgan mentioned representation from the North in relation to the political institutions in the South, and that should be encouraged. Town twinning is a great idea. My home town of Rhyl was twinned recently with Athy, and its councillors and officers have been over to Ireland to swap political perspectives.

We ought to be doing more for our schools, and Alex Salmond mentioned that there should be long-term

funding for that. Welsh schools, in particular, have much to offer Gaelic-speaking schools in the North and in the South. We have made rapid progress in preserving the Welsh language, and we could share our perspective on that with Gaelic-speaking schools in the North and in the South. I echo the thoughts of John Griffiths and Alex Salmond that the Body should discuss, as a matter of urgency, how we can build on those links and develop financing for them.

The Lord Brooke: At this stage, I shall be elliptical and telegraphic, since everything that could possibly be said in the debate has already been said. First, I express great gratitude to our Irish hosts for arranging this plenary session in Kilkenny. It enabled me yesterday, at the Rock of Cashel, to express, for the first time, penance that my direct ancestor, the Earl of Kildare, had burned the cathedral there and excused himself afterwards on the grounds that he had been misinformed that the archbishop was inside. *[Laughter]*.

Peter Temple-Morris used a suitable metaphor about racing, for racing binds these islands together. I endorse his warning about the final straight. At the first Derby after the war, Denzil Batchelor was asked to broadcast a commentary to the forces overseas. He did so that evening after the race was over, having made notes on his cuff. All was well until a corporal in Burma wrote to the BBC and said that he had been alarmed to find that a race, which before the war had only taken two and a half minutes, now took four minutes. We must hope that the final stages of this particular race are shorter rather than longer.

During the second world war there was an episode known as the “man that never was”, and today, Robin Glentoran has invented the concept of the amendment that never was. As is suitable from an Olympic bobsleigh champion, he was clearly in favour of cavalry charges as opposed to trench warfare. As Kevin McNamara remarked in his references to the SDLP, I too suspect that trench warfare is more the mode of the peace process than cavalry charges.

To those who do not understand cricket, I apologise for using it as a metaphor. My only defence is that I used the same metaphors to Mrs Thatcher, and I do not think that she understood them either. In his youth, John Hume was a slow left-arm bowler — a mode of attack in cricket that relies on great stamina and a nagging length. Those were highly relevant virtues throughout the 30 years of the troubles, and they remain virtues today, as John Hume demonstrated in his speech.

Several references to exiles were made during the debate. I endorse Harry Barnes’s remarks, as I often do, and I am sorry that he cannot hear me say that. However, I conclude in a spirit of optimism by saying that Hugh Orde, as Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, has shown an admirable concentration on reducing “ordinary decent crime”. As a consequence, perhaps the exiles will move up the agenda, because a line cannot be drawn under

the past 30 years until that matter has been resolved on both sides of the community.

Mr Tony Killeen TD: Go raibh maith agat, a Chomh-Chathaoirligh. I too convey my sympathy to the families of the lost servicemen through their parliamentarians who are here today, and, indeed, to all who will suffer because of the war and who have suffered for the past 20 years or so in Iraq.

We are witnessing truly distressing images from the war, and it will do us well to remember that it is not long since similar images were a fact of life on this small island. Those of us who are somewhat removed from the situation need to remember that we are asking people to put terrible memories aside — people bear physical and psychological scars. That is one reason that it is necessary to reaffirm support for the Good Friday Agreement. There may be a view that the motion is somewhat bland, but it is vital and fundamental to progress in Northern Ireland. We are aware that even some of the pro-agreement parties, and in some cases substantial percentages of their memberships, seem to be investing more energy in undermining the agreement than in working for it. In particular, I have in mind elements of the Ulster Unionist Council and some of its members in the Assembly and elsewhere. That is why it is important that we reaffirm the agreement's position and make clear that it is not up for renegotiation. Even some of those who are anti-agreement are beginning to face up to that fact.

However, commitment to the agreement means all aspects of it working, and I agree with those who have said that policing is a key issue. While Sinn Féin refuses to sit on the Policing Board, it refuses, *de facto*, to work a key element of the agreement, and that is equally as wrong as the actions of the Ulster Unionist Council. I realise that, as a political party, it is difficult for Sinn Féin to change its position before the election, but it is vital that there is universal participation immediately afterwards. However, we should also acknowledge that considerable movement has been made on all sides — even by those whom I have mildly criticised. The next eight weeks or so are hugely important, and the Body should reaffirm its support and throw its weight behind the efforts of the two Governments. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Brian Gibbons AM: As the penultimate contributor, I admit that I am impressed with the level of debate and the considered thoughts of many people. One thing that inspired me to contribute has been the many references of solidarity and support for the British armed forces in Iraq, even though some of us have reservations about the timeliness of their deployment. There is also concern that the misapplication of military force to defeat terrorism in Iraq could weld a whole generation to a new era of terrorism. We must consider that, because it is a lesson from our own history that the misapplication of military force to defeat terrorism has a counterproductive effect.

12.45 pm

The sentiments of so many of the Irish political representatives, particularly those regarded as being part of a Nationalist tradition, is a sign of how far matters have moved forward in Ireland. There would have been a time not too many decades ago when, if people had made such statements, they would be making them at a certain amount of political risk to themselves.

I wonder whether we might go a step further and consider our attitude towards Remembrance Sunday. As someone who has had a lot of innate resistance to engaging with Remembrance Sunday because of its militarist connotations, even though I have lived in the United Kingdom for 30 years, I think, having listened to the contributions today, perhaps it is time to consider how we engage with Remembrance Sunday, not only those who are opposed to militarism but those from an Irish Nationalist tradition. I appreciate that steps have been made to try to engage with Remembrance Sunday — Seymour Crawford made the point about the number of Irish soldiers who have died on foreign fields under the British flag — and that move would not go amiss with regard to the Ulster Unionist community. The fact that the Ulster Unionists are not at this plenary session is a big drawback and a disappointment to me. I realise that the Unionists will not be impressed by a single gesture, but if we could consider how we relate to Remembrance Sunday in view of the comments made about the British armed forces in Iraq, that would be a small step towards reconciliation on this island.

Mr Michael Mates MP: I know that I speak for every one of my British colleagues here when I say how grateful we are for the expressions of sympathy and concern for our troops and servicemen in Iraq. It is very much appreciated.

From now on I might not speak for all our colleagues. This was a relatively bland motion, and I pointed that out in the Steering Committee meeting last night. I asked what there was to debate on the motion, and that has been shown by the fact that no one, aside from a very tongue-in-cheek Lord Glentoran, has spoken against it. That is because the peace process has moved faster in the Body than it has among those who are trying to solve the problems in Northern Ireland. I echo what John Ellis said about the first few meetings that we had when a peace process was very definitely required. That it has come so far is a tribute to everybody who has taken part, but, most of all, it is because we have got to know each other. There was palpable hostility the first couple of times we met, and that was not helped by a particularly vigorous speech by David Andrews, before he became the Irish Foreign Minister, in which he raised so many hackles on the British side that I wondered how I was going to wind up in that debate. However, we have come a very long way, and that is to everybody's credit.

Several people have referred to Unionists not attending the conference. This is trotted out every time, and it is

inevitable that it should be. Harry Barnes raised it this time. The Body may be interested to know that the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, which I have the privilege of chairing, went to the Dáil Committee on Foreign Affairs in Dublin, and included in our party were not only two Ulster Unionists, Roy Beggs and Martin Smyth, but perhaps most remarkably of all, Peter Robinson. They came and participated, so that scene is starting to change.

Someone suggested — I cannot tell from my notes who it was — that approaches should be made to David Trimble. However, I can inform the Body that I communicate with Mr Trimble about the BIIPB. I get together with him after each of the meetings and tell him how much the Unionist voice is missed. I believe that things are moving in that respect, but they are moving more slowly than any of us would wish. Given David Trimble's other problems, it is understandable — if not excusable — that he does not want to upset any more of his people by putting his head into this lion's den.

I agree with a remark that my colleague Kevin McNamara made when he said that the Body was debating in the dark. That may be one of the reasons that everything has been so bland this morning; nobody knows whether there has been a breakthrough. Everyone has talked about a breakthrough. However, I am not sure if the breakthrough is imminent — and no one can be sure of that until announcements are made that the breakthrough is a reality and not just a hope. The next few weeks will be critical in that regard because of the probable impending election, but I will return to that issue.

Remarks were made about the need for progress on policing. Several Members, in particular Arthur Morgan, made that point. Harry Barnes, Steve McCabe and I are members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, and we have visited the police training college in Belfast. The progress in police training and, more importantly, the retraining of former members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary who are still serving are major features of what Hugh Orde has done since he became the Chief Constable. Everyone will find in time, as I have found already, that Hugh Orde is an outstanding police officer, and he will do a lot of good in completely reshaping the attitude of the Police Service of Northern Ireland to meet the needs of the whole community.

I do not want anybody to think that progress has not been made on police training. My colleagues and I have visited the training college twice and have noted not only the calibre of the recruits but their different backgrounds, and their attitude to the Police Service that they are shortly to join. They are more aware than anybody could expect of what is required of them with regard to a change of attitude. That is why it is so important for Sinn Féin to change its attitude about supporting the police and join the Policing Board, so that it can have an input into what is going on. That, above all, will energise everybody in the Police Service of Northern Ireland to get cracking in this new era.

I know that I am all that stands between Members and their lunch, but I want to raise one point that has hardly been mentioned in the debate, save by Liz O'Donnell in her thoughtful and powerful contribution about the danger of an election in the absence of a breakthrough and a settlement. I am aware of that danger, but if there is no breakthrough and no restoration of the Assembly — and I know that my view will not be shared around this table — the election should be postponed further. I wish that we had debated that issue more fully so that the views of more of the Members could have been heard.

I remember February 1974, after the Sunningdale Agreement, when a new dawn in Northern Ireland — a false dawn as it turned out — had arrived. John Hume was involved; the SDLP was working with the Unionists and working with Ian Paisley. It was all starting to go well, and then it was completely disrupted by an election that had no relevance to what was going on in Northern Ireland. That election was to do with the miners' strike in England, the three-day week and the Heath Government's decision to go to the country early. That effectively scuppered the Sunningdale Agreement. It was destroyed because, at that election, the extremists on both sides were — to use a telling phrase of Arthur Morgan's — determined to go back into their trenches.

As the Member of the Body who was probably in the deepest trench for the longest time, I admire Arthur Morgan for saying that he has left his trench and does not want to go back. However, that is what happened in February 1974. That is what would happen if there were an election but no Assembly for newly elected Members to sit in. Without policies for them to follow, it would mean a return to the tribes and to the trenches. I do not know what the Irish Government's view is on that — perhaps people will want to ask Brian Cowen that this afternoon.

The attitude of the British Government is that they have not made up their minds and are playing their cards close to their chests. On balance, if the Assembly is not up and running by 29 May when the elections are due to be called, the elections should be postponed again. Otherwise, the elections will happen but by June there will be no Assembly. There may be more extreme newly elected Members. That, however, is not the point. The point is that they will have been elected to nothing, and the marching season will be upon us. That is a recipe for an enormous amount of trouble.

I therefore caution those who say that there must be a democratic process whatever happens. To delay the elections was correct. Otherwise, there would have been an election campaign as we speak, with elections on 1 May, no Assembly in place, and anti-agreement and anti-Assembly people having the loudest voice and being listened to most by the media. That point needs much debate. Perhaps the Body will need to return to it when it meets again in

October. I issue that word of caution, not as part of my winding-up speech, but as a view that, alas, did not get a wide enough airing this morning.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Body reaffirms its support for the Good Friday Agreement, which was democratically endorsed by the people of Ireland, both North and South; believes that the full implementation of the Agreement is necessary to ensure peace, stability and sustainable political institutions in Northern Ireland; welcomes the intensive efforts of the two Governments, in consultation with political parties in Northern Ireland, to secure rapid and full implementation of the Agreement, including the restoration of devolved government in Northern Ireland; calls upon all parties involved to redouble their efforts to achieve a successful outcome to this process; and looks forward to the prospect of the Agreement being fully operational and in place before the Assembly elections on 29 May.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): We have had a good debate, to which 36 Members contributed. We have kept rigidly to the time allocated. The sitting will resume at 2.30 pm. The first debate is on proposed amendments to rules. At 2.50 pm there will be a debate on Committee C's report on tourism, and a group photograph will be taken at 3.30 pm. At 4.15 pm there will be a debate on Committee A's interim report on penalty points. At 5.00 pm — later than originally envisaged — the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Brian Cowen, will address the Body. We must stick rigidly to the timetable that has been outlined.

The sitting was suspended at 12.58 pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.35 pm

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO RULES

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): We will start this session with the controversial matter of the proposed amendments to rules. I will ask Mr Kevin McNamara MP to move the first amendment to rule 19. The proposed amendments have been distributed. I hope that everyone has a copy.

Mr Kevin McNamara MP: I beg to move amendment No 1:

“In rule 19, page 20, line 5, paragraph (c), leave out ‘twentieth’ and insert ‘tenth working’.”

It might help if I say that all the amendments arise out of discussions the Steering Committee had after representations were made, for example, by Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP and other colleagues, on how to improve the workings of the Body.

Amendment No 1 concerns the tabling of questions. There used to be complaints that people had to put down a question for answer 20 working days beforehand, so it was not possible to have topicality when placing questions. Under the British system, however, there is what is called the “open question”, which can be put, and anyone can ask what he likes, when the time comes.

The desire to have topicality in specific instances means that colleagues want to change the rule from 20 working days to 10. The reason that it has to be 10 is that Ministers answering questions, both here in Ireland and in the United Kingdom, need not necessarily be speaking for the lead Department on a particular issue. For example, in the area of education, the Irish Minister responsible and his Foreign Affairs counterpart would have a competent general knowledge but would have to be properly briefed about the specific details of what was going on in another Department. Therefore, representations having been made on both sides of the water to the various Departments, they are all agreed that they would be able to answer questions within 10 working days. The proposal halves the time involved, and I recommend it as a simple and straightforward amendment to the rules.

Question, That amendment No 1 be made with immediate effect, *put and agreed to.*

Mr Kevin McNamara MP: I beg to move amendment No 2:

“Before rule 32 insert a new rule 32 entitled ‘Powers to appoint sub-Committees and Rapporteurs’.

32 (a) Without prejudice to the generality of the rules of the Body, the Steering Committee may confer, on any of the Committees, the power to appoint sub-Committees, and to refer to such sub-Committees any matter comprehended by its orders of reference and to delegate any of its powers to such sub-Committees, provided that,

in the case of each Committee, only one sub-Committee shall be appointed at any time.

(b) A Committee shall assign to a sub-Committee its place of meeting and its budgetary limit, and shall determine the date by which the sub-Committee's report is to be made.

(c) Except as provided by (d) below, five Members or Associate Members shall be nominated by a Committee to each sub-Committee, at least one of whom shall be a Member of the Oireachtas and one a Member of Parliament.

(d) In the case of Committee A, four Members or Associate Members may be nominated by the Committee to a sub-Committee, of whom at least one shall be a Member of the Oireachtas and one a Member of Parliament.

(e) The Chairman and Shadow Chairman of a Committee shall be members of each sub-Committee *ex officio*.

(f) The quorum of a sub-Committee shall be two, one of whom shall be a Member of the Oireachtas and one a Member of Parliament.

(g) Sub-Committees shall report on their deliberations to the Committee.

(h) On delivery of its report each sub-Committee shall be dissolved, unless the Committee orders otherwise.

(i) A Committee may, subject to the approval of the Steering Committee, appoint Rapporteurs in respect of matters to be specified by the Committee.

(j) In respect of matters specified in paragraph (i) above, Rapporteurs shall be nominated by a Committee to undertake an inquiry, of whom one shall be a Member of the Oireachtas and one a Member of Parliament.

(k) A Committee shall assign to Rapporteurs their place of meeting and budgetary limit, and shall determine the date by which the Rapporteurs' report is to be made. In making their inquiries, Rapporteurs should act jointly at all times and shall not be substituted by any other member of the Committee.

(l) Rapporteurs shall report the outcome of their inquiries to the Committee.

(m) The appointment of Rapporteurs shall cease on delivery of their report unless the Committee orders otherwise."

One healthy thing that emerged from the past couple of sessions is the desire of Committees to appoint more than one rapporteur to deal with a particular topic and to appoint subcommittees. There was no provision for that in the rules. Because of accounting procedures, particularly in the United Kingdom but also, as is increasingly likely, in the Republic of Ireland, it is necessary to have provision in the rules for the appointment of subcommittees and rapporteurs so that the Steering Committee and the accounting officers for the respective Parliaments can point to where the authority came from for this and, therefore, the authority for the expenditure.

We have suggested that all Committees may appoint rapporteurs and subcommittees. Normally, when a rapporteur has finished reporting, or a subcommittee has finished its business, he or it shall be regarded as being completed, except that, if the Committee desires, he or it can continue. However, there is elasticity if a Committee wants to maintain a watching brief, either through a subcommittee or through rapporteurs, about a particular matter. That, of

course, does not prevent the main Committee conducting its own inquiries.

It is possible for rapporteurs, a subcommittee or the main Committee to take on board a string of different matters. However, there is always a downside, and in this case it is the question of appropriate budgets for each Committee. Reference is made to that in the amendment. When things were going badly in Northern Ireland, both Governments wanted the Body to continue its work. They were enthusiastic about that and considered it necessary to provide anything that we needed to maintain good relations between the Parliaments and the islands.

However, both Governments are now more stringent financially. Therefore as a Body and as a Steering Committee we ought to prepare ourselves for that stringency. The Steering Committee will probably assign budgets to Committees, and it will be up to the Committees to decide what they can afford to spend on rapporteurs, subcommittees and the work of the main Committee. That is how it should be in any case, given that we hold public funds.

The amendment also deals with quorums and representation. In any subcommittee meeting, there must be a Member from the Oireachtas and a Member from the United Kingdom Parliament. If there are rapporteurs, there must be one from each Parliament. However, it is important to note that there is no limit on the number of rapporteurs, and there is no provision for the size of the subcommittee that would in any way prevent the active participation of the autonomous self-governing areas and the devolved Parliaments and Assemblies in the United Kingdom. In fact, we are seeking to extend our area of operation to bring in new Members of the Body so that they can play an active role as rapporteurs and as members of subcommittees. We are dealing with the financial issues, and we hope that our new Members will play a more active role.

However, the numbers of staff and Clerks for the Committees is another restraint that we must bear in mind. That is a major problem because the Committees are currently staffed by Clerks from both sovereign Governments, sometimes with help from the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. However, that contribution is voluntary, and the amount of work that some people are doing is placing a strain on them. With the best will in the world, a Clerk from either Parliament will be heavily involved in their own Committee and parliamentary work. Acting as a Clerk for a Committee or subcommittee is a considerable additional burden.

That is another reason that we have considered limiting our activities, and Committees must bear that in mind when they are thinking about appointing rapporteurs or forming subcommittees. However, the Steering Committee representatives of the autonomous islands and the devolved Parliaments and Assemblies indicated that

they would be prepared to play their part in supplying help where necessary.

Once rapporteurs have been appointed they must always act together. For example, if a rapporteur wanted to study the environmental problems of Samoa, he could not go by himself. He would have to take with him someone from another part of the Body and, if they are also Members, Members from the other organisations. He would also have to take a parliamentary Clerk, not necessarily from the sovereign Governments, but from one of the devolved legislatures. That ensures that there is a degree of officialdom behind any actions.

We have taken on board the developments since our last plenary. Arguments, such as those that were put forward by Andrew Mackinlay and others, to allow for a degree of flexibility and to allow the Committees to do more if they can, must take account of firm and stern budgeting and be in accordance with the rules. In that way, we can meet the demands of our respective paymasters and account properly for our use of public money. Amendment No 2 increases the power and the scope of the Committees in what they are seeking to do.

Question, That amendment No 2 be made, *put and agreed to*.

2.45 pm

Mr Kevin McNamara MP: I beg to move amendment No 3:

“In Rule 32, page 28, line 32, insert after ‘Chairman’ the words ‘and Shadow Chairman’.”

Amendment No 3 gives substance to the role of shadow Chairmen. There is an oversight in the rules, and the amendment is a textual matter that pays proper regard to the position of shadow Chairmen.

Question, That amendment No 3 be made, *put and agreed to*.

REPORT FROM COMMITTEE C (ECONOMIC AFFAIRS): TOURISM

The Chairman of Committee C (Mr Séamus Kirk TD): I beg to move

That the Body takes note of the Report of Committee C on Tourism [Doc No 87] and the conclusions and recommendations of the Report, which should be forwarded to both Governments and devolved administrations for their observations.

I am glad to have the opportunity to present this report formally to the plenary. It deals with tourism development on the island of Ireland, something that Committee C has been considering for some time. For a variety of reasons, the finalisation of the report has taken longer than was first anticipated. However, Members will find the report to be worthwhile and informative, and it is to be hoped that it will in some way help to chart the future of tourism development on the island as a whole.

When setting out the scope of the inquiry, the Committee focused on certain aspects that were felt to be relevant to the future growth of the industry in Ireland, North and South. Those aspects included the development of tourism infrastructure, North and South; efforts to renew and develop cross-border tourism growth in rural areas and in post-conflict Northern Ireland; marketing strategies for inward tourism; and increasing the capacity of tourist travel infrastructure, including ports of entry and regional links, to facilitate the hopes for the expansion and development of the industry.

Central Statistics Office data sets the scene for developments in the tourism industry in Ireland. In the third quarter of 2002 it was estimated that 2,045,000 visitors came to Ireland. That was a decrease of 2.2% over the same period in 2001. Visitors from the UK to Ireland in the third quarter of 2002 numbered around 1.1 million, which was marginally less than the same period in 2001. The number of North American visitors fell from over 330,000 to around 300,000, which was an estimated decrease of 9%. The British tourism market is important. It represents 47% of overseas holidaymakers to Ireland, with an estimated 3.4 million visitors in 2001, generating revenue of 1.24 billion euros.

Tourism is Ireland's number one volume market. A greater proportion of visitors come from that market in the off-peak months in comparison with visitors from other markets, and that is very important for the performance of the industry. The forecast for Britain in 2002 was a 6% growth, including a 15% growth in Northern Ireland. The target for Britain in 2003 is for further growth of 5%, which would represent an additional 237,000 visitors coming to the island.

With regard to the relevance of the tourism industry to the Irish economy, in 2001, 5.9 million overseas visitors to Ireland generated total foreign exchange earnings of

3.96 billion euros. Domestic tourism expenditure amounted to 1.26 billion euros, making the tourism industry for that year worth an estimated 5.2 billion euros. On the basis of those figures, it is a significant industry.

In 2001, tourism supported 150,000 jobs, or job equivalents, in the Irish economy. An estimated 1.741 million people were in employment in Ireland in 2001, so tourism represents an equivalent of one in 12 in the economy at work. During our consideration of the industry, some concern was expressed about the industry's competitiveness. Emerging consumer trends indicate greater price awareness. There is a need for vigilance in relation to the value that the industry offers to overseas visitors.

The visitor attitude survey conducted by Bord Fáilte is also significant. Approximately 33% of visitors found that the Ireland holiday experience surpassed their expectations; some 60% reported that the holiday matched their expectations; and only 4% stated that the holiday did not live up to their expectations. Some 93% were "very satisfied" with the friendliness and hospitality experienced in Ireland. That is an important and integral part of the attractiveness for tourists.

With regard to the regional spread of tourism, Dublin captures 36% of overseas tourists; the south-west captures 16%; the west captures 12%; the mid-west captures 11%; and the midlands-east and north-west capture 10%. Given those statistics, there is clearly an imbalance, and there is an urgent need to place greater focus on the marketing effort. That is the position in relation to the market share. A greater regional spread is an objective in the Government's national development plan.

With regard to marketing Ireland as a tourist destination, Tourism Ireland Ltd was established on foot of the Good Friday Agreement as a North/South body. It has taken over functions previously carried out by Bord Fáilte. The new company is also responsible for the international livery of the product and the regional marketing programmes that are developed by Bord Fáilte and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. The company headquarters are based in Dublin and Coleraine, and it has a staff complement of 148.

Policy development will clearly impact on the tourism industry. Significant developments have had, and will continue to have, an impact on the development of tourism in Ireland. We have seen the establishment of Tourism Ireland Ltd as a North/South tourism marketing company on foot of the Good Friday Agreement. There is also the proposed establishment of a national tourism development authority, through the merger of Bord Fáilte and the Council for Education, Recruitment and Training (CERT), to promote the development of tourist facilities and services, including the promotion of training, human resources and marketing skills. A major review of national tourism policy will be initiated under the auspices of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism. That review

will examine the performance of tourism over the past 10 years and the factors impacting on it, with a view to identifying appropriate actions and recommendations for the implementation of future strategies, both industry-led and Government-led, for the sustainable development of tourism in Ireland.

That briefly outlines the position, and Members have a supply of bulky documents that set out the background to the Committee's work and deliberation. We are in contact with all the key components of the industry, North and South, and their responses are included in the written submissions to the tourism inquiry. Those are contained in document No 87A. It is quite bulky and will make good bedtime reading for Members, if they so wish.

I thank the members of the Committee for their diligence and commitment. It took us some time to finalise the report, but we are pleased that we did. The report is comprehensive and identifies an industry that has significant development potential, North and South. A tweaking of the marketing strategies will be necessary because the statistics that are quoted show where overseas visitors visit. More importantly, they show where they do not visit. The strategy will have to take account of that. Significant infrastructural investment in the northern half of the country will be needed to facilitate that. However, experience has shown us that industry generally responds when the market potential is seen to be growing. Investment will come fairly quickly to cater for development of the infrastructure.

I thank the officials who were involved in the completion and compilation of the report. We are grateful to them for their input. We are grateful to the various agencies and bodies with which we were in contact to hear their views and observations. That is vital when trying to put together a report like this with limited resources. The report is worthwhile and comprehensive, and I commend it to the BIIPB.

Mr Iain Smith MSP: Scotland and Ireland have obvious shared interests in tourism. We share some of the same problems, especially with regard to the American market, which has been the mainstay of our overseas tourism trade for many years. Tourism has suffered in the past couple of years as a result of the economic downturn and the effects of 11 September 2001. I welcome the report because some of the issues highlighted in it are pertinent to Scotland.

I wish to highlight transport links, which is a key issue. Many opportunities exist to market Scotland and Ireland jointly. Issues surround the unsuccessful Euro 2008 bid, which we have debated in this arena on a couple of occasions. A successful bid would have helped in the joint marketing of Scotland and Ireland, but transport is also part of that operation. For example, there is a new Rosyth to Zeebrugge ferry, which may provide an alternative link with the Continent. Passengers on that route may perhaps spend a few days enjoying Scotland's hospitality before making their way to Ireland. I also hope that the

Ballycastle to Campbeltown ferry route will be fully established shortly. The Scottish Executive are totally committed to using that route, and anything that can be done at the Irish end to encourage that would be welcomed.

Improved air links are important, because it takes much less time to fly from Edinburgh or Glasgow to Dublin than it does to fly from Edinburgh to London. The links between Scotland and Ireland are strong, and much can be done to market Scotland and Ireland jointly.

Mr John Ellis TD: We all welcome the report. I attended the final meetings, at which several issues stood out: access, whether by sea or air; the cost of access; and the fact that several cheap airlines now operate routes to Ireland, which makes it a more accessible destination. Likewise, routes from Ireland to Scotland and the rest of the UK are becoming more accessible because of cheaper flights.

3.00 pm

Another issue raised was that the border region, which suffered so much during the troubles, suffers from lack of tourism. The north-west region — Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan and Monaghan — attracts only 5% of tourists. The midlands and the east are visited by 11% of tourists, and Northern Ireland by 19%. That shows that there is a need for major investment in tourism infrastructure and tourism marketing, North and South. Everyone is delighted that there will now be an all-Ireland marketing body. That is most important.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD: As a member of the Committee, I would point out that the report contains plenty of food for thought. As John Ellis and others have said, access has been a key problem, particularly in the north of the country, where tour operators and travel agents are used to the old chestnuts, for want of a better phrase. They do the Ring of Kerry and all the usual sights and scenes. Those are wonderful places, but we want to overcome the mindset that ignores the other half of the country, which has as many wonderful sights and locations to explore. The message must reach the tour operators that there is another option — and it is a safe option. Up to now it has been discarded as a place that was unsafe.

I agree with Iain Smith about the Scottish links, particularly those with Donegal. We are exploring the possibility of a ferry run from the Foyle in Donegal to Scotland. We have the Derry to Glasgow service, which is run by Loganair — it runs the flight into Derry from Dublin. The Glasgow link is strong. There is huge potential for linking Donegal, and the north-west in general, to Scotland for golfing holidays, and the car ferry will create access to Portrush, Portstewart, Castlerock, the Inishowen links courses and on to Scotland. There is massive potential there.

The tourism infrastructure is patchy in many places, but that can be overcome if it is accepted that there is a problem in certain areas. It is to the good of the entire country that our tourism be spread out as much as possible.

It is terrible to get caught up in the traffic jam of tourists in the south-west, when they could come up and move about with relative freedom in areas such as my own. Go raibh maith agat.

Senator Martin Mansergh: I congratulate the Committee on its report. Tourism is an important part of any economy, and it is particularly important to the Irish economy. It would have more potential for the Northern Ireland economy but for the existing factors that have artificially depressed it.

Even with the peace process, the fact is that the height of the marching season occurs when the tourist season reaches its peak. I do not have anything against the marching season, but I am talking about the flashpoints. They have spillover effects in the north-west as well. If those problems could be resolved, that would be an enormous economic boon to Northern Ireland. Conversely, continuing trouble over certain marches has a devastating impact on an important industry.

I support the comments of John Ellis and Cecilia Keaveney. Sligo and Donegal are very fine places to have a holiday. We hear a great deal, partly because of the establishment of the Ulster-Scots Agency, about the link between the northern part of the country and Scotland. Perhaps more could be made of that with regard to tourism in both directions.

In response to my Scottish fellow parliamentarian, the problem with the Ballycastle to Campbeltown ferry is that the length of time taken to travel such a short distance is hopelessly long. As someone with family connections in the Highlands of Scotland, I think it would be welcome if the Caledonian MacBrayne system could link across to Ireland. I see the west of Scotland and the west of Ireland as a geographical continuum, but it is not a continuum in terms of access.

I have a plea concerning the transatlantic flights that went from New York to Shannon to Belfast, which were stopped after 11 September. It is important that those flights be restored. That service was much appreciated by people in Northern Ireland and those in the Shannon region.

Dr Jimmy Devins TD: As a member of the Committee, I commend the report to the Body. Unfortunately, I came late to the deliberations because I was elected just last May. However, I pay tribute to the previous members of the Committee, who worked very hard.

The report demonstrates the practical benefits of the peace process. In that regard, I want to emphasise the importance of the setting up of the all-island body, Tourism Ireland Ltd. The concept of promoting our whole island through one body is to be strongly encouraged.

I also want to reiterate the points made by Members who spoke earlier, particularly in relation to conclusion 7(f). Much investment is needed in the border region, both south of the border and in Northern Ireland. I say

that with due reference to my colleague who is sitting beside me, Senator Paul Coughlan, who comes from an area where there is a well-developed tourist industry. We do not have that in the north-west, and any help that we can get is to be welcomed.

We have a network of regional airports, many of which are underused. I would love to see the development of direct cross-border and cross-sea links to those regional airports as a means of developing this important industry.

Mr Harry Barnes MP: The work on the report lasted for a considerable time. General elections in the United Kingdom and Ireland altered the membership of the Committee. Therefore, we owe a great debt to Séamus Kirk, the Chairperson throughout that time; Bill O'Brien, the Vice-Chairperson; and Cecilia Keaveney, who was a member of the Committee during the entire period. Those three people were responsible for the continuation of the work that led to the report. Some of us joined at a later stage and built on work that had been initiated by others.

The report's conclusions are shown on pages 2-4. Conclusion 7(a) concerns the problems of perception in relation to the conflict in Northern Ireland. That impacts on people's willingness to holiday in Northern Ireland and in border areas. That is exacerbated by the impact of 11 September and the fact that we now live in an edgy world. Tourism benefits and the resultant economic spin-off come about through overcoming those problems. People must be content to be in certain areas and to perceive those areas as unproblematic. Therefore, everything that we talked about this morning is relevant to the possible major tourism developments that would take place throughout the island of Ireland.

One or two matters that are not in the report might be worth reflection. Although the euro can often be used in Northern Ireland, someone on an all-Ireland holiday who starts off in the North is liable to emerge with sterling and will want to exchange it for euros, and vice versa when moving from the Republic to Northern Ireland. Whatever side we take in the argument about the euro, it is of interest in connection with all-Ireland tourism. With regard to the simplification of tourism and the views of tourists from outside the island of Ireland, the euro is a matter of some interest.

Sporting activities such as golf have been highlighted as a major area. However, there is always a possibility of wider sporting activities. Some of us have stressed, via different avenues in the past, the need for Northern Ireland to have a major sports stadium that could be used for football matches and other events. If bids, such as the unsuccessful Euro 2008 bid made by Scotland and the Republic of Ireland, were to be made in the future, an adequate facility in Northern Ireland would make the concept of bidding for sporting activities mutually beneficial to the whole island of Ireland.

Much tourism will be internal. Not enough people from the Republic visit the North, so they must be encouraged, and, as the peace process beds down and problems are overcome, that is more likely to happen.

The tourism inquiry alerted us to another problem that was, I think, tackled by Committee C several years ago when it examined differences in state benefits and other provisions. Free travel for elderly people in the Republic is much more substantial than any travel benefits in the North. Therefore, co-ordination in that regard will also be of benefit to tourism, because once people can move more freely around the entire island, an atmosphere will be created in which overseas tourists will be likely to follow the same patterns.

The Lord Brooke: I do not speak as a member of the Committee, but I congratulate it most warmly on the excellent report that it has produced. I was profoundly impressed by the final two pages in the appendix and the amount of direct research and analysis that went into it. I wish to add two footnotes to the report, and, as so often happens, I will endorse and echo some of the things that Harry Barnes said, although I would have said one of them anyway.

The first footnote relates to paragraph 9 of the report and the Ballinamore-Ballyconnell Canal. The British have a reputation for being profoundly Euro-sceptic in every direction; however, I am slightly surprised that there is no reference to the European Union money that went into that canal project. I have cause to recall that, because — unless we were doing it simply to cover our flanks on state funding — both the United Kingdom and Irish Governments had to produce detailed analyses of the future economic benefit of putting money into the canal project. I am delighted that it has come out the way it has and that it has been such a success.

3.15 pm

My second footnote is personal and relates to paragraph 14 of the report. One of my eighteenth-century ancestors was a man called Henry Brooke, whose first play was banned simultaneously in London and Dublin for being politically incorrect. He was one of the first novelists, and he was also a political journalist who wrote widely on Irish subjects from his base in Cavan. He wrote a pamphlet on Irish canals in 1759, so I am delighted to see the new all-Ireland body, Waterways Ireland. I hope that his spirit is smiling in another place.

I fully endorse Harry Barnes's comments about having a first-class sports facility in the North which would be able to embrace any number of different sports — that would be a major step forward.

I want to mention — and Mr Barnes already remarked on it — tourism between the two parts of the island of Ireland, which is implicit, but not explicit, in the report. Sometime around 1990, the then tourist authorities in the North

conducted research into the likelihood of residents in the Republic visiting the North because the Republic was the nearest market at a time when tourism in Northern Ireland was low. The research concluded that 27% of residents in the Republic had spent at least one night in Northern Ireland during the previous 25 years. Some 23% said that they would not be averse to spending a night in Northern Ireland — in other words there was a market there that was capable of being tapped. The remaining 50% said that under no circumstances did they have the slightest desire to visit Northern Ireland.

I cannot help but feel that the spirit that underlies the Body, which was mentioned in the debate this morning, namely, our getting to know each other and the effect that this has had on relations between the two halves of the island, would be profoundly served if there were more interchange. In that regard, I support the implicit thrust of the report.

Mr Joe Sherlock TD: I will make a brief observation. I listened to Séamus Kirk's presentation, and it is a good report. Tourism is important for our economy and so on, but there is a contention that the marketing of the tourist programme is unbalanced. However, my main point is that I hear from time to time that our tourists are being fleeced — and I am using the Irish language — in this part of the island. That is a general contention among residents and tourists.

Mr Donald J Gelling CBE MLC: I will make a short contribution to this debate on an interesting report. It reminded me of the Isle of Man's situation, where 650,000 visitors a year dropped to 70,000. Imagine the disaster that that left us with — hundreds of guest houses were closed and boarded up. However, I also remember research, very much like the report, into where the island should go with tourism in the future. One of the findings was that the product must be right before visitors are asked to come. If tourists find that it is not as they had perceived, many will talk the place down when they return home. In the Isle of Man we thought we got the product right by spending an awful lot of money on historical items around the island and by building sports stadiums, swimming pools and so on. However, missing from the report is the fact that the Isle of Man is the nearest island to Ireland and nearer to Great Britain than Ireland.

We are finding that because of the speed of the SeaCat vessels, which sail a triangular route between the United Kingdom, the Isle of Man and Ireland in a maximum journey time of two and a half hours, the number of visitors to the Isle of Man is increasing quite dramatically. I am told that people become fed up and bored on journeys that last for more than two hours. Many people travel from the UK to the Isle of Man, stay two or three days and play golf, before travelling on to Ireland.

I agree with the point that was made, I think, by one of the Chairmen: if there is a downside, there is always an

upside. Given past events, people do not like flying across the Atlantic, but still enjoy going on holiday. We have found that many more people are travelling around the British Isles. There is an old saying that if someone wants to open a restaurant, they open it in an area where there are other restaurants, and restaurateurs also go out to eat. Therefore, the fact that people wish to fly only short distances or take sea trips may bring gains for tourism in Northern and Southern Ireland. The report shows a way forward, but the product must be right before visitors are attracted to these islands.

Mrs Margaret Ewing MSP: After that speech, Donald, I feel that I must visit the Isle of Man and review my tourism options. We all welcome the report. Tourism is a key policy area because it creates jobs and wealth and gives a dimension to all the countries represented here today.

One or two points, however, have come up and perhaps they should be referred to Committee B, which is responsible for European affairs. Landing charges are a major issue for our airports. Every week, I fly from Inverness to Edinburgh, and the charges are quite horrendous. They are due in part to the private finance initiative (PFI) at Inverness Airport, and £13 million must be spent to retrieve the sum that was invested. The result is that every time I fly, I pay an additional £5 or £6 to fulfil my job as an MSP. Those charges must be considered seriously. Ryanair, which is an important Irish airline, wanted to fly direct links out of Inverness, but because of the PFI situation, it was unable to do so. Those problems are also set against the background of the European Union's open skies policy.

On the political side, there is the Euroroutes issue. How many Euroroutes do we have? I travel to Ireland a lot, both North and South, but Euroroutes seem to be stymied. I have asked questions on the subject, and there will be no new Euroroutes in Scotland. Access is terribly important. Passengers arriving in Stranraer or Inverness want decent roads on which to travel. Appropriate funding mechanisms for Euroroutes must be considered.

Has the introduction of the euro into the South impacted on the tourist industry in the North? I would be interested to hear from people, North and South. That must be a matter of concern for many people and should be addressed. Perhaps we could consider that issue in the future.

Mr Chris Ruane MP: I speak from the perspective of a Welsh MP — a North Wales MP. Improvements have been made in the transport connections between Ireland and Wales. Recently, there has been a development involving bmibaby in Cardiff, and that has opened up cheap flights to people from Ireland, North and South, into Cardiff. Swansea Airport is developing, and we are now talking about the development of a commercial activity in RAF Valley. If that goes ahead, the flying time between Dublin and RAF Valley will be just eight minutes. Therefore important gains are being made. Dr Jimmy Devins

mentioned the importance of the smaller regional airports. They can offer cheap flights because they do not have the huge overheads of the big airports, and that will be key in developing tourism in the north and the west. Ireland has shown the way in this with the development of Knock International Airport, Galway Airport, Kerry Airport and Cork International Airport, which are all very successful.

There is a 100-million-euro bid to improve the port of Holyhead, and that will make it the third- or fourth-largest port in the United Kingdom. The SeaCat routes have been developed in recent years, and there has also been the upgrading of the A55 across the island of Anglesey, which has dramatically improved the time needed to get across that island.

We have also seen the establishment of Mostyn port, which has direct routes to Dublin, and we hope to extend that to include a route to Belfast. At present, the Mostyn port to Dublin route is mainly for freight transport, but it is hoped that it might also be developed to cover passenger travel.

The rail improvements to North Wales by Virgin will cut the travel time from my home town in Rhyl from three hours 10 minutes to two hours 40 minutes. The rail network connections to Ireland will, therefore, be improved.

The Select Committee on Welsh Affairs examined the impact of tourism on the Welsh economy. Wales has suffered from exactly the same problem as the North: is off the beaten track. When Americans visit, they come to London and then go to Stratford-upon-Avon, Chester, the Lake District and Edinburgh. We are developing tactics to try to get them off that well-worn track and into North and South Wales. The Scottish are also doing that, and even the people in the south-west of England are considering similar strategies. Perhaps we could consider strategies that have been developed in other parts of the British Isles and copy them.

Tourism in Wales would also benefit if American visitors flew into Manchester Airport. If they fly into Manchester, it is easier to get them into North Wales, and more could be done to encourage that. As has been said, more could be done to reroute those flights into Shannon in the west of Ireland and Belfast in Northern Ireland. There would be a greater likelihood of attracting those high-spending US customers if that could be done.

As Donald Gelling said, the product must be considered. The products are not only the visitor sites and historical sites; the available accommodation and restaurants must also be closely examined. If they are not up to scratch and the infrastructure is not sound, tourism in Northern Ireland and Wales will be done more harm than good when the tourists visit.

Northern Ireland tourism could also benefit from the use of the Scots-Irish diaspora over the past 200 years. The South of Ireland has done it, and its exploitation of geneal-

ogy and heritage is probably the best in the world, with its genealogy centres, databases, Internet sites and informal networks. If that were done in Northern Ireland, Wales and other areas, international connections could be developed.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Mr Mackinlay, could you please be brief because we should be finished by 3.45 pm.

Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP: I support Donald Gelling's references to the Isle of Man, and I reiterate what was said at the end of the last plenary, which has not been picked up on today.

Again, I urge Members to visit other parts of the islands. I would like our colleagues in the Republic to continue to host the conference once a year, if they are prepared to do so. A duty and obligation that would be mutually beneficial would be to move outside England. There is a powerful case for the Body to hold an early plenary in Northern Ireland —

3.30 pm

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): And in the United States.

Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP: There is also a case for the Body to hold a plenary on the Isle of Man. The richness of our common Celtic heritage is encapsulated in that island in a way that is invaluable to anyone who is interested in our common history, culture and language. I have already reminded the Body that Eamon de Valera rescued the Manx language in the 1950s. All those people who are scholars of the various Celtic languages should go to the Isle of Man to see what has been done there.

We need to visit other parts of the islands, and we must stress to other Parliaments the particular importance of visiting Northern Ireland. I speak as someone who has, for his entire life, lived and worked in the deep south of England, where my constituency is situated. There is widespread, abysmal ignorance of the topography and geography of Northern Ireland there. Unfortunately, there is an incorrect perception that Northern Ireland is, politically, a parlous state. We cannot seem to get across to people that only a few hectares experience any difficulties. However, it is not just a question of that. People also think of Northern Ireland's cities as industrial and dark. The widespread ignorance is amazing, so we must deal with that. There should be an obligation on every Member of Parliament to visit Northern Ireland.

Senator Mansergh referred to the loss of transatlantic flights between North America and Belfast. I agree with his remarks. We should have a vested interest in taking the pressure off Heathrow rather than encouraging that airport to "interline" for other parts of the United Kingdom. That is environmentally unhealthy for those who live in west London. Either the devolved Ministers — if and when they return — or the Northern Ireland Office Ministers

should take the initiative and establish carriers to try to get more markets into Northern Ireland from North America.

The marketing of Northern Ireland is pretty abysmal. There is a degree of smugness in the fact that we have been able to put across the richness of Northern Ireland. Some of the best initiatives that have been referred to in the report have come from local authorities rather than from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Local authorities in the Kingdoms of Down have done a superb job. However, current arrangements are unsatisfactory.

Colleagues who represent border constituencies might be concerned to know that at least one of the major car hire firms that operates from Belfast International Airport and Belfast City Airport charges an extra £20 each day if the car is to travel into the Republic. I do not know whether that fact is widely known. However, the matter should be pursued, and such companies should be shamed into not lifting that extra charge, which is a massive disincentive for people to straddle the border and to shop in border towns.

The market for cheap air carriers is welcome. However, despite private enterprise, their marketing does not seem to be sound. For many people, the brain associates Knock International Airport with pilgrimages, not with Yeats Country. For some reason, the airport is not being marketed in London as a gateway to Yeats Country. That is a great pity, because it is an equally valid market to that of the rosary. Sometimes, private enterprise is not good at marketing. I hope that when people read this they will take that into consideration.

Finally, Margaret Ewing is correct. I was appalled when I travelled to Northern Ireland via Stranraer. For people struggling up the spine of England with a view to turning left and hoping that they can get to Ireland pretty damned quick, it is a major journey on from the English trunk roads across the west of Scotland. No doubt the Scottish Parliament and Executive will address themselves to that with some vigour — there really has been some serious neglect.

I hope that colleagues will promote Rosslare, not only for going to the southern part of the Republic, but also as an access to the north — Northern Ireland and Donegal. Once that road is improved, it will be a swift alternative route with decent motoring across Wales, as distinct from going up a crowded corridor of England, which for those of us who live in the south-east is pretty unattractive.

Mr Kevin McNamara MP: It is nearly as bad as the M25.

Mr Murray Tosh MSP: I apologise for missing the beginning of the debate. However, I have heard most of the subsequent speeches, and I was moved to contribute a few words when I was sitting in the Public Gallery.

I want to pick up on Andrew Mackinlay's point about communications between Scotland and Northern Ireland. The A75 trunk road is legendary for its slow-moving

freight and agricultural traffic, and it is a very frustrating road. However, one of the benefits of devolution is the way in which members of all political parties have campaigned on a regional basis within the new devolved framework for the Scottish Executive to address particular pinch points in our road structure. Significant investment has already begun and will continue in the next few years. We cannot boast a Holyhead motorway, or anything on that scale, but we will, in the next four to five years, progressively develop overtaking opportunities and passing places and attempt to make both the A75 to Stranraer and the A77 down from Glasgow to Stranraer much faster and more direct routes.

The ferry companies at Stranraer — or Cairnryan, because Stranraer will close shortly — and Troon have invested heavily in new port facilities in recent years. P&O and SeaCat run from Troon, which is not far from the central belt of Scotland and will shortly be much closer because the motorway down into Ayrshire is to be extended by 15 miles. Road and ferry transport are about to improve significantly.

The biggest change in the west of Scotland in recent years, however, has been the advent of Ryanair, and its quick and cheap flights from Glasgow and Prestwick, and the rail connection to Prestwick Airport, which has led to a huge increase in the number of Irish accents being heard in the streets, shops and pubs of Ayrshire and, indeed, all over the west of Scotland.

I do not think that there is a mechanism for Euro-routes to deliver massive significant additional investment, but incrementally, progressively and deliberately, we are working hard to improve communications with Northern Ireland, and we are well aware of the importance of being more competitive.

There is in Scotland a long legacy of tension between Scotland and Ireland, or perhaps between communities in Scotland and communities in Ireland. We are entering a much more secular age in Scotland, and I think that it is time for us to realise that there may very well be a different state in Southern Ireland. However, there is a huge community of interest, culture and history.

During the lunch break I went to the cathedral here in Kilkenny. Members should take the opportunity to visit it before they go home. It is an Anglican cathedral, but we have those in Scotland as well — that was not too alien. I was fascinated by the memorial plaque to an army officer from the Inverness Fencibles who died here in 1797, when that regiment was travelling westwards to deal with French soldiers who had landed here during the Revolutionary Wars. I make that point, not to give a history lecture, but to illustrate that we have so much in common — in experience, language, culture, genetics and population movement.

It is time for the people of Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom to appreciate what a familiar foreign

country this is — how close it is, how utterly accessible it is, and how much more accessible it is becoming. There are opportunities for all communities on both sides of the Irish Sea to develop this business and traffic in years to come. Nothing would help us more than the completion of the normalisation of civil society and the political institutions in Northern Ireland. That is the gap in the middle, and the return to full democratic politics and to a peaceful society will be a huge benefit to the tourism industries on both sides of the Irish Sea.

The Lord Glentoran: I apologise for missing part of the debate. I did not intend to take part, but after listening to my colleagues' comments, I decided to speak. The debate on tourism is fascinating, and I have been at the centre of it for some time, because, for a long period of my life, I wanted to become chairman of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. However, I never succeeded in getting that appointment. [*Laughter*].

The topic of air traffic in and out of Northern Ireland is at the front of my mind and many other people's minds. In a way we are suffering because we have two airports that are privately owned by different people. Belfast City Airport was put up for sale recently, but I do not know the current status of that sale. The airport used to belong to Shorts, which became Bombardier, and so on up the takeover ladder.

Belfast City Airport is right in the centre of Belfast. However, it is a small airport and it was recently shown that it suffers from fog more than other parts of Northern Ireland — which does not usually suffer from fog — because it is beside the sea. It also suffers from serious planning restrictions because it is located in a built-up community. The last time I was updated, the flying restrictions allowed flights between 7.00 am and 9.30 pm. That can be stretched to 10.00 pm, but no later.

A serious public complaint has already been made because the vendor has applied for permission to extend the hours during which the airport can operate. Sir Reg Empey, former Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in the Northern Ireland Assembly, has taken the side of the local community against that permission being granted. The airport operates on the edge of Civil Aviation Authority limits for the airbuses that British Midland fly into that airport. If any aircraft larger than those were to fly in, the runway would have to be extended into a nature reserve. I think that all Members understand the problems with that proposal.

Those are the confines of Belfast City Airport. Unfortunately, both British Midland and British Airways have moved all their operations out of Belfast International Airport, which leaves that airport to handle only freight and intercontinental airlines. It is a shadow of what it was when it was the main airport.

I do not know whether this would be the responsibility of the devolved Government at Stormont, once it is up and running again, or of Westminster, or whether the Dáil can have any influence on what happens. If it is left to the

private sector only, I would be fearful that Belfast International Airport could become unviable from a financial and economic point of view. If that were to happen, those of us who live here and who travel in and out of Northern Ireland would have to go to Shannon or Dublin — which is still a long journey — to Manchester or to another airport if we wished to take a long-haul intercontinental flight. That is even more important for tourists coming to Northern Ireland. Waiting in the wings is the very real problem of whether Northern Ireland will have a major airport.

3.45 pm

Mr William O'Brien MP: The report has provoked a great deal of interest in tourism. Our brief was to examine tourism on the island of Ireland under the framework of the Good Friday Agreement. The report is based on that fact. It refers to the importance of the peace process to developing tourism throughout the island of Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement led to the creation of an all-Ireland tourism body. The investment that we refer to in conclusion 7(e) demonstrates the mutual benefit that the North and the South can accrue if the tourist industry is developed.

Lord Brooke mentioned EU money. The recommendations refer to EU money, but do not specifically mention canal development. The Committee acknowledges that substantial EU money has been put into that system.

Members referred to the currency difference between the North and the South, and the Committee considered that. Paragraph 22 considers the problems associated with different rates of VAT and the different currencies. The officials from whom we took evidence advised us that those issues did not create a great problem for tourists. I will be interested to hear the Minister for Foreign Affairs' response to question 2, which concerns the impact of the single European currency on the Irish economy and, in particular, on tourism. In view of the information that the Committee obtained from witnesses, the Minister's response will be of particular interest.

The Committee also considered the question of infrastructure, and paragraph 48 refers to infrastructure, the slow-build strategy and getting the correct infrastructure in place. It is important, as we say in the report, that we should concentrate on infrastructure. According to the report:

“The key was to present a positive and quality product to the tourist, through improved infrastructure, rather saying that Northern Ireland is safe and secure.”

We accept that there has to be an improvement in the infrastructure, but — as the Chairman mentioned in his opening comments — there is a forecast of growth in the tourist industry, and that is important to the economy of the whole island.

Price and price awareness are important. That applies to accommodation, airport costs and other issues that can influence the development and improvement of tourism.

The tourist boards of England, Scotland and Wales should consider the report with a view to ensuring continuity of exchange between the various areas, including the Isle of Man. All the areas should be presented as one large tourist attraction in this part of Europe.

Airport costs and the charge that is to be introduced were beyond the Committee's brief. Those matters will be recognised and addressed by the various Governments. If UK tourism is to be developed, we must press for Manchester Airport to become a full regional airport. The wrong image is created if everyone coming to the United Kingdom has to fly into Heathrow or Gatwick. Manchester Airport is the regional airport, and it can accommodate many of the services. We should press for it to become one of the prime airports.

I refer to the Welsh Assembly's Official Report on the Wales Fish and Fisheries Strategy. The report recognises that tourism is very important. On page 60 it is stated:

"Today, I took part in several interviews on the future of the ruddy duck. Many Members will know — and this again concerns Spain — that the ruddy duck was introduced into Britain. Around 30 to 80 ruddy ducks travel to Spain every year; they are sex tourists."

[Laughter].

The report continues that the Government are suggesting spending up to £1,000 per bird to slaughter the entire British ruddy duck population. That raises concern, because people travel from Ireland and England to Spain to be "sex tourists", as the ruddy ducks are called in the report. If those people return to Britain, are we going to spend £1,000 trying to eliminate them? It is interesting that the National Assembly for Wales examined tourism, but not as we know it. It was examining the ruddy duck. Perhaps the National Assembly for Wales will address that matter in the near future.

I should like to thank the Chairman of the Committee, who was a very good leader. The Committee produced the report after lengthy deliberations, but we could have continued on the issue of tourism because it is a changing programme, and we will have to revisit it in the near future.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): I am afraid that there is no time for right of reply from the National Assembly for Wales.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Body takes note of the Report of Committee C on Tourism [Doc No 87] and the conclusions and recommendations of the Report, which should be forwarded to both Governments and devolved Administrations for their observations.

The sitting was suspended at 3.53 pm.

The sitting resumed at 4.31 pm

PENALTY POINTS (INTERIM REPORT OF COMMITTEE A)

Senator Brian Hayes: I beg to move

That the Body takes note of the Interim Report of Committee A on Penalty Points [Doc No 90].

The report is the work of Committee A and, specifically, of myself and the joint rapporteur, Lord Dubs. Six months ago we were asked to sponsor a report on how a single penalty point system for road traffic violations and offences could be introduced on the island of Ireland as a means of reducing the daily carnage on our roads and of changing driving behaviour.

The reason the report is an interim one is that there has been no action from the Governments to show that they are taking this issue seriously. We will keep this issue on the agenda until both Governments change the law to ensure that we can have a single penalty point system on the island of Ireland, thereby helping to change driving behaviour for the better. We expect to return to the matter at our next meeting, which I understand will be in October or November.

Penalty points are an important means of reducing the death and suffering on roads all over these islands. Legislation introducing penalty points in the Republic of Ireland went through the Dáil and the Seanad and came into force in 2002. However, it was only made effective on 31 October when the Minister for Transport signed an order enforcing penalty points.

There has been much debate in the Republic about how effective penalty points have been, and there are still some IT difficulties to be dealt with. Nonetheless, the system is in place. The penalty point system in Northern Ireland is different from that in England, Scotland and Wales. In the United Kingdom, there are two separate systems; one system in England, Scotland and Wales and another system in Northern Ireland. Clearly, we see a need for co-ordination. We are not arguing that this be approached on a UK-basis immediately. It can be done as a stand-alone measure between both jurisdictions, North and South, in an attempt to change driver behaviour, and we will pressure both Governments on the matter in the coming months.

In the Republic of Ireland, if a driver is caught and pays the fine there and then, the number of points on his licence is about half the number it would be if he were summonsed to court. Motorists can receive penalty points for 69 individual offences. If a motorist receives 12 points within a three-year period, he is automatically disqualified from driving for six months in the Republic of Ireland.

There is an interesting distinction between our system and the system in Britain. In Ireland, if a person receives 12 points, they are disqualified automatically without any court intervention, be it good, bad or indifferent. In Britain, a driver must come before the courts to be disqualified. We must consider further the substantial difference between those systems.

In 1997 a penalty points system was introduced into Northern Ireland. However, there is no mutual recognition between the penalty points system in the North and in other parts of the United Kingdom. Lord Dubs and I met our colleague Ministers on the matter. From the Irish perspective, Minister Brennan, whom I met two weeks ago, is supportive of the work of the Body and the Committee in bringing the recommendation forward. He believes that we should see a united approach to the introduction of penalty points. He referred to the fact that the recommendation is in the work programme for the North/South Ministerial Council, and with the Irish Government, it is his long-term objective to implement the initiative. Some weeks ago, Minister Brennan advised me that meetings have taken place between transport officials of the British-Irish Council to progress the issue.

This is an interim report, and I ask Lord Dubs to take up the matter and to expand my points.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): Before I ask Lord Dubs to respond, and bearing in mind the time limits, do any Members wish to make a contribution?

The Lord Temple-Morris: This matter takes me back many years. In a previous incarnation as a Conservative Party lawyer, I wrote a pamphlet, 'Motoring Justice', which led to the penalty points system that the then Minister of Transport/Secretary of State, Norman Fowler, introduced in 1980-81. It was one of the first measures that that Government introduced, and it has been refined and improved on since then. It has worked. It is a good thing in principle, and it is a useful and well-trying example of where the North and the South should work together. I wish you all the best of luck in bringing that about.

Mr Damien English TD: I live in County Meath where there is a lot of cross-border traffic, and I urge that the Body supports the initiative, speeds it up and makes it work. It is a matter of urgency. When penalty points were first introduced in my county, the system worked well and the number of accidents was reduced. The only cars that were driving dangerously were from Northern Ireland. It was as simple as that; the proof was there. It is a matter of life and death. County Meath and County Louth have an above-average level of accidents on the N2 and N3 roads. The proof of the pudding is there. I ask for all urgency to be given to the matter.

Mr William O'Brien MP: There is no doubt that we have to work to improve road safety and to influence drivers to adopt a better system of driving. However, we must guard against becoming anti-car in the process. In

my opinion, the report highlights several issues that must be addressed. I make the plea that we do not include much in the document that it could be interpreted as anti-car. That would be disastrous.

The Lord Dubs: We do not intend to be anti-car. We want to give better effect to a measure that can save lives. We know that the number of people killed and injured in road accidents in Ireland, North and South, is far too high. The intention is to do something quickly to remedy that.

On occasions, we have all met Ministers who have said that a penalty points system is a good idea but then have given 20 reasons why it is going to take a lifetime to come into effect. I had a meeting with Angela Smith. She was very supportive, but — and this is a big "but" — she said that Northern Ireland and Britain do not have a harmonised penalty points system. I got the impression that the British Government want to harmonise the system between Northern Ireland and Britain before anything is done about harmonising the system between Northern Ireland and the Republic. There are several problems with that. First, there could be a long delay. Much time will pass before there is harmonisation in the UK. Secondly, the critical aspect is traffic in Ireland. Far more cars go across the border in Ireland than cross from Scotland or England to Northern Ireland, which makes it a far more urgent problem.

There is a further difficulty that we must all be realistic about. No one has mentioned it to me, but everyone will accept it. If there is much negotiation and Northern Ireland and Britain get a harmonised system, it will be very hard for the British Government to change that newly negotiated system further in order to achieve a compromise with the Republic. Thus, the British Government will tell the Irish Government that they must follow what the British have done if they want to harmonise the points system. I am not sure that it is sensible for the British Government to order that their way be followed and to argue that they will not meet the Irish Government halfway, unless the Irish Government want to. I see problems with that.

We would like to push this issue further. We should build up more of a case — for example, by meeting the Garda Commissioner, the Chief Constable and the road safety organisations in Dublin and Belfast — and give a further report to the Body when we meet next in October this year, in order to progress the matter. The key issue is that we press the British Government that North/South penalty points harmonisation ought to take priority over east-west harmonisation unless they can do it all at once. If it can be done in one go and negotiations take place with the Government in Dublin, that is fine.

However, we do not want UK harmonisation to take a long time and delay any North/South harmonisation. We also fear that if that has been done in the UK, North/South harmonisation will be harder to compromise on because we will just be telling the Irish Government that if they

want harmonisation, they must do as the British Government have done. That is not a good way forward in negotiations.

Mr Michael Mates MP: I want to speak briefly from the other side of the fence to endorse what Alf Dubs has just said. We must press on with the North/South accommodation, find a compromise and put pressure on both Governments. We need all Members of the Body to pressure their Governments to take a very sensible step.

Mr Séamus Kirk TD: I am sorry that I missed the earlier exchange. I was under the impression that there was an EU Directive on this issue. It is not just a UK and Ireland issue; it is probably wider than that. It may do no harm at all to touch base with the EU Commissioner who has responsibility in this general area in order to ascertain what type of timescale the Commission might have for the full implementation of the Directive on a Community-wide basis.

Mr Michael Mates MP: I hate to differ with Mr Kirk. However, if we wait for the EU to bring in a Directive, which may or may not be binding on both Governments, the muddle will double. We must focus on the North/South element, which is a bilateral matter. If we choose to harmonise North and South, that is nothing to do with the EU. It is a matter for the EU if it then wants to deal with the enforceability in third countries. We must just focus on this narrow issue.

Mr Jim O’Keeffe TD: As Chairman of Committee A, under whose auspices the report was produced, I think we should make our view clear: the emphasis should be on trying to establish North/South harmonisation. There is already a Convention on Driving Disqualification that was adopted by the EU about five years ago. However, as has been mentioned by my Co-Chairperson of the Committee, we could be waiting for ages before that would have an effect.

I support the position that has been adopted by our co-rapporteurs that we should try to focus on the North/South situation. I hope that the Body endorses that view.

4.45 pm

Senator Brian Hayes: To take up Deputy Kirk’s point, the Convention on Driving Disqualification that was adopted by the EU member states in 1998 allows countries to enter into bilateral arrangements. From our knowledge of the issue, Ireland is the only country to date that has transposed that Directive into its domestic law. The problem is that if we wait for the British Government to do that, I suspect that it will become another barrier in our way. I agree with the view that was articulated by Deputy O’Keeffe and Mr Michael Mates on the need to approach the issue from the level of the two Governments to see whether they can implement the report’s findings as swiftly as possible.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): Did you wish to speak, Lord Dubs?

The Lord Dubs: No. Brian Hayes made the point; there is no need for me to repeat it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Body takes note of the Interim Report of Committee A on Penalty Points [Doc No 90].

The sitting was suspended at 4.46 pm.

The sitting resumed at 5.08 pm.

**ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
MR BRIAN COWEN TD**

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): I am glad to have the opportunity to welcome to the Body the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Brian Cowen TD. We appreciate the Minister's attendance in view of his demanding schedule and his ongoing work for the peace process on this island.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr Brian Cowen TD): Thank you, Mr Smith. Distinguished guests, Members of both Parliaments, I am delighted to get the chance to speak with you again. It is a long time since I was on the first British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body — Michael Mates is looking at me knowingly, remembering some of our jousts in the past. I thank Members for being here, because it is important that parliamentarians from both sides of the Irish Sea meet regularly to discuss issues of mutual concern and of mutual benefit.

This is the first opportunity I have had to address the Body since the general election last year, and I extend my warmest congratulations to Brendan Smith on his appointment as Co-Chairman of the Body. Together with David Winnick, I know that Brendan will do an outstanding job in leading the Body in the years ahead, as Michael O'Kennedy did before him.

Last year, when I addressed the Body in Dublin, I looked in the rear mirror to review the encouraging progress that we had made in British-Irish relations over the preceding 12 years. Members will be relieved to know that I do not intend to be quite so retrospective in my focus today.

However, our location makes it difficult not to be conscious of the resonance of history. Those of you who have had even the briefest opportunity to walk the streets of Kilkenny will have been struck by its rich depth of history, heritage and culture. It is a unique city that harmoniously blends the Gaelic, Norman and Anglo-Irish influences of our past. My delight in the rich heritage of Kilkenny is only slightly diminished by my envy of its contemporary success on the hurling field.

The confluence of historical influences in this city was perhaps personified by one of its most famous citizens, the essayist Hubert Butler, who died in 1991 and was of Anglo-Irish background. Nearly 50 years ago, Butler wrote about the state of relations between both parts of Ireland. He asked why our differences were so unfruitful? He offered the following reason:

“Too many people would sooner be silent or untruthful than disloyal to their own side... And so there is always a drift towards

crisis, a gentle, persistent pressure towards some simple alignment of Good and Evil, Friend and Enemy.”

Through the collective work that we have all been advancing over recent years — the two Governments, the parties in Northern Ireland, the Body and other supportive agencies — this simple alignment is progressively giving way to a more complex, but also more benign, understanding of relationships on this island and between our neighbouring islands. We are increasingly finding ways of making our differences more fruitful.

The Good Friday Agreement was a major milestone on that journey. It represented the distillation of years of creative thinking and political experience about what were the fundamental requirements of a just and durable political settlement in Northern Ireland. The agreement was both a codification of everything that had been learned in the past about the nature of the Northern Ireland problem, and a set of balanced ground rules for the future to justly accommodate the competing constitutional and political aspirations of both communities. The agreement was an outstanding political achievement and a major departure in Anglo-Irish relations. It would not have happened without the ever-closer partnership that developed between both Governments; without the courage and commitment of various party leaders in Northern Ireland; and without the goodwill and support that came from the United States, the European Union and the international community.

However, despite all its achievements — with which you are all very familiar — there were several difficult issues that were not finally resolved on Good Friday 1998. Some issues were remitted to other processes or mechanisms to be taken forward. Issues such as policing, the decommissioning of paramilitary arms, the reform of the criminal justice system and the advancement of the human rights and equality agendas all involved processes of real and substantive progress rather than instant delivery.

Yet very considerable progress has been made in all those areas over the past five years. The Body is familiar with the important benchmarks for implementation of the agreement, and I do not propose to recite them all to you again today. Notwithstanding those specific advances, there was, however, a wider and deeper problem. It was that, although substantial progress was being made through the process of gradual implementation, its positive impact was being eroded by activities — or allegations of activities — that were corrosive of the trust and confidence necessary to sustain workable political institutions.

Although important confidence-building steps — such as two acts of IRA decommissioning — did take place, their effect was undermined by other reported events that suggested that the paramilitary option was being kept open. Equally, it could be argued that confidence-building opportunities were not always positively embraced so that anti-agreement elements were allowed to dismiss or minimise their significance.

Regardless of whether opportunities were wasted or spurned, the fact of the matter was that, by the autumn of last year, the reservoirs of trust and confidence among the parties were at a low ebb. The October suspension was ultimately a crisis of trust and the deficit of confidence was mutual. As Mark Durkan put it, the suspicion was reciprocal: Unionists feared that Republicans were congenitally subversive, and Republicans believed that Unionists were innately intransigent. The pithy slogans of “no guns, no government” and “no Fenians about the place” were crude mirror images of a common perception of mistrust.

Last autumn, both Governments concluded that, although the incremental implementation of the agreement had served the process well, it was no longer sufficient if forward momentum was to be maintained. Addressing the deficits of confidence would require the rapid and complete implementation of the agreement. In the words of the Irish Government, a “quantum leap” was required. In the now-familiar formulation of Prime Minister Tony Blair, acts of completion were needed on all sides to fully implement all aspects of the agreement.

Over the past five months, the two Governments, together with the pro-agreement parties, have worked intensively to devise an overall agreement that would comprise the acts of completion necessary to fully implement the agreement and restore the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland. That work was progressed in various formats: in ongoing bilateral and trilateral contacts between the two Governments and the parties, and in collective discussions in round-table meetings. All this engagement was helpful and necessary so that the two Governments could arrive at a composite view of what were the essential ingredients for an acts-of-completion agreement.

5.15 pm

All that intensive work culminated in the discussions that were held over two days at Hillsborough earlier this month. Apart from the substance of the progress made, two things particularly struck me about the discussions at Hillsborough. First, I was impressed by the extent of the commonality in approach and analysis of all the parties. Despite their different political needs and pressures, each of them demonstrated a great commitment to finding a collective way forward through the difficult issues that were being addressed.

Secondly, I was struck by the truly impressive solidity and solidarity of the partnership between the two Governments. It occurred to me then that Bertie Ahern and Tony Blair had in 1998 negotiated the agreement as colleagues; they were now delivering it as friends. All of us at Hillsborough were deeply impressed that, despite the pressures of the global crisis that was fast approaching, the Prime Minister devoted over two days of his time, energy and wisdom to pursue what has been a constant priority of his premiership. Likewise, my colleague and friend Paul

Murphy has been tireless in his efforts to engage with, and accommodate, all the parties in Northern Ireland.

Considerable progress was made at Hillsborough on a range of difficult issues such as criminal justice, security normalisation, the ending of paramilitary activity, human rights and equality issues. There now exists a shared understanding about the broad parameters of an overall acts-of-completion deal, even if all parties are not signed up to every detail of all aspects.

The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister will return to Northern Ireland next month to formally present their proposals. In the meantime, the two Governments have encouraged the parties to use the time and space to reflect on the proposals outlined at Hillsborough and to undertake whatever internal consultations are necessary.

Major steps are required of all sides if we are to achieve the quantum leap that is required to fully consolidate the agreement. Our collective level of ambition is great. It will require all sides to share the risks, the pain and the gain. It will have to be clear to all that: paramilitary activity and capability are being brought to a definitive end; the process of security normalisation is rapidly advancing; the achievement of the new beginning to policing is being fully realised; the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland is fully reflective of both communities; the human rights and equality provisions of the agreement are being entrenched; the stop-start phase of the operation of the institutions has come to an end, and all parties are committed to full and enthusiastic participation in them.

Because the two Governments wished to accord a little time and space to the parties to consider those proposals, the British Government judged it appropriate to delay the scheduled elections by a few weeks. That deferral was appropriate and reasonable, given the circumstances and the progress that was made in the discussions.

Five years ago, the people of Northern Ireland voted for an Assembly that was tasked to deliver on the vision of the agreement. Five years later, the pro-agreement parties can point to a record of achievement and progress that would have been unthinkable 10 years ago.

Over the past few years, the Northern Ireland Executive, under the joint leadership of David Trimble and Séamus Mallon and, latterly, Mark Durkan, achieved much success in bringing together political representatives of both communities to work in partnership and with common purpose for the betterment of all the citizens of Northern Ireland.

The work of the Executive had a substantial impact, with locally accountable Ministers taking decisions of real importance and significance to the lives of the people of Northern Ireland and positively impacting on vital sectors such as agriculture, industrial promotion, health and education. The successful workings of the Northern Ireland Executive over recent years have shown beyond question that partnership government works to the benefit of

Nationalists and Unionists alike. That partnership was seen at its best in the work undertaken by Mark Durkan and David Trimble in securing the reinvestment and reform initiative, which allows for the transfer of certain vacated military sites for use for economic and community regeneration purposes.

The Assembly had also been operating successfully, proving itself capable of withstanding robust debate on controversial matters in line with the best traditions of parliamentary democracy. Assembly Members from all traditions had taken on their responsibilities with commendable enthusiasm and sincerity, and their contributions had been marked by commitment and diligence.

The North/South interface was also moving from the old zero sum model of suspicion and isolation to a relationship based on win-win perspectives and the achievement of mutual benefit. Meetings of Ministers from both parts of the island through the North/South Ministerial Council had become a recognisable feature of ministerial calendars, North and South. Ministers from both parts of the island and representative of both traditions were regularly taking decisions that benefited all our people in a practical and meaningful way.

Similarly, the all-island implementation bodies established under the agreement have now been in successful operation for over three years. They operate in sectors that range from trade and business development to the maintenance and development of the island's waterways to food safety promotion, and their functional achievements are many. The development of rational co-operation in a sector that is economically vital on both sides of the border is, perhaps, most manifest in the all-island tourism organisation, Tourism Ireland Ltd. Its promotional campaigns are, undoubtedly, crucial to the success and development of the industry throughout the island, particularly at this challenging time for the global tourism market.

I therefore want to pay tribute to the outstanding effort and commitment that all Ministers from both parts of the island displayed in the operation of the North/South structures. We came to meetings from different political cultures and traditions, which were transcended by a common commitment to advance co-operation between both parts of the island to the mutual benefit of all our people. The sooner we can renew that partnership, the better for everyone. As a result of the work that we are currently engaged in, we may soon be able to return to that constructive and developing network of partnership. There is now the real prospect that, when the people of Northern Ireland go to the polls on 29 May, they will be able to give their democratic verdict in the full knowledge that the devolved institutions are secure and that the agreement in all its aspects is on course to be rapidly and irreversibly implemented. In short, the achievement of a normalised society in Northern Ireland will no longer be a vision but an attainable reality.

I am conscious that this survey of our local difficulty is taking place in a context of global anxiety and uncertainty. The path to war in Iraq has caused great debate and sincere differences of view in the international community and in our respective legislatures. Although we fervently hope that human casualties and physical destruction can be minimised and contained, inevitably there will be losses and tragedies in the days ahead for the people of Iraq and for the coalition of US and British troops. The political and diplomatic fallout to the crisis will be immense. Only one thing is certain: there will be far-reaching change in Iraq, in the surrounding region and in the wider international order.

I am reminded that in the aftermath of the Great War, Winston Churchill ironically commented that in the cataclysm of change that then swept the world, the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone were one of the few institutions to have maintained the integrity of their quarrel.

All of us who are involved in the current talks process in Northern Ireland should, in the light of the current global crisis, reflect even more deeply on our current responsibilities. Now is not the time to play the process long, to seek to extract one concession too far, to assume that the doors of people who have been endlessly patient and supportive will remain as generously open as they have been in the past. As in the affairs of men, there is also a tide of opportunity for conflict resolution that inevitably recedes if not taken on the flood.

It is now 10 years since the beginning of the Oslo peace process created great hopes for peace in the Middle East. We all remember those heady days of historic handshakes on the White House lawn. Those hopes have since dimmed considerably. For some time, Israel and Palestine have been locked in a sterile and violent stand-off, although we all hope that the recently proposed "road map" will regenerate momentum in the search for peace in the Middle East. Conscious of those global realities, we must not make the mistake of assuming that, regardless of opportunities not taken, or declined, our peace process is uniquely irreversible or immune to setback until the remaining vital strategic decisions are taken to enable the full and faithful implementation of the agreement.

In the shadow of a global crisis, the next few weeks may, paradoxically, be a time of great opportunity for the peace process on this island. As one commentator in Northern Ireland said last week, the dread in the wider world may encourage people here "to think outside their boxes". In the coming period that opportunity must be seized for the benefit of all the people of Northern Ireland and, also, to extend a light of hope to an international community that yearns for an enduring model of peace amidst the discouragement of war.

As the two Governments and the parties continue in the weeks ahead to bring their collective work to fruition, we will be encouraged by the continuing support and goodwill that exists across these islands for our endeavours — not

least, in the Body. The Irish Government continue to attach considerable importance to the development of the nexus of wider relationships across these islands. We were pleased that, despite the regrettable suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, it has been possible to maintain the programme of work and activity in the British-Irish Council, which brings tangible benefits to all our people.

When I had the honour of addressing the Body last year, I spoke of the diversity of partnerships on these islands and said that the circle of partnership in the Body would be complete when representatives of Unionism from the Northern Ireland Assembly took up the Body's invitation to participate. The question of inter-parliamentary links was, of course, addressed in the agreement — both in regard to the North/South and the wider east-west dimensions.

I would hope that, as a result of the current talks process, we could achieve some forward momentum in this area that might facilitate the establishment of a North/South parliamentary forum and secure the participation of Northern Ireland parties, reflective of both traditions, in the wider British-Irish inter-parliamentary links envisaged by the agreement.

In that regard, the Body and its constituent legislatures will clearly have crucial roles to play. I know that the Body will be constructive and imaginative in responding to any opportunities that may present themselves in order to achieve another important act of completion with regard to inter-parliamentary links across these islands.

The next few weeks and months offer a real prospect of breaking free of the old, simple alignments that have impoverished the politics of this island for too long. In three weeks' time, we will reach the fifth anniversary of the agreement. There would be no more fitting way of marking that important milestone than by demonstrating to the people who put their trust in that agreement that: it is now irrevocably secure; its consolidation and development is no longer held hostage to violent threat or political resistance; the political leaders of Northern Ireland are now free to focus their talents and energies on the bread-and-butter issues of making Northern Ireland a better place for all its citizens; and the Governments and Administrations of these islands can accelerate our work in ever closer partnership.

In summary, the people of this island deserve to see acts of completion that now advance a peace process to a political settlement and allow us all, paraphrasing Hubert Butler, to make our differences truly fruitful. *[Applause]*.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): Minister, thank you for your detailed address and your overview of the current political situation.

Oral Answers to Questions

Political Situation in Northern Ireland

1. **Mr Michael Mates MP** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will make a statement on the peace process.

10. **Mr Kevin McNamara MP** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will make a statement on the political situation in Northern Ireland.

11. **Mr Conor Lenihan TD** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs what further initiatives he has planned to complete the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

20. **Mr Tony Killeen TD** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs whether he will make a statement on the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

21. **Mr Séamus Kirk TD** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs whether he will give an update on the current political position with the Northern Ireland Assembly and whether he will make a statement on the matter.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr Brian Cowen TD): I propose to answer questions 1, 10, 11, 20 and 21 together.

Since the suspension of the devolved institutions of the Good Friday Agreement, the British and Irish Governments and the pro-agreement parties have been engaged in intensive negotiations with a view to implementing all the outstanding aspects of the agreement. Members of the Body will be aware of the detailed negotiations that the two Governments and the parties had at Hillsborough at the beginning of the month.

We are firmly of the view that the broad elements are now in place to secure full implementation and the speedy restoration of the institutions. We believe that the intensive engagement on all sides allowed us to identify and address the key areas and facilitate the confidence that is essential in each community to enable the agreement to be implemented fully.

The opportunity is ours to be grasped, working on the basis of acts of completion to reach a political settlement that is fully appropriate to a transformed society. A great deal of discussion and commentary has ensued on the key areas under consideration. The core substance of the proposal lies in the need to see an end to paramilitarism, coupled with securing the ongoing stability of the institutions, achieving a normalisation of the security environment, and the clear judgement of both Governments that an overall agreement is within reach. Such an understanding would open the way to restoring all the institutions to their whole-hearted operation by all parties and to the completion of the implementation of the agreement in all its aspects.

On 29 May, the people of Northern Ireland should have the opportunity to vote for an Assembly that has already resumed its powers and enjoys the prospect of operating on a stable and inclusive basis. The Taoiseach and Prime Minister Blair will return to Northern Ireland next month with definitive proposals, having allowed the parties time to reflect on the key issues.

I believe firmly that the increasing direct engagement among the parties now holds the key to future progress. We cannot rush the steps to conclusion, no matter how much we might wish to. There is a need on all sides to rebuild the trust and confidence that is necessary to underpin the successful operation of the institutions as they go forward in the future.

The package of measures that we have proposed provides an opportunity to generate the essential confidence to build a durable political future in the North. However, we also recognise that some safeguards or assurance mechanisms may be necessary to generate full trust among the parties. We see such mechanisms as a method of ensuring confidence as the process moves forward as a contingency device that should never need to be deployed.

Mr Michael Mates MP: I thank the Minister not only for his comprehensive answer, but for his excellent speech to us on the progress that has been made. It was full of optimism, and rightly so. Ministers have to be optimistic.

What would the attitude of the Irish Government be if we were unable to get the Assembly up and running before 29 May 2003? Does the Minister agree that there would be great difficulty in holding an election if there were no Assembly, and conversely great difficulty in not holding an election? On balance, would it be better to postpone the election further if there were a chance of reaching agreement and success, rather than holding an election in a vacuum in which the only people who would benefit would be the extremists on both sides of the argument?

5.30 pm

Mr Brian Cowen TD: The discussions that we had at Hillsborough Castle are complete. The Governments will make their proposals next month. Those will be considered proposals based on the all the discussions that we have had. I think that the election should go ahead on 29 May in any event. There is an important expectation among everyone in the North that the election will be held on that date. I do not see any benefit in deferring it.

In the event of non-agreement, the Good Friday Agreement would continue to be implemented, but the core of the agreement, with regard to the institutions, would clearly not be implemented until after an election. A renegotiation of the Good Friday Agreement would not be an option in the aftermath of an election. That has been made clear by both Prime Ministers.

It is important that the election on 29 May is held in the sure knowledge that the electorate knows that the only template available for political progress in Ireland is the implementation of the agreement. Therefore, during this period of reflection, I think that the pro-agreement parties will take into account the fact that we have had detailed discussions, that we addressed all the issues, and that we will put forward proposals. There is every prospect that they will turn the key that will re-establish the necessary trust and confidence. It is important that the pro-agreement parties point that out.

Those parties that have taken risks should look forward to the political rewards of the election. They should not hand to the anti-agreement parties the prospect that an alternative model is available that is feasible or that has any prospect of flying or taking hold. The Good Friday Agreement will make this work. We will implement it in full to restore the necessary trust and confidence on all sides. Its renegotiation is not an option, so the question of deferring the election to allow for further negotiation is a non-starter.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): I will take Mr Kevin McNamara's and Mr Conor Lenihan's supplementary questions together.

Mr Kevin McNamara MP: I thank the Foreign Secretary for his firm reply to Michael Mates's question. Part of the agreement was that the Republic would introduce legislation to cover the European Convention on Human Rights. I understand that there is some difficulty with that at the moment among some Members of the Government. Will the Minister confirm that we will see legislation in the Republic bringing the European Convention on Human Rights within the domestic law of the Republic?

Mr Conor Lenihan TD: Given that the Minister regards some form of agreement between now and 29 May as a real prospect, does he envisage a cut-off date at the end of April? At what point does a real prospect for agreement run out?

Mr Brian Cowen TD: To answer Kevin McNamara's point, as we have worked so hard to ensure that the commitments of other Governments and parties are honoured and respected, I do not expect my Government to be able to abrogate its responsibilities. All commitments by all Governments will be respected and implemented under the agreement. There is no credibility in any other position.

To answer the second question, as the elections have been set for 29 May, the last possible date for the dissolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly is 28 April. We will work back from that date. There is a window of opportunity between now and 28 April for the parties to complete their periods of reflection and for the necessary work to be done to restore confidence on all sides.

Single European Currency

2. **Mr Iain Smith MSP** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs what impact the single European currency has had on the Irish economy, and in particular tourism, since its introduction last year.

Mr Brian Cowen TD: The euro was adopted as the official currency of Ireland and the other member states participating in the European Monetary Union (EMU) in January 1999. The adoption of the euro has had a beneficial impact on the Irish economy. Ireland benefits from euro area interest rates, which are significantly lower than those that prevailed in Ireland before it joined the EMU. Those lower interest rates have benefited businesses and consumers.

Ireland's trade has benefited from the elimination of transaction costs in the single currency area. The introduction of euro notes and coins in January 2002 has further reduced transaction costs, and it has facilitated greater price transparency. Over time, that can be expected to have a favourable impact on prices by increasing competition.

Since specifically Irish interest rate and exchange rate tools are no longer available to manage the economy, fiscal and incomes policies have had an increased role in ensuring that the economy remains competitive in the context of euro area exchange and interest rate exchange.

As regards tourism, the introduction of the euro has been regarded as a positive development in that it facilitates travel in the eurozone. For those people who travel regularly in the eurozone the benefits are clear in terms of the reduced inconvenience and expense associated with the exchange of currencies. Although I am not aware of any empirical research on the impact of the euro on tourism in Ireland, the Irish Tourist Board will include a question in its annual visitor attitude survey this year that should reveal the importance of the euro in the consumer's choice of holiday destination.

The euro has also facilitated price comparisons across the eurozone, which can be seen only as a positive development for the consumer. In relation to tourism, that has enabled the overseas visitor to more readily compare the price of holiday packages in the eurozone. In Ireland, that price transparency has led to criticisms from Irish consumer groups in relation to prices for particular goods. However, where prices for certain items are seen as higher than expected, that has not detracted from the overall enjoyment of the Irish holiday from the tourist perspective. What is clear is that the euro has encouraged a greater awareness of price and placed a stronger emphasis on value for money as part of the holiday experience.

A key objective of the tourism promotion agencies is to ensure that visitors to Ireland get value for money for quality services provided. Over 90% of our overseas visitors are satisfied with their holiday experience.

Mr Iain Smith MSP: I thank the Minister for that full reply. I am not sure whether there is any room for a supplementary question.

There was a debate on tourism earlier following the Committee C report, which referred to price transparency as being of positive benefit. Does the Minister consider that it would be in the interests of the North and the South of Ireland if the UK Government were to do more to encourage and assist businesses in the North — and across the UK, including Scotland — to accept the euro? What advice would the Minister give to those of us in the UK who would like to see the euro introduced as soon as possible?

Mr Brian Cowen TD: Do not have a referendum on it. *[Laughter]*.

I would not seek to advise such an august body of British parliamentarians on how it should introduce the euro since I know that there is not unanimity among you on it. I will not get into that quarrel — I have quite enough quarrels with you at the moment without entering into another one.

Certain people believe that the euro generates inflation, but most of our inflation is domestically generated — that is an important point to make. Some people will always try to find a scapegoat to blame in the event of increased inflation, but it is clear that Irish inflation is domestically generated rather than being due to exchange rate changes.

Inflation in the services sector has been slowing down in recent months. It is expected that the overall consumer price index inflation rate will fall from its current level of 5.1% over the remainder of the year. On Budget day last December, before the European Central Bank cut interest rates, the consumer price index was forecast to average 4.8% in 2003. The new social partnership agreement, 'Sustaining Progress', contains an anti-inflation initiative through which the social partners will work together to reduce the inflation rate.

I know from the business sector in Northern Ireland that the difference between the euro and sterling is an issue that impedes, rather than adds to, the level of business between both parts of the island. Ideally, it would be great if we were all in the eurozone, but those are policy decisions that I know are for "another place", to use Westminster phraseology.

I hope that we can work together regardless of the exchange rate. Were we operating the business sector, North and South, in a way that people would regard as a normal interchange and exchange, approximately 130,000 more jobs would be created in both places. That would be significant. Therefore we must work harder. If local devolved institutions were in place and there was a politically stable situation, that would generate increased economic activity, which would provide for the greater interchange about which the Member talks.

Mr Alex Salmond MP: Some years ago, I contributed to a debate on Ireland's entry into the euro at the General Humbert Summer School in Ballina. I was enormously impressed by the depth of analysis of the then Minister for Finance about the pros and cons of euro entry. The analysis was more detailed and objective than the five economic tests carried out in the United Kingdom.

Has the same depth of analysis been carried out retrospectively on the effects on Ireland's economy had it not entered the euro? Has the same amount of energy and effort gone into working out the benefits and disbenefits of euro entry? I am interested to know whether that analysis has been done, as I am strongly sympathetic to euro entry.

Ireland's phenomenal growth rate has slowed down and its inflation rate is still relatively high, so perhaps the Minister can tell us whether that depth of analysis has been carried out with the same rigour after entry as it was before entry.

Mr Brian Cowen TD: Unfortunately, the question was restricted to tourism, but I am looking at it again to see whether it can relate to the Irish economy generally and, in particular, to tourism. I do not have that information available, but I will provide the Member with a written answer when I obtain it from the labyrinth of the Department of Finance. The Member finds it to be a far more transparent operation than I do.

“On the Runs” / Exiles

3. **Mr Joe Sherlock TD** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs whether he has any information on the number of people who may have been driven out of Northern Ireland as a result of threats of death or violence from Republican and Loyalist paramilitary organisations; whether any steps are being taken to facilitate the return of these people to their families; whether the matter has been raised during the course of talks with parties in Northern Ireland; and whether he agrees that it should be a quid pro quo for any arrangement for “on the runs” that these people should be allowed to return.

7. **Mr Harry Barnes MP** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs whether he will make a statement regarding the future of those who have been exiled from Northern Ireland by Loyalist and Republican paramilitary groups.

Mr Brian Cowen TD: The Irish Government have consistently condemned the practice of paramilitaries exiling people from their place of residence as an abuse of their human rights. People should be free to choose where they live. That fundamental right has been recognised in the Good Friday Agreement, and a breach of that right by paramilitary groups is unjustified. I frequently call on all political parties that are associated with paramilitary

organisations to make every effort to get those organisations to desist and to ensure that all exiles, wherever they currently reside, can safely return to their homes.

A difficulty that is associated with the issue of exiles has been the absence of adequate information about the extent of the practice. Discussions with the British authorities informed us that, although statistics and reported incidents of general intimidation are maintained, official figures are neither compiled nor issued by the police on the number of people who have been exiled by paramilitaries. The practice of exiling, together with punishment attacks and other acts of intimidation, is contrary to the rule of law and the Good Friday Agreement. As the Taoiseach has stated, the best way to end those practices is to gain community-wide support for policing.

The Member also raised the issue of “on the runs”. That issue and that of exiles are sensitive and complex. They are being dealt with in the context of full implementation of the agreement. However, as I have said in the past, to make one a precondition of the other is not the way to make progress on either issue. There is ample evidence to demonstrate that to set such preconditions does not lead to progress.

Mr Joe Sherlock TD: In a reply to a Dáil question, it was stated that there were 700 exiles in 2001. A non-denominational body in another country said that 4,000 people had been exiled over some years. Have the Governments and parties that are involved in the talks debated that matter? Paramilitaries would be allowed to return if they were on the run, but the issue of those who had to leave their homes because of paramilitary attacks must also be dealt with. Something would be seriously wrong were that issue not to arise at the talks. Has any reference been made to that issue in the talks between the Governments and the parties?

5.45 pm

Mr Brian Cowen TD: A non-governmental organisation, the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO), prepared a report on exiling this time last year. It indicated that 680 people were told to leave their homes that year by paramilitary groups, with twice as many threats coming from Loyalist paramilitaries as from Republican paramilitaries. We must bring about a normalised society in which people are committed to putting an end to acts and threats of violence. That would facilitate the return home of exiles.

None of us accept for a moment that there is any justification for people not being allowed to live wherever they wish in the island of Ireland. When full implementation of the agreement is achieved, and a commitment is made by all sides that threats of violence and intimidation and paramilitary activity of any kind will be brought to an end, and when that capability

ceases to exist, we will be in a position to ensure, in practical terms, that people can feel safe coming home.

Mr Joe Sherlock TD: The Minister has not stated whether this issue has been raised by the two Governments and the parties in the talks. Let us make the matter very clear to those who have been exiled, because to be exiled is a major breach of international law. Has the issue been discussed and agreed at that level?

Mr Brian Cowen TD: Both Governments are agreed — we are *ad idem* on this matter. We have found from experience that the best way of resolving the issue — and we do want to resolve it — is to move to a more normalised situation as quickly as possible. We must have policing arrangements that have the support of all sides of the community. There must be acts of completion all round and an end to paramilitary activity so that those who fear returning will have reason to believe that they will not be subject to victimisation on their return. That is the practical approach. This has, of course, been a matter for discussion among the parties. In the implementation group, the pro-agreement parties have discussed this issue with regard to human rights and the equality agenda, and both Governments are *ad idem* on the matter.

Mr Harry Barnes MP: Although the key issue is to put an end to people being forced into exile, because paramilitaries acting as the police, judge, jury and executioner strikes at the very heart of the democratic process, this is a complex matter. Groups such as Maranatha that help people who are in exile and who are concerned about their benefits and housing provision assist the process in some way. At the same time, action must be taken to overcome that situation and to allow people to return home. It is almost a double-edged tactic — action is taken to ensure that those who are forced into exile are looked after, while at the same time action is taken to return them home.

Mr Brian Cowen TD: I agree that people's entitlements and rights should be a priority, and there are organisations that assist in that. The fundamental issue remains people's right to live in their own home and community. The entire peace process has been about a transition from a violent, divided society to one that is peaceful and inclusive, and one in which everyone has a place and in which everyone's contribution can be constructive and positive in the context of an end to violence and paramilitary activity. We have made huge progress in that respect. The peace process has not yet dealt with this outstanding issue, but I agree that it must be dealt with. Whether or not people can return home without fear will be a litmus test for the normalisation of society. I hope that the acts-of-completion process in which we are now engaging, rather than an incremental management of the process, will provide the quantum leap and the breakthrough that in time will allow people who are fearful about returning to return on the basis that this conflict is behind us for good and all.

Co-operation Between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland

4. **The Lord Dubs** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs whether he will make a statement on the recent developments in co-operation between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Mr Brian Cowen TD: As I said in my speech, it is more than three years since the inauguration of the North/South Ministerial Council, when Ministers first gathered to discuss matters concerning people of Ireland, North and South, and to agree ways in which the two Administrations could develop formal co-operation for mutual benefit. Since that historic day in Armagh, a total of 65 meetings of the Council have taken place in locations throughout the island of Ireland. I have been pleased to participate in the four plenary meetings of the Council that have taken place to date and to represent the Irish Government in the Council's first meeting in institutional format in Belfast in December 2001.

I look forward to attending further meetings of the Council in both its institutional and plenary formats, following the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Working together in the North/South Ministerial Council, Ministers from the North and the Republic have, by agreement, mandated an extensive programme of work across a wide range of policy areas, including health, education, agriculture and environmental issues. The current work programme includes some important initiatives, for example in the agriculture sector, and the development of an all-Ireland animal health strategy is now well advanced. The Council has agreed to establish an all-Ireland centre of excellence in County Armagh for the treatment of children suffering from autism. The Council also directs the work of the six implementation bodies and Tourism Ireland Ltd, which are, like the Council itself, fruits of the Good Friday Agreement.

The seven North/South bodies have remits that range over a number of significant social, cultural and economic sectors, such as cross-border trade and business development, tourism marketing, food safety and language issues. Their combined budget is approximately 140 million euros and they employ almost 700 people across the island. North/South bodies are well established with permanent staff and, in many cases, permanent headquarters.

Some significant projects are under way and are beginning to deliver results in the form of concrete benefits. For example, InterTradeIreland, the North/South business and trade development body, was involved in the organisation of the first all-island competitiveness forum, which met recently in Bunratty in County Clare. In the important tourism sector, an all-island tourism marketing company has been established to market the island abroad as a single tourist destination. My colleague, the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, participated in the official opening of Tourism Ireland Ltd's London offices on 14 March 2003.

A significant amount of North/South co-operation takes place outside the framework of the Ministerial Council. That is true of policy formulation in the communications and energy sector, as well as in the field of higher and further education. Government Departments, North and South, also co-operate routinely on a range of day-to-day issues.

During the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the North/South Ministerial Council is unable to meet, and as the North/South bodies are dependent on the Council for their policy directions, and require Council approval for various administrative decisions, the absence of Council meetings could have adversely affected their successful operation. However, the British and Irish Governments are agreed on the importance of protecting and maintaining the achievements of the agreement, including the area of North/South co-operation. In view of that fact, and recognising that the bodies carry out an essential public function, we have taken the necessary steps to enable them to take decisions in relation to the bodies to ensure that they can continue to co-operate on a care and maintenance basis, pending restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the full operation of the Ministerial Council. Interim procedures were put in place, and these are operating effectively, enabling the implementation of programmes agreed by the Council before suspension to continue.

The Lord Dubs: I am grateful to the Minister for such a full and detailed explanation of North/South co-operation. Given the form of his answer, what further co-operation on a North/South basis would he like to see, once the Northern Ireland Assembly is restored?

Mr Brian Cowen TD: There is a huge job to be done when we finally get the political institutions bedded down and a politically durable settlement in place. Inter-community relationships will have to be developed to a greater extent, along with non-government organisations, throughout all these sectors. Many of those are operating in a co-ordinated basis already. There is a huge community and voluntary sector, which will enmesh the success of the agreement in the communities, where people will see the day-to-day benefits of co-operation. Up until now, we have had political institutions that were not conducive to the identification of common interests and progressing common approaches and joint initiatives. That is changing under the Good Friday Agreement. Changes have been hesitant and progress is incremental. People are finding their feet.

If we move in the next political initiative to an acts-of-completion phase, there will be unlimited potential for people to work more closely together on a range of issues. The agreement provides for the expansion of those areas. For example, even though it is not one of the structured North/South areas of co-operation, Mary O'Rourke, in the previous Administration, and Sir Reg Empey made such progress in the energy sector that the Irish Government supported the building of a power station in

Derry that will provide for further energy requirements in Derry and in the north-west of the Republic.

Given the increasing cost of health here, we must consider how we can better provide excellent health services, North and South. There are people in the Republic who use Daisy Hill Hospital in Newry for renal services. There is a range of practical areas, including health and education, where the natural hinterland spans the border. The potential is there, but the real success of the agreement will be when we move beyond trying to finalise the political architecture and get down to providing a more benign environment in which communities can work. The natural co-ordination of activity on the island will be seen to a far greater extent than in the past.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): There are two supplementary questions to be taken together.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD: Go raibh maith agat. I too welcome an tAire. Does the Minister agree that without the political will of both Governments to change the infrastructural deficit in the north-west we are possibly losing opportunities to draw down European funding for cross-frontier projects, particularly for real infrastructural projects? Thus, we will be unable to help ourselves to overcome the historic east-west divide of the country. Cross-border groups at a local level have, down the years, produced reports and studies galore on infrastructural needs and presented them to Ministers, many of whom are here today. However, unless we decide to prioritise the north-west, it will not be able to do so itself. That must be seen on the ground through spatial strategies.

Recent funding was announced in the UK, and a tiny percentage of the money that is earmarked for spending over the next four to six years is going to the north-west. My question concerns the need to increase the north-west's attractiveness for inward investment and job creation, and the political will of the two Governments working to do something about the north-west is essential.

Mr John Hume MP: The price of petrol is a major factor in every community and has, until recently, always been the same in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The special tax levied on the northern side of the border has wiped out the petrol industry and petrol stations in the border counties of Derry, Tyrone, Fermanagh and Armagh, which are the areas of highest unemployment on both islands. Given those circumstances, should the two Governments be working together on economic fronts to prevent such things happening?

Mr Brian Cowen TD: Cecilia Keaveney and John Hume have raised practical issues. With regard to regional funding, we are all engaged in trying to find a durable political settlement, and the level of goodwill and support from the European Union has been a consistent factor. Even at times of greatest violence, the European Union has provided real financial support in developing communities and areas of co-operation.

6.00 pm

In the context of the new budgets beyond the Berlin perspectives of 2006, much work could be done by both Governments to introduce a package that the European Union would support as its continuing contribution to the bedding down of the agreement and which would provide for the need to ratchet up and accelerate infrastructure development. The conflict has greatly affected the economic potential of those areas over a long period — quite apart from the arguments about whether we gave them enough support, which is always a contentious issue for peripheral areas.

With regard to petrol, trying to bring about a more integrated island economy should be one of the objectives of a restored Assembly and the two Governments, because not only has partition been politically divisive but the border has been economically disruptive. The Good Friday Agreement has produced benefits over the past five years. The traditional view of many people who live in border communities is that if one side of the border is doing well, the other must do badly. That happened: if Newry was up, Dundalk was down and vice-versa, and if Clones was down, Enniskillen was up. It was fine for Ministers if it was their areas that were doing well. However, the level of economic activity generated in the island of Ireland, the fact that unemployment has dropped significantly in Northern Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement and the economic dividend that the US Administration always spoke about — perhaps more so than the rest of us who were engaged in the political minutiae of arrangements — provide the real bedrock of support for the agreement in the communities, because people find that they give greater day-to-day opportunities.

Now that we have a balanced constitutional settlement, we are moving forward, and the quicker we move forward on the economic and social issues the better, and that is all the more reason for the pro-agreement parties to approach the proposals that will be put to them next month with positive attitudes. Ultimately, that is what will secure all the political work that must be done on the issues raised by the Members here.

Mr Seymour Crawford TD: I congratulate the Minister on his detailed reply to Lord Dubs.

I want to mention two small issues. The Ulster Canal must be dealt with through Waterways Ireland, and the

Minister did not mention that or how we can move forward on that matter. It is one of the truly cross-border projects that links North and South, and it would also link to the Ballyconnell Canal, an issue that was discussed earlier.

The second issue, which is very dear to the Co-Chairman's heart, is Scouting Ireland's facilities at Castle Saunderson, where young people from the North and the South will be brought together in the scouting organisation. That project also spans the border. I appreciate that a sum of money has already been contributed to the project, but cross-border issues are important in the light of the fact that INTERREG and other funds may come to an end shortly.

Mr Brian Cowen TD: I hear what the Deputy is saying. We must move beyond the project-based approach to one where there is a community support framework and a multi-annual budgeting system that will generate sustainable and integrated projects in a way that will bring about the sort of benefit that people want. Judging from the success of the Ballyconnell Canal and the regeneration in tourism that it has brought to north Leitrim, Fermanagh and other areas, I have no reason to suggest other than that the Ulster Canal would be an excellent project that would be worth funding. Many people, including the First Minister, are interested in that project. Let us hope that the British Government and the European Union can come to some funding arrangement that will enable the project to happen. We will help all we can.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): We are grateful, Minister, that you are here today. No doubt you have a busy schedule, and I understand that Paul Murphy was in Dublin today to discuss all the important issues that we hope can be finalised in order to bring about the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. We share your sentiments that all the institutions should be back in place and the agreement should be being implemented once again by its fifth anniversary.

We can but hope that that will happen and that common sense will prevail in all parties involved in Northern Ireland. Minister, we are grateful that you could attend as you have a very busy life. We enjoyed the contributions and responses to questions.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): I advise Members that briefing packs are available for tomorrow's debate on the common fisheries policy.

The sitting was suspended at 6.06 pm.

Tuesday 25 March 2003

The sitting resumed at 10.10 am.

BUSINESS REPORTS FROM CHAIRMEN OF COMMITTEES

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): We will now hear business reports from the Committee Chairmen. I ask Chairmen to be brief in their reports, limiting them to around seven minutes, as we wish to move on to the Seventh Annual Report of the Body at about 10.40 am.

Report from Committee A (Sovereign Matters)

The Chairman of Committee A (Mr Jim O’Keeffe TD): The Committee has been busy and active since the last plenary conference. We met in Belfast in February, and we had a full, fruitful and interesting discussion with the new Chief Constable there. I reflect the views of the Committee when I say that Chief Constable Hugh Orde was impressive in his presentation, and that he has the right to our confidence that he will do a very good job.

Andrew Mackay reminded me to report that, although most of the discussion was confidential, the Chief Constable highlighted the fact that the level of what he called “ordinary crime” is now lower in Northern Ireland than it is in Surrey.

We met many of the parties in Stormont during our visit to Belfast, and we had some useful discussions. The SDLP proposed that consideration should be given to changing the system in Northern Ireland for Westminster elections. The SDLP delegation felt that it would be helpful to the overall development of politics in Northern Ireland to introduce a system of proportional representation by way of single transferable vote and multi-Member constituencies in Northern Ireland. We accept that this would be a major break with tradition, but we undertook to consider the matter.

I tabled a question on this matter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs yesterday. We did not reach question 16, but a written answer will be given. The SDLP’s view is based on the fact the system of proportional representation is used for all other elections in Northern Ireland, such as European and local elections. The other side of the coin is that, in elections for Westminster, the candidates for all the other constituencies in Great Britain would be elected on a single-Member basis. We will give that issue further consideration.

There are three major items under consideration by the Committee, on which detailed work is under way. The first of those is the issue of penalty points. Co-rapporteurs Lord Dubs and Senator Brian Hayes gave an interim report on that yesterday. They highlighted the fact that they want to do further work; they want to meet the Garda Commissioner, the Chief Constable and the agencies on both sides of the border involved in dealing with road safety. They hope to have a final report on the harmonisation of the two systems for the next plenary conference.

Lord Brooke and Martin Mansergh are dealing with the functions and work of the British-Irish Council, and the relationship between it and the Body. They have produced a detailed interim report for the Committee, which members considered this morning. They want to do some further work on that issue. I expect a report — possibly a verbal report — from the co-rapporteurs for the next plenary conference.

The third area that we are considering is the criminal justice review. The rapporteurs examining that are Andrew Mackay and Tony Killeen. They have done much preparatory work by collecting information, but they want to do further work and meet some more of the parties involved.

10.15 am

Mr Michael Mates MP: Perhaps, for the record, the Member should say Andrew Mackinlay.

Mr Jim O’Keeffe TD: My apologies, I always mix up the two names.

Andrew Mackinlay and Tony Killeen have done much work and they want to continue over the next six months. The next plenary will hear their report, which will probably be oral. As to their work programme, they have planned a further visit to Belfast to meet with the Police Ombudsman among others, and to see the training college.

This morning, we met Mr Paddy McGarvey, the founder and director of the Irish Parliament Trust. The trust has produced a document outlining a solution that involves a new single Irish capital. Mr McGarvey gave us a oral presentation, but Members need not worry that the document will not be available. The document will probably contribute to any detailed discussions in the immediate future. A Member informed me after the meeting that, 20 years ago, Paddy McGarvey wrote about the advisability of bottling and selling water, a suggestion that received a cynical response at the time — and now Members have bottled water in front of them. The document is available to any Member who may be interested.

Report from Committee B (European Affairs)

The Shadow Chairman of Committee B (Mr Séamus Pattison TD): I begin by passing on the apologies and offering an explanation of the absence of the Chairman of the Committee, Andrew Mackay. Until he arrived in Ireland on Sunday afternoon, he had no idea that he would be leaving as Chairman of Committee B, but, because he had previously arranged an important meeting at Westminster today, he had to leave early this morning to get back to London.

At the Manchester plenary, the Committee agreed to conduct an inquiry into links between the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body and the Nordic Council. That inquiry aimed to investigate the links and overlap between the Body and the Nordic Council, explore the existing relationship, and suggest areas that could be developed and intensified, with the aim of increasing the number of areas in which there is a mutual interest.

The Committee had hoped to begin that work and to undertake visits to Scandinavia and Iceland before this plenary. We had hoped to agree a report this week. Unfortunately, none of the dates that were suggested for the meetings were convenient to our hosts, so we have had to postpone those meetings, including those with the secretariats of the Nordic Council and with the Council of Ministers. Those meetings have been rearranged to take place in late spring and early summer. We confidently hope to have our report ready for the autumn plenary.

In the meantime, the Nordic Council has invited the Body to send observers to its April meeting with the Baltic Assembly, which is to be held in Sweden. In the light of the Committee's inquiry, it was agreed that we should nominate two Members to attend. Ideally, we would have wished to nominate one British Member and one Irish Member, but our colleagues from Westminster, Cardiff and Holyrood are otherwise engaged, or are facing imminent elections.

Therefore, the Committee decided that Senators Mooney and O'Brien should attend. The Committee also agreed that it should undertake more investigative inquiries into matters that affect UK and Irish mutual interests in an expanded Europe. For example, when the Committee's final report into the Convention on the Future of Europe, particularly on the role of national Parliaments, together with specific areas, has been agreed, Committee B will liaise with Committees A, C and D to ensure that there will be no overlap or duplication of work.

In conclusion, it would be remiss of me not to express sincere thanks on behalf of Committee B to the outgoing Chairman, Sir Brian Mawhinney, who chaired the Committee with his usual calm courtesy and effectiveness. We are sorry that he has had to stand down due to other heavy commitments, and we wish him well.

Report from Committee C (Economic)

The Chairman of Committee C (Mr Séamus Kirk TD): The completed report on the tourism industry was tabled and discussed at some length yesterday. The Committee met this morning and is now moving on to investigate health and the delivery of health services in Ireland, the UK, the Isle of Man and perhaps further afield. The delivery of health services is, in general, extremely expensive, and demands are placed on the respective Finance Departments. We have not finalised the programme, but the Committee will examine efficiency, effectiveness and economics, the delivery of primary health-care, the issue of elective surgery and the possibilities and prospects for greater co-operation and sharing of facilities.

The Committee seeks a model in the UK that provides midwife-led maternity services so that Members can see at first hand how effective it is, or otherwise. We hope to consider a more harmonised approach to the delivery of health services in the border counties. For example, there could be a greater degree of cross-border co-operation between Brendan Smith's constituency of Cavan-Monaghan and Fermanagh and Tyrone. We are anxious to talk to Don Gelling about the significant investment that the Isle of Man has made in its health facilities. I anticipate that the Committee will decamp en bloc to the Isle of Man to see at first hand what is involved, and I am sure Mr Gelling will be glad to have us.

There is one change in the membership of the Committee. Gareth Thomas has replaced Andrew Mackay who has moved to chair Committee B. We are delighted to have a new member on the Committee to help us with this significant task. We do not underestimate the volume of work involved; it will impose a burden on the Committee members and on the officials, but we have the capability to do it. We have not yet worked out a timescale for delivery of the report. We may look at the feasibility of delivering interim reports as we go along, but that decision has yet to be taken. It is a mammoth task, but it is well worth undertaking.

Report from Committee D (Environmental and Social)

The Chairman of Committee D (Mr Kevin McNamara MP): We do not have much progress to report at the moment, but we hope to make considerable progress before our next meeting. We were bogged down by the controversy over the report on Sellafeld. However, we now have two rapporteurs for it — Senator O'Rourke and Jeff Ennis — and the possibility of a third rapporteur from one of the devolved Assemblies after the general elections.

We intend to visit Guernsey — I imagine that there will be a good turnout of the Committee — immediately

after the Dáil rises for the summer. The purpose of that is two-fold. First, our general report will be on the environmental problems associated with waste management. Guernsey is in the throes of coming to terms with the fact that its landfill capacity is rapidly disappearing; it may be available for perhaps only another two years. Whether or not Guernsey should have an incinerator is a matter of considerable public controversy. We thought that the situation in Guernsey could be used as a reasonable, simple test case to examine the various problems involved, to ascertain the need for alternatives to landfill, to consider the environmental consequences of using incinerators and to gauge public opinion on their use.

The second reason for going to Guernsey relates to the Sellafield report. Representatives from Guernsey kindly invited us to see how they monitor emissions from the French nuclear power stations adjacent to them. They have a good working relationship with France. If it can be fitted in, we may also visit the nuclear plant in France to see how its relationships with Guernsey and the other islands work.

Furthermore, the Isle of Man has suggested that we should visit there as it has a similar system for dealing with emissions from Sellafield. Moreover, it has finished its consultations and has no more landfill left. It has damned the public and decided to have an incinerator. It would be useful to visit both islands and cement the relationships within the Body. We hope that the rapporteurs will have interim reports for our meeting in the autumn and that we might also be able to produce an interim report for that meeting on progress on waste management, but without reaching any specific conclusions.

SEVENTH ANNUAL REPORT

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): I beg to move

That the Body takes note of the Seventh Annual Report of the Body [Doc No 89].

This is my first “home” plenary, and I especially thank the officials who organised it and the shadow Chairman of Committee B, Séamus Pattison, and his office for their work on ensuring that we have been met with such great hospitality here in Kilkenny. Mr Pattison’s encouragement and work are very much appreciated by David Winnick, myself and the other officials.

Yesterday, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who was a founding Member of the Body, spoke in an upbeat manner about the future of the Body, its work and its potential to contribute to politics on these islands. Over the past 12 months there has been a substantial change in the membership of the Body, mostly as a result of the general election last May. As I said last night, we hope that our Members who are facing elections in Wales and Scotland on 1 May will be back with us in October for our plenary conference.

10.30 am

Yesterday, Andrew Mackinlay spoke about the need for a wider membership of the Body, particularly with regard to the participation of Unionists. This discussion provides Members with the opportunity to give their views on how they see the Body evolving in the future; how a reformulation of the Body could make it more attractive to Unionists; and on the role that the Body can play with regard to politics in all these islands in the years ahead.

The Lord Brooke: At the last plenary sitting, I drew attention to the fact that the secretariat had, with great kindness, recorded me as the Rt Hon Peter Brooke MP. That implied that I had reached Parliament without the benefit of the intervention of the electorate. It was noted at the time, and suggestions were made that the matter would be corrected. However, I suspect that the information was taken directly from the meeting. On page 9 of the Seventh Annual Report of the Body, the full lists of Members of the Body from Westminster at the beginning and end of 2002 record me as a Member of the House of Commons. The Committee reports, however, refer to me as being in the House of Lords. I am not suffering from an identity crisis, but if someone were to write a PhD on the work of the Body in 100 years’ time, he or she might be puzzled by that entry.

My other comment I make only to show that I have read the report from cover to cover. It might be unique to my copy, but the contents page lists pages 1 to 18. However, at the back there is a report from the States of Jersey entitled ‘EU and UK Fish Quotas and Their Impact in Jersey’. Those pages have not been paginated as pages

19 and 20. That may have been deliberate, but it may just be possible that it was an administrative error.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): That is quite likely.

Mr Seymour Crawford TD: I associate myself with the thanks extended to Mr Séamus Pattison TD and his staff for the wonderful few days that they have organised for us, obviously with the help of the administrators. I pay special tribute to Séamus for his work and for the great structures that he has put in place for us.

The Co-Chairman, Mr Brendan Smith, raised the issue of the involvement of the Unionists. We must be careful about discussing that matter before the election, which I hope will take place on 29 May. This is a delicate time for the Unionist family; it is not a very united family. I make no apology for saying that the Official Unionists have, in the main, taken a constructive attitude towards the Good Friday Agreement. It has not been easy for them, and I say that as one who has some knowledge of their difficulties.

In the light of the fact that the Body has been in place for 13 years, the few weeks between now and the election are not that significant. We should not make too much public play of our desire, however fervent it is, to have the Unionists on board. We can take the issue up at our next plenary meeting, when, I hope, a successful election will have taken place in Northern Ireland. We will then understand the situation better. I want to see Unionists actively involved in the Body. Our different parties have good relationships, especially with the Official Unionists, and also with the SDLP and other parties in Northern Ireland. I am simply giving a word of warning that we should not push the issue too much in the next few weeks.

The Lord Temple-Morris: I want to address the same topic. I read through the annual report, but could not find any mention of the door being at least open to the Unionists when they choose to join us. I may have missed that since I did not read the report very thoroughly. However, that should be mentioned.

Michael Mates was helpful yesterday when dealing with his approaches to David Trimble. He mentioned that he thought there could be changes for the better. From the point of view of the House of Lords, relations are extremely friendly. I am approached constantly with requests for a deputation of Unionists to visit one of our plenary sessions or a sovereignty Committee. I do not know whether that has ever been responded to. These may not be top-flight Unionists, but they are people whom David Trimble has seen fit to send to the House of Lords. I am speaking about Lord Rogan, Lord Laird and Lord Maginnis.

Relations at that level with those sorts of people could lead directly to David Trimble at a chosen time. It is a matter for the Steering Committee. However, it should

be mentioned, because we have had little response to it. I was approached again about the matter before this plenary. I did not know what to say, because they had not heard anything. The House of Lords offers another door that can be used at the appropriate time if that is helpful to the Steering Committee.

Senator Martin Mansergh: This is the one of the acts of completion about which we have spoken. We want to end the various boycotts; for example, Sinn Féin's boycott of the police. Northern Ireland politics has been too full of boycotts. This particular one has no ideological justification. It is said to be a sensitive issue, but is rioting on the Shankill likely to break out if the Ulster Unionist Party decides to attend the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body? I do not think so. It is without public resonance at this stage.

For whatever tactical reasons meetings are being held, the origin of the Body is not the Anglo-Irish Agreement; it originates from the British-Irish studies of the 1980s, which even under the Molyneux leadership became more ideologically acceptable. This is an east-west, not a North/South, body. David Trimble is one of the most assiduous attendees of the British-Irish Association. He is there practically every year. I have not heard any reasoned defence for Unionists' non-attendance at the Body. I have raised that point with several Unionists, and none of them has produced any coherent, reasoned response as to why they should not be Members. The best that can be come up with is perhaps an association with the Anglo-Irish Agreement. However, the Good Friday Agreement has superseded and replaced the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

The Body finds a place, taking into account the various devolved Assemblies that are brought into association with it and are part of it. Reconstitution has taken place. For example, the Anglo-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference set up under the Anglo-Irish Agreement has become the British-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference. There is no suggestion of any Unionist objection to that at this stage. Likewise, the secretariat is now in the centre of Belfast, and Unionists have no problem going along to functions there. What is their concern with this Body? It is organised on an east-west basis, which in my understanding of Unionist thinking, is the preferred way that relations between Britain and Ireland should be organised.

We should look for this act of completion from the Ulster Unionist Party. When the other difficulties are sorted out, it would be very unsatisfactory if come September or October, the Ulster Unionists were still absent.

The Westminster Members probably have more influence in this matter than the Oireachtas Members, and I know that they have been trying to bring that influence to bear. Apart from anything else, how can it be in the Unionists' interest to have British and Irish parliamentarians discussing matters, many of which focus on Northern

Ireland, without direct Unionist input or participation, apart from the best efforts of Robin Glentoran?

Senator Paschal Mooney: Not for the first time, I find myself trailing in the wake of my friend and colleague Senator Mansergh's forensic analysis of the situation. I support all that he said, and I draw colleagues' attention to the references in the Seventh Annual Report on the work of the Committees, especially that of Committee B, of which I am a member.

Members will note that the report refers to the fact that there was growing frustration with the lack of co-operation from the Unionist Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly in attempting to complete an important report on transport links between Northern Ireland and Britain. To quote from the report, for the benefit of Members who might not be familiar with it, the Chairman reported that

"he had tried to set up a meeting with the Regional Development Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA), but without success."

The next paragraph refers to the fact that

"following the meeting in Dublin, he had again tried to obtain evidence from the NIA's Regional Development Committee. The chairman of the NIA committee had been open to the suggestion, but the Unionist members of the committee were not, and in the circumstances the chairman was not inclined to pursue the matter. As the Committee had now been considering the matter for three years, it was agreed that a line should now be drawn under the inquiry."

For three years, Committee B attempted, at various times, to engage with the Unionist Members who were publicly elected to represent their people in the Northern Ireland Assembly and have the same status as those who are constituent Members of the Body. For the reasons that Senator Mansergh has referred to, which I believe are now obscure, they refused to even participate in the completion of a report by the Body.

I am flummoxed, frankly, and I agree with the views of Senator Mansergh and those of our Westminster colleagues who are in regular contact. I acknowledge Michael Mates's enormous, ongoing contribution to the attempt to encourage Unionists to join the Body. However, they are clinging to the view that because it is a creature of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, they should not have anything whatsoever to do with it.

We cannot drag someone, kicking and screaming, into something that they do not wish to be part of. I hope that this might be another opportunity to use the undoubted influence that Westminster colleagues have with the Unionist Members to once again emphasise that the Body has absolutely nothing to do with the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and that that agreement, as Senator Mansergh said, has been superseded by the Good Friday Agreement, which Ulster Unionists have signed up to. I will not dwell on that point any further, but the Body has an incomplete dimension while it continues to operate in the absence of Unionist Members.

I draw attention, rather sadly, to the debate that we had in Dublin and the resolution that was passed in relation to the attempts of Scotland and Ireland to host the 2008 European Football Championship. It now seems like a long time ago. However, the Body is to be complimented for having debated the issue, for having brought it to a conclusion and for contributing significantly to heightening public awareness of the political dimension to that debate.

It is a matter of grave disappointment, not only to our Scottish colleagues but also to us in Ireland, that the bid was unsuccessful. However, although it seems a long way off, and despite the old cliché that a week is a long time in politics, I hope that the Body will continue to monitor developments in that regard, as there will be an opportunity to make a joint bid for the 2012 European Football Championship. I draw the Body's attention to the fact that we debated the matter, although it was not within our normal agenda. We should continue to look at it, not just in the narrow political sense, but because there are issues of commonality between our various component parts. Where issues such as that arise the Body has a role to play in drawing wider public attention to them.

Football may not seem very important, but I subscribe to Bill Shankly's school of philosophy that football is much more important than life or death.

10.45 am

Mr Michael Mates MP: I want to address the remarks that were made about getting some Unionists in through the back door via the House of Lords. Fellow members of the Steering Committee will remember that I suggested that a year or 18 months ago. With the Steering Committee's permission I spoke to Ken Maginnis and David Trimble. I suggested to David that to do that would be less sensitive, given that Ken has been out of what we might call front-line politics since he gave up his parliamentary seat. David thought about it and said that when the UUP decides to join the Body it will do so through the front door, and one must accept that point of view. I reported that to the Steering Committee, but I wanted to share it with Members. I understand, but I share the frustration of Senators Mansergh and Mooney. Senator Mansergh put his finger on it, whether he meant to or not, when he said that, when the other difficulties are over, all would be well in September.

I think that David Trimble's view is that participation in the Body is one more problem and that it is something he can do without because it is not very important to him. He is trying hard to hold his party together under difficult circumstances. I do not speak for David Trimble, but I am telling the Body what lies behind what seems like a stubborn refusal to make what we consider to be a small and relatively irrelevant step in terms of the big picture among Unionists in Northern

Ireland. He thinks that he can do without it and that he has enough problems on his shoulders. His leadership is challenged almost every other Monday about this, that and the other. Therefore why would he upset any more of his people by allowing a delegation to sit on the Body, when they believe that it is a creature of the Anglo-Irish Agreement? That is the problem.

However, we know that that is wrong, because the Good Friday Agreement has superseded the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The Anglo-Irish Agreement was demonised among quite moderate Unionists — it was not only the extremists that found it too big a pill to swallow. Cast one's mind back to that, because that agreement is the source of the problem.

As I have told the Steering Committee, I shall continue to try, but the way to do it is to carry on chipping away quietly behind the scenes. I shall have another talk with David Trimble when I get back to see what we can do. However, we shall not achieve anything until we achieve acts of completion. I shall put it to him that participation in the Body could be achieved, and I do not think that he will disagree. However, whether rightly or wrongly, he feels that it will be one more nail in his coffin were he to grant another concession before he has got back what he and the Unionists think they need in order to restore the Northern Ireland Executive with confidence.

Mr Jim O'Keeffe TD: I listened with great interest to the debate on Unionist participation in the Body, and I would love that to happen. I understand the perception of the Anglo-Irish Agreement having had a peripheral role, as I was Minister of State for Foreign Affairs at that time. However, I could never understand the objections — not only those of the Unionists, as there were objections on all sides, which I shall not go into — to what was the foundation stone of the Good Friday Agreement.

I wonder whether the attitude that we display to the Unionists should be more invitational than demanding. I am not sure that displaying a sense of frustration and an attitude that says that, as a final act of completion, Unionists should attend here, is the right approach. I favour the approach suggested by Michael Mates, with the assistance of Peter Temple-Morris, that there should be informal discussions and an attempt made to convey the view that it would be in Unionists' interests to be involved and to put forward their viewpoint, which is missing. Despite the efforts by some over the years — going back to Barry Porter — to try to convey that viewpoint, a direct Unionist input is missing, and that is not to their advantage. The presentation should be more in that mode rather than making demands and telling them that the game is up, to stop messing and to come in and join the Body. I feel that that would be the wrong approach — from what I know from friends in the Unionist Party. I would not expect a positive reaction. We need a friendly, invitational approach, pointing out to Unionists that is in their best interests to be Members of the Body.

The Lord Brooke: My first comments were editorial rather than substantive. However, I have followed the debate, and I strongly support what Michael Mates said. I have quoted before in the Body the wise remark of CS Lewis, that great Ulsterman, that if you hear of somebody going round doing good to others you can always tell the others by their hunted look.

In my experience help is defined by the receiver rather than by the giver. When the Ulster Unionists are ready to come, they will come.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): It has been an interesting debate, and it has concentrated once more — as to be expected — on the exclusion of the Unionists. However, one recent success of the Body is the manner in which the devolved institutions in the United Kingdom have become part of the Body. I noted the way in which Members of the devolved institutions wanted to take part — and rightly so — in the debate on Northern Ireland. There was some hesitation when they attended the first three plenary sessions. I got the impression that they thought that it was a matter for the Members of the two sovereign Parliaments, but all that hesitation and reluctance has now gone, and we have an integrated Body. No one says that on one side are the representatives of the two sovereign Parliaments and on the other side the Members — as almost a second tier — of the devolved institutions. There is nothing of the kind; we are one Body. That, undoubtedly, has demonstrated how right we were to bring on board the devolved institutions, and their willingness and enthusiasm to come on board and become Members of the Body. We have been strengthened by their participation, and that is a success.

Broadly speaking, the main emphasis has been on the exclusion of the Unionists, and their exclusion from the beginning was their own wish. Peter Temple-Morris and his colleague in the Lords, Peter Brooke, made the point that some sort of contact can be made with members of the Ulster Unionist Party in the Lords. I hope that that is so. However, in an article that appeared in either this week's or last week's 'Irish Post' by a journalist who has been present at the Body, Lord Kilclooney, the former deputy leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, made some comments about the Body which, to say the least, were not very gracious. Perhaps Lord Kilclooney's comments express a prevailing view in the main Unionist Party about the Body. In his view at least, we are wasting our time, and we are only in it for the leisure, the dinners and the other events.

Martin Mansergh summed up the position well when he said that it was another form of boycott. We want to end boycotts; we want acts of completion. It is up to the Unionists to decide whether they are going to take a negative view of the Body in the future, as they have done in the past.

Seymour Crawford said that now is not a good time for the Ulster Unionists. Obviously it is not. With the elections coming up on 29 May, it is a sensitive time for

David Trimble and the Ulster Unionist Party. As well as that, the fact that David Trimble's leadership has been challenged several times by those who are anti-agreement lessens the likelihood of members of his party coming to the meetings of the Body, and that is unfortunate. Martin Mansergh said that we are, first and foremost, an east-west body, not North/South. That is all the more reason that we will not be an all-inclusive Body until the Unionists decide that they are willing to participate.

Ultimately, in a free country and in a free party it is the party members who must make the decision. What we know and what we have said from the beginning is that they would be most welcome. The work of the Body would be strengthened considerably if the voice of Unionism was directly heard. We have had a number of colleagues over the years, including the late Barry Porter, who had a pronounced Unionist viewpoint. Mr Porter gave his views with his usual candour and honesty, but it was an indirect voice. We want the Unionists to come to the meetings of the Body, explain their points of view, argue and participate in all the usual ways. I hope that they will come to that decision, but I am not optimistic. Representatives from the Body — and Michael Mates has promised this on his part — will continue to make informal contacts and representations to the Ulster Unionists, and it is hoped that, over time, they will decide to attend. However, we will have to wait and see.

The report demonstrates that the Body is successful in its deliberations. My only concern is that the Committees are not functioning entirely as they should be, but apart from that, the Body is a success story.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Body takes note of the Seventh Annual Report of the Body [Doc No 89].

Mr Kevin McNamara MP: The Body has been talking about the exclusion of the Unionists. Can the word "exclusion" be changed to "absence", because exclusion suggests that the Unionists are being kept out, but it is their decision to be absent?

Senator Paschal Mooney: The Ulster Unionist Party has been invited to attend meetings of the Body, but has any approach been made, or invitation extended, to the DUP? We have talked about Mr Trimble and the Ulster Unionist Party, but I am curious to know about the status of the DUP. Is it following the mainstream Unionist line?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): Both the DUP and the UUP were invited to participate.

Senator Paschal Mooney: Comments have been made about the approaches made by the Lord Temple-Morris, Michael Mates and others to David Trimble. One assumes that they are also discussing this with the DUP.

Mr Michael Mates MP: One assumes wrongly.

Senator Paschal Mooney: That is what I wanted to check. I was being slightly disingenuous, but I am glad that you clarified that for me.

Mr Michael Mates MP: We will have to take this one step at a time.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): The chances of Ian Paisley agreeing to attend meetings of the Body is as likely at this moment — or indeed during his lifetime — as his converting to the Roman Catholic Church.

Senator Paschal Mooney: It was not Mr Paisley that I had it mind; it was the more pragmatic element in the DUP.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): On that spiritual note, we will suspend for tea and coffee.

Mr Michael Mates MP: Have we taken note of the penalty points report? If not, we could do it on the nod.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): We did that yesterday afternoon.

The sitting was suspended at 10.59 am.

The sitting resumed at 11.18 am.

Motion made:

That the Body do now adjourn. — [*The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD).*]

COMMON FISHERIES POLICY

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): This morning, colleagues from the Isle of Man kindly circulated a document in relation to the debate on fisheries. There is also a document from the Northern Ireland Office. Those documents, and others, are available on the document table at the back of the conference room for those who want to refer to them.

A new housekeeping arrangement is that the bus to Dublin that was due to leave at 1.45 pm will now leave at 1.30 pm. In view of that, we hope to conclude business at around 12 noon in order to have lunch. It is hoped, therefore, that we can get through this important debate as quickly as possible.

The Governments and the devolved Administrations have submitted papers, which have been circulated to Members.

Mrs Margaret Ewing MSP: Before speaking in this Adjournment debate, I wish to make two comments. First, I want to thank Members for the kind remarks that they made yesterday with regard to the troops in Iraq. From my constituency, four RAF squadrons, several helicopters and many infantrymen from the Black Watch and the Highlanders have been sent to the area. I will ensure that your kindness and sympathy, which will be greatly appreciated by the men and their families, are conveyed to the commanding officer.

On a personal note, I would like to thank the Members of the Body who wrote to me last year when I had to undergo radical surgery for breast cancer. I thank them also for the kind wishes that were sent to Winnie Ewing, who is well known to many people here, on the sad and tragic loss of her husband Stewart, my father-in-law, earlier this year. All those messages meant a great deal to us.

I assume that many people here will understand the complexities of the common fisheries policy. If they did not, I would have to use up all the allocated time to go through them. I would like to raise a series of issues that the Members of the Body, from across our political and geographical boundaries, should address. Many will have their own views and will wish to make their own comments on the impact of the common fisheries policy on their areas.

First, what should we do with the common fisheries policy? Many people see it as having been a disaster from the outset and beyond remedy. Can it be reformed, or should it be scrapped? I would be interested to hear

what Members have to say about that. In Scotland, 44,000 jobs depend on the fisheries industry, and even people who come from land-locked constituencies can see its importance. The potential loss to the Scottish economy of 44,000 jobs is immense.

Secondly, the common fisheries policy is creating a sense of disillusionment with the European Union. Many here may have different views about it, but, generally speaking, we have been favourable to the European Union. There is now the prospect of enlargement, which will bring in other countries wishing to participate in fishing. We have to look at protecting the Irish box and the Shetland box and at the implications for Jersey, the Isle of Man and many other areas. Should the management of sea fisheries be repatriated to our national institutions?

Thirdly, how reliable is scientific evidence? There are skippers all over the place who tell me that in 20 years of fishing they have seen only one science boat out in the North Sea. We all agree that conservation is a noble aim; but there are constant disputes about the accuracy of the findings that are given to us by scientific bodies. The role of environmental groups is increasing — they have their own arguments about conservation and sometimes do not understand the realities of the industry. How do we ensure that scientific evidence is foolproof and is allowed therefore, to dominate how we deal with the fisheries industry? We have to bring together the expertise of the fishing people and the scientists, so that they are working together rather than separately. How do they interact with the Government Ministers who attend the various councils?

Are we satisfied that conservation measures are applicable across the entire European Union? The Scottish fleet uses 120 mm nets. However, its quotas has been halved this year, and it is restricted to 15 days a month at sea. At the same time, Denmark has managed to make a deal with regard to industrial fishing, which takes away the seed corn of our future. Sand eels, pout and other small fish are being used for industrial purposes to feed Danish pigs and cattle.

We must address the issue of quotas. In the past, the decommissioning of boats under the common fisheries policy meant that the licences went with the boats but the quotas did not. In Scotland we have what we call “slipper kippers”, because the quotas are still there, in theory, in a bank. We wish to see those retained on a national basis so that, in the event of a recovery in the industry, they can come back into the Scottish fishing fleet. We are still awaiting a ruling on that from the European Commission. However, it could be an interesting prospect.

The Scottish Executive have allocated a £50 million package, £48 million of which is for decommissioning. Many of us in the Scottish Parliament — my colleagues from other parties might wish to make their own comments on this — take the view that decommissioning equals redundancies. We are not going to retain our fleet, skippers and crew and all their skills. We have already decomm-

issioned 117 boats, and under the programme, the Scottish fleet would be left with very few boats. Ian Duncan of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation has stated:

"We are not talking about lean and mean, we are talking emaciated and crippled".

The anger that is felt throughout those fishing communities is almost palpable, and I am sure that it is the same everywhere. I spoke at a rally organised by support groups in my home town of Lossiemouth at the weekend. I have a T-shirt here — I was asked to do a strip, but I will not —

Several Members: Go on!

Mrs Margaret Ewing MSP: The message on the T-shirt reads "SOS Fishing" and "Moray Makes Waves" — one of my skippers said that that sounded like a hairdressing salon. Support groups are springing up all over the place because this anger goes beyond the fleet and its dependent industries. It reaches into the heart of our communities. The women who have supported their husbands, sons and grandfathers over the years — five generations of fishermen in some cases — are so angry about the common fisheries policy. The anger that they feel for the European Union is something that we must bear in mind.

Some 32 million euros have been set aside in the European budget for scrapping, which is the same as decommissioning. A budget line has been placed. I hope that the Governments represented here will ensure that a proposal for equal funding is brought before the sovereign Parliaments to ensure that that money is made available, and that some of the package that I spoke about earlier can be used for transitional relief for many of the industries dependent on the fleet.

I have tried to avoid being party political in my remarks, and I hope that these issues can be addressed. I look forward to hearing other comments, and I hope that — either directly from this plenary or via the European Committee of the Body — we can make a substantial report and address some of the fundamental long-term issues that have an impact on the common fisheries policy.

Dr Dai Lloyd AM: Diolch yn fawr iawn, Gyd-Gadeirydd. Yr wyf yn falch o gael cyfrannu at y ddadl bwysig hon ar bysgodfeydd.

I will not go over the same ground that Margaret Ewing trod, but I will say that the large fishing fleet in Milford Haven in Pembrokeshire, which is one of Western Europe's largest natural harbours, is now but a distant memory.

Modern fishing has been seriously affected by depleting fish stocks. Fishing is a sustainable activity only at a certain level, and disastrously depleted fish stocks have enormous consequences for employment and biodiversity. In Wales we have lost our large fishing fleets, so I will concentrate on the domestic picture. In the National Assembly for Wales, moves are afoot to produce an all-Wales fisheries strategy based on the development of the commercial

and recreational fisheries sectors in Wales, hitherto long and largely neglected.

In Wales, many fish stocks are well below historic levels and require restoration. What is happening at sea cannot be divorced from the condition of domestic rivers. Wales needs to catch up with its competitors in developing and maintaining an access and information infrastructure and marketing support for fisheries. Wales has a wealth of affordable coarse, game and sea fishing opportunities that are readily accessible for local and tourist anglers.

Angling is the largest participatory sport in Wales, which is lucky, as we are not doing so well at rugby nowadays, even though it was close on Saturday — *[Interruption]*.

11.30 am

To return to the subject of fishing, Wales has 240 salmon and trout-fishing rivers, several hundred natural lake fisheries and over 20 large reservoirs. In addition to those, there are over 200 small, stocked still-water fisheries, 150 km of canal towpath and 1,200 km of coastline that can be fished. Also, nearly 300 charter boats operate from Welsh ports, and each year the recreational fisheries of Wales provide opportunities for the 100,000 anglers who live in Wales, the 60,000 anglers who visit Wales solely for a fishing holiday and the more than 400,000 visitors who make fishing a part of their holidays in Wales.

Recreational fisheries contribute more than £100,000 each year to the Welsh economy, mainly in rural areas, and that is why I welcome the opportunity to debate this important issue. By focusing on fisheries and restoring good water quality and habitats, we can produce enormous economic, environmental and social benefits.

Wales is unique in that it has an abundance of club-based fisheries where traditional local ownership fosters care for the environment, and fishing is more affordable than anywhere else in the UK. In addition, Wales has historic "heritage fishermen"; for example, the coracle fishermen on the River Teifi in Ceredigion and the lave net fishermen of the Severn Estuary. Those types of fishing are historic; they are handed down through families and employ medieval techniques. They are valuable tourist attractions. There are also the cockle fishermen of the Burry Inlet, between the Gower Peninsula and Carmarthenshire.

The Welsh fleet, such that it is, is a mainly inshore fleet that catches shellfish. However, the potential of recreational and commercial fisheries needs serious development in Wales. The National Assembly for Wales has begun to consider that issue. It must provide our rural and tourist economy needs with a significant boost.

Diolch yn fawr, a chefnogwch y cynnig.

Thank you very much, and I support the motion.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD: Go raibh maith agat, a Chomh-Chathaoirleach. With respect to those journalists who are here, I am afraid that I must begin on a negative

note. I am disappointed that although we are debating a topic of such great importance to the island nation of Ireland, and to the British Isles, so few of the journalists who have been present for the past couple of days are here to report on what is probably the most significant issue that the Body could be debating. Changes to the fishing industry have made a genuine impact on our communities over the past few months. As such, they deserve to be reported. With respect to my colleagues, the representation here reflects those people who are hit closest and hardest by the problems, and I thank those Members for whom the issue does not have a direct relevance but who have returned to attend the debate.

Ireland has never fully developed its water resources: not only fisheries, but water and marine leisure among others. At the risk of condemning my colleagues, successive Governments have not realised that Ireland's water resources are treasures that have been poorly exploited and have not been awarded the focus that they deserve. Those resources are still not at the centre of activities.

The devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales should aim to deal with their own water resources. I do not know enough about the water policies in those Administrations, or how much power has been devolved to allow control of the water resources, but it is time that we worked together to fight a common cause in Europe.

Margaret Ewing asked whether we should get rid of, abandon or review the common fisheries policy. Fishermen in my constituency would say that the problems cannot be resolved and that the policy should be scrapped. Whether or not that happens is for another debate.

We definitely sold our fishermen out when we joined Europe, although the farming community benefited from it. That sell-out can clearly be seen from the percentage of waters that we have in relation to the percentage of catch that we are allowed. Every December, an increasing number of Ministers go to Brussels to try to share an ever-depleting cake into ever-depleting quotas and amounts of stock. I am becoming increasingly disgusted by the words and rhetoric about "conservation" and by the outcome of the Brussels meetings.

Recently in South Africa there were discussions about conservation and about increasing stocks by 2015. Everyone left those discussions slapping each other on the back. There has been a big move towards "sustainable development" and the other wonderful buzzwords that are used. The Ministers then go to Brussels and, as ever, forget about the bigger picture. They fight for their own national interest — which is what most people do. However, they then come out with the words "conservation measures". I have yet to see what the days-at-sea restrictions are doing for cod recovery.

In Area VI, fishermen in my constituency of Donegal North-East who use 100 mm meshes, which are meshes with big holes, are told that they can fish for nine days.

However, if they use 16 mm meshes, they are told they can spend 23 days at sea. I have been advised not to press that issue, because if I highlight the fact that people can spend 25 days at sea if they fish with meshes measuring between 70 mm and 99 mm, the 25 days will be reduced and not the period for the 16 mm meshes. However, if fishermen use 16 mm meshes, they will catch not only the small fish but everything that the bigger fish are going to eat. That is not conservation. If fishermen use 100 mm meshes, which allow the smaller fish to escape, that is more in line with conservation.

Like Margaret Ewing, I worry about to what extent the intellect of the fishermen is coming into play. They are out in the fishing grounds and know about them. The fishermen have not been entirely honest in their approach, and they will say that themselves. However, they do know that there is only one way for them to succeed now; it is to work with the scientists and with the system to get a fair deal from the system.

In my area we fought with the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources to establish the facts about what is going on. At sea there are places where the fish spawn; there are places where they stay as juveniles; there are areas where there have never been any cod; and there are areas where there are plenty of cod. The fishermen and the analysts should both provide the statistics in relation to that.

We have battled to get research vessels into the area to provide us with the statistics so that we can go to Europe with the facts. We can then recommend the closure of spawning and juvenile areas at certain times, thus achieving proper conservation. We have enough information on those vessels now, and, through the various mechanisms, tracking and policing can easily take place. We have had some success, and I must congratulate the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources for granting the funding to get research vessels into our part of Area VI to work with the fishermen and to put the experts onto some of the small boats that are now being crippled because of the days-at-sea restrictions.

I want to highlight a related aspect that some people forget about. When fishermen return to their families after being at sea, life is not necessarily wonderful. Fishermen are served by many industries. It seems that, as a result of the decisions made in Brussels in December, no one has really looked to those who serve the industry: the engineers who service the boats; the people who paint the boats; those who bring stocks of food to the boats; the ice-makers; the drivers of the diesel lorries; the suppliers who come from every nook and cranny; the net-menders; the food-processing industry; and many others.

In my region, we suffered the loss of Fruit of the Loom. We used to say that we had the three Fs; fishing, farming and Fruit of the Loom — I will not say what the second part of that phrase is — but they are all in trouble. The

number of workers at Fruit of the Loom has fallen from 4,500 to 200 or 300. Farming is going down the tubes, to use a blunt expression. Fishing is very much following suit, but it should not be because it was the life and soul of our area. Fishing brought extreme wealth to our community.

There is no doubt that we should look to conservation — the cod stocks are depleted. However, let us have real conservation. Let us obtain the statistics and put the issue back in the fishermen's hands and say, "You asked us to close this area, and you said that you would oblige by observing that." Thus, we can give fishermen a chance and ensure that there will be stock for their sons and grandsons to fish. The sea is not like a coal mine — when a coal mine is finished, it is finished. However, if the sea is looked after and nurtured, it will yield infinite stock.

The Irish box is another conservation measure that is often talked about, but it does not stack up. Sometimes I wonder whether we Irish do more policing and enforcing than any other country. However, other people would ask whether we do enough. I agree that we must examine the issue of fair play between all the different countries and the issue of flags of convenience, but we must also examine the conservation issue.

We cannot get the legislation to protect aquaculture in the Foyle. The Executive are not up and running, so they are unable to draft legislation. How are we to conserve our aquaculture? At present, we rely on the best will of the fishermen in the area. The legislation must be introduced.

We are going to stick a wind farm in the biggest salmon fishery in the country — and probably in Europe — yet we do not know whether the wind farm will detract from the salmon's ability to return to the Foyle. Although the Foyle is being sold as a lovely sanctuary for fish, my wee salmon swimming around those turbines could become prey for the predators and bigger fish. What is the price of conservation and green energy?

I am sorry that I have been long-winded, but I am extremely concerned about the issue. It has had very serious consequences for my area. We must get the statistics to Europe quickly to prove that the days-at-sea restrictions are too blunt an instrument. They must be refined and honed. Yes, we agree that there should be conservation, but conservation that is focused, targeted and that makes some sense — not what we got from Brussels in December. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Jamie Stone MSP: I deliberately want to describe the situation in my part of the world. I have the good fortune to represent the constituency of Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross — at least for the next six days, when our Parliament is prorogued. My constituency is at the top of the UK mainland and covers three coasts — north, west and east. Those who are acquainted with Scottish history will know that the county of Sutherland was worst hit by the infamous Highland clearances. Therefore, a huge tract of its territory is sparsely populated, and the com-

munities are extremely fragile to say the least. Gaelic, which I am sure will strike a chord with colleagues here, hangs on by its very fingernails in the north-west of the county of Sutherland. The village of Kinlochbervie on the west coast faces the possibility of the complete disappearance of its fishing industry. In the scheme of things, that would not involve a great many jobs, but it could sound the death knell for that tiny community.

11.45 am

One must be desperately careful. One can imagine the effect on the local school roll; it does not take much to render those tiny wee schools no longer viable. That is the sort of life-or-death situation that I am faced with.

My first point, therefore, is that it is important that not only the UK Government and the Scottish Executive but all of us working together keep an eye on the situation. If the fish and fishing boats were taken away, how could those communities be protected? In addition to our national legislatures, Europe has a role to play in that. May I add — and this may sound like a whinge, but I will bang the drum anyway — that those Members who are acquainted with the EC will recall that in years gone by, largely due to Margaret Ewing's mother-in-law, Winnie Ewing, we enjoyed Objective 1 status, which gave us the funds to tackle this sort of problem.

Unfortunately, within the Highlands are the good burghers of Inverness. Now Inverness is a buoyant, growing community. The problem, however, is that the size of its GDP per head knocked the entire Highlands out of the equation, otherwise it might have been eligible for Objective 1 status. I am told that colleagues in Wales drew sharper boundaries, and that if we in Scotland are more subtle in future and can carve out the areas that I have outlined, such as the county of Sutherland and parts of Ross and Cromarty, we may be able to return to Objective 1 status. I mention that to highlight the problem — I am sure it will ring a bell with colleagues.

I hope that when the European Affairs Committee makes its report that the fine-tuning of direction of assistance will have been considered and also ways in which we can underpin and safeguard communities that are in danger of no longer existing at all. That would be a tragedy given that Gaelic is — as is Irish — our other national language, and it is only just alive in some places.

Mr Donald J Gelling CBE MLC: First, I thank the joint Clerks, Mr Jim Mulkerrens and Ms Alda Barry, for circulating the information on the Isle of Man's situation regarding the white fish quota, which I realised was missing from the pack.

In her introduction Margaret Ewing talked about disillusionment. To that I would add complete frustration. The Isle of Man is much the same as the Guernsey and Jersey Crown dependencies, whose connection with the EU is through protocol 3 of the Treaty of Accession

1972. That means that we must obtain permission from Brussels, yet the United Kingdom looks after our quotas and our international affairs.

What frustrates us particularly in the Isle of Man is that for the past five years, and with the United Kingdom fighting our corner, we have been trying to get agreement for the principle of obtaining management of our white fish quota. That has been agreed in principle, but has been delayed since the middle of last year, because the United Kingdom has again been trying to obtain an answer from the EC as to whether it would regard an Isle of Man buying quota as a contribution to its fishing industry and, therefore, an unfair advantage. The Isle of Man does not receive any EC moneys. We have to look after our own fishing fleet. Our difficulty is that we cannot obtain a quota.

Last year, we bought quota from some of our friendly neighbours around this part of the Irish Sea to enable fishermen to catch herring in order to produce the famous Manx kipper. The current situation is that the herring comes in from the north Atlantic. There is a question, therefore, as to whether they are Manx kippers — they are smoked in the Isle of Man but the fleet does not catch them locally. Imagine the Isle of Man fishermen's situation. They are totally disillusioned. They talk to fishermen from Scotland, Wales and the North and South of Ireland, and they all sing from the same hymn sheet — out of total frustration.

Finally, scallops and queenies have been the Isle of Man's main fisheries. We are becoming extremely concerned because shellfish, particularly queenies, along our east coast, are being poisoned. Just last week, we had to close a five-mile square box of our west coast. It is coming this way. I am told that this is not a naturally forming poison, and that it is now spreading around the Isle of Man. That shows how far it is moving out into the Irish Sea. We have no white fish quota; the only fisheries are shellfish, and the shellfish are being poisoned. It looks very much as though our fishermen will be called in to buy their boats because the last of the natural hunters are going to disappear.

Everyone in the fisheries industry is totally disillusioned and frustrated. Through the efforts of the British Government and the University of Liverpool, we have a station for testing and analysing. A box on the west coast of the Isle of Man was closed to run tests. The Irish and other fishermen in the area upheld that ruling, and they did not enter that box. However, one evening, three large Spanish fishing vessels came in and raped the total area. That entire experiment has now been destroyed. Trying to protect ourselves environmentally is proving very difficult.

Mr Kevin McNamara MP: In 1971, I tried to move a debate under Standing Order 9 in the House of Commons to the effect that we should not accede to the European Community — or the Common Market as it then was — until we had a satisfactory fishing regime for our inshore

middle-water and distance-water fleets. Out of the well over 100 deep-sea trawlers at that time, there is now none. There are a couple registered in Hull, but none lands regularly.

We used to say that for every fisherman, there were 10 jobs ashore. Those were various sorts of jobs — food processing, maintenance, engineering and so on. We had 1,500 fishermen, and that equated to 15,000 jobs that went down the tube. Those have been lost, and we are only now beginning to recover from that.

Part of the problem was that the then members of the European Community cobbled together a common fisheries policy, which Mr Heath acceded to without properly examining it. Secondly, the fishermen and the big trawler owners felt that the North Sea was going to become an English lake and that none of these nasty foreigners — the Dutch, the French, the Danes and others — would come anywhere near us. They were wrong. They have since apologised to me, but that did not do me much good, nor did it help the fact that 15,000 jobs have been lost.

I mention that because I wonder to what degree the fishermen and the trawler owners are not their own worst enemies. There has been considerable overfishing. That can be seen through the size of the fish and their immaturity. The Newfoundland banks disappeared completely as an effective and economic fishing ground as a result of complete overfishing. It is always good to blame the Spaniards, with their nasty fishing habits, or the Dutch, with their particular trawling habits. However, our own fishermen did just the same, and we should realise that.

It is right that we are concerned because a community is at risk. However, wolf was cried continuously by the scientists, and nobody paid any attention to it. Now, it has come home to roost. I am not quite sure how a wolf comes home to roost, particularly when we are dealing with fish. Members can pick on my mixed metaphor.

Harsh measures must be taken so that stocks can be rebuilt. There must, therefore, be proper social policies to maintain fishing communities until the fish come back in sufficient numbers. Those fish stocks must then be sensibly and properly harvested. That means that Ministers should not go away saying how unfair the allocation is and come back crowing because they get an extra so many thousand tonnes. By getting those extra tonnes, they compound the problem.

There must be a proper re-examination of the entire common fisheries policy. That will be even more difficult than examining the Common Agricultural Policy because of the communities involved — the Spanish, in particular, and the Danes, with their strange sort of industrial fishing, as well as the Portuguese, the French and the Dutch. Unless the European Union comes together to get them to operate a sensible, coherent fishing policy, with proper attention to conservation and control of net sizes — and the paradox of the net sizes was eloquently expressed when we were told about what has happened

in Donegal — initiatives, however big, taken by the fishermen of Donegal, Ireland as a whole or the east coast of the United Kingdom, will not get to the root of the problem. The nations must not look on the scientists as the enemies of everyone who seeks a living from fishing. Nor should the scientists look at the nations as people who pay no attention to them. That destroys the entire resource. The nations and the scientists must get together and co-operate, and that must be seen as maintaining and building up the communities as well as conserving fish. It will mean some decommissioning.

The real problem has been the advance in fishing technology. Once upon a time a fisherman went out and smelled, or had a fair idea, where the fish were, but now the sophistication of the instruments is such that, by identifying the shoals, he can almost count the number of fish that he will catch before he lifts them out of the sea. It is a difficult problem, which will be solved only if we work at it properly. Otherwise, fishing communities will end up like that in Hull — non-existent.

Mr Iain Smith MSP: I thank the Body for the work that it has done for the devolved institutions since we started coming to these events some six sessions ago in Galway. I have been to each of the sessions, and this will be my last before the election. Whether or not I come back will be in the lap of the electorate and the business managers after 1 May. I have enjoyed my time here and the welcome and hospitality given to us by the Body.

My constituency of North-East Fife, as well as being the home of golf in St Andrews — which would be a fine place for the Body to visit for a future meeting — has a historic fishing industry. The East Neuk of Fife contains the port of Pittenweem, which was once a large fishing port but its boats are now reduced to approximately 30. The boats used to fish mainly for white fish, but the stocks have disappeared and, until recently, few white fish were seen within 100 miles of Pittenweem harbour. Now the mainstay of the community is fishing for nephrops, which are prawns to you and me. The nephrops fishery is valuable not only because of the value of the stock but because it maintains that community.

There is, however, in Pittenweem and its surrounding area an important processing industry, which still deals with white fish. Pittenweem haddock is famous, and vans travel round central Scotland selling it, although it does not come from Pittenweem, in the same way as herring does not come from the Isle of Man — it tends to come from Peterhead. I suspect that in the next few months even more fish will be imported, but the haddock can be called Pittenweem haddock because it is processed there.

12.00

There is no question that the industry is in dire straits. The common fisheries policy has been a disaster. It has failed in all its objectives. It has failed fishermen and the conservation of fish stocks. It does not make sense; it

does not seem logical to have a system in which every European member state determines, and tries to micro-manage, local fisheries. Some countries in the European Union have no direct interest in fisheries or the North Sea, yet they can influence decisions on fishing policies for the North Sea. Where is the logic in that?

There is no logic in a system that essentially operates on back-door dealings between member states that try to preserve their own interests. For example, where is the logic in trying to cut the quota for nephrops, which has little by-catch of white fish, while allowing the Danish industrial fisheries to continue, which seem to have a much larger by-catch of white fish and are also sucking up the food on which the cod and haddock rely? That is another major issue that has not been properly addressed by the European Union — the extent of the removal of food stocks, the lack of a decent supply of food and the effect of that on white fish.

Emergency measures impact particularly heavily on Scotland, and there is no question that it has suffered more than most countries. Scotland has the largest part of the British white fish fleet, and the quota cuts and restrictions on days at sea have had a severe effect on its industry. However, we must bear in mind that there are problems with fish stocks, and we need to take measures to ensure that those are preserved. I hope that they will begin to increase. The question is whether the days-at-sea regime is the way to achieve that. I regret that the European Commission has failed to recognise the substantive measures that the Scottish fishing industry has voluntarily taken to improve conservation, such as the larger mesh sizes, which Margaret Ewing mentioned — they fish with 120 mm nets rather than with the 100 mm nets that they would be obliged to use under EU rules. That contributes much to the conservation of stock, yet it is not recognised by the European Commission when it introduces its proposals.

Margaret Ewing also said that the Scottish Executive produced a £50 million package of support for decommissioning and transitional relief. There is much discussion on the question of the balance of the package, whether too much is given to decommissioning and too little to transitional relief. The 15 days at sea achieved by the Scottish Executive during negotiations, presumably by guaranteeing a reduction of fishing effort by 20%, requires decommissioning, without which we would have had only nine days at sea or possibly fewer. Initially, the European Commission proposed seven days — indeed the scientific advice is that there should be no fishing for white fish in the sea. The quota of 15 days at sea is a significant improvement since October/November last year, but it is not a good situation.

White-fish fishermen and the fishermen of Scotland find it incredible that the UK Government refuse to draw down financial support from Europe, which may be available. I hope that our UK parliamentary colleagues can give the Body's message to the UK Government that

there is no sense in not drawing down any EU aid that might be available for decommissioning or other measures when it finally comes on stream in the next few weeks. The fishermen would find that unforgivable.

In the longer term, we must consider the reform measures. It is often forgotten that substantial progress was made on reform of the common fisheries policy at the December EU Fisheries Council meeting due to the inevitable focus on emergency measures: the continuation of relative stability; the "Hague preferences"; the continuation of six- and 12-mile limits; the Shetland box for Scottish interests; and the cessation of financial systems for new vessels from 2004. Most of those can be achieved with the establishment of regional advisory councils, which is a big step forward for the fishing communities. The Body should welcome that, and the Irish Government, the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly and the Isle of Man should begin to work together on a regional advisory council policy for the northern waters, the North Sea, the Irish Sea and the north Atlantic. We have a common interest in preserving stocks in those areas, and we should work together to do that.

We should go further. Fishermen should be given more responsibility for the management of fisheries. They should have final responsibility and final accountability. They should understand that it is their responsibility to ensure that they fish in a way that is sustainable and will maintain stocks; if they do not do that, they cannot expect continued Government and European Union support. We must give final responsibility and accountability to the fishermen.

Mr Séamus Kirk TD: This discussion has been very worthwhile. The number of Members who have spoken reflects immediate constituency needs and the broader position as it affects Wales, Scotland, the Isle of Man and other areas.

Fishing is very important to Ireland. Cecilia Keaveney's contribution reflected its importance to her constituency in County Donegal and the impact that policy change will have from time to time. She referred to negotiations about fisheries policy and the common agricultural policy (CAP).

Given the importance to the consumer of fish stock supplies, and food supplies from the wider agriculture industry, I wonder why there is not a closer relationship between the operation of common policy as it applies to the fishing industry and as it applies to the agriculture industry. Fundamentally, they provide the supply chains that link to processing, which leads to consumer needs in the marketplace.

Co-Chairman, given your constituency, I am sure that you are more than familiar with the mid-term proposals for the reform of the CAP. We had an agreement, but Commissioner Fischler felt it necessary to introduce what, in effect, are emergency proposals for a mid-term review of the CAP, and I suspect that that has much to do with the entry to the EU of the new Eastern European

states. Large tracks of very good agricultural land will come into production and be part of the equation in the wider food supply position in the EU.

It would be easy to be pessimistic about the impact of those policy proposals. However, pessimism is one thing, but realism is an entirely different matter. We must consider the impact of the proposals, and it is clear that the general level of economic activity in rural communities will be affected severely. Similarly, we must consider the impact of the proposals and their effect on policy implementation in the fishing industry. It could change the operation of the quota system and necessitate further adjustment for emergency conservation measures. It has profound implications for those involved directly in primary production and, on a wider scale, for those employed in the processing sector.

It is a classic case. If a macro policy is implemented at EU level, there are micro implications for individual fishermen or those who are employed in the fish-processing industry. I sometimes wonder whether there is a relationship between them at all. I can imagine that in such a broad area as the EU, and with the significant economic interest in the fishing industry, it would not be possible to have the desirable position where we could make our own adjustments, whether in Scotland, Wales or Ireland.

As the Co-Chairman will know from a previous incarnation, a fishing village in my constituency is very dear to my heart. I have a particular interest in it because of the people who are employed directly in the primary and processing ends of the fishing industry. In addition, a colleague of mine has direct ministerial responsibility for the EU negotiations on the policy adjustments.

There is no doubt that we are losing out and being very parochial in this matter. We are losing out in those negotiations. There is the issue of the Irish box. There is the question of larger, well-endowed fishing fleets from other areas of the European Union being able to come into the Irish Box and having, by right, an entrée to it; that has profound implications for those who are trying to eke out a living in Clogherhead, Killybegs, Dunmore East or wherever else along the Irish coast.

It is good that we have had this debate. Initially, when I saw it on the Programme of Business, I wondered whether it would become too parochial. There was a degree of parochialism about the contributions, and that is perfectly understandable. It highlights how passionate the respective representatives are about the implications of the implementation of the policy, whether it be in Scotland, in Dai Lloyd's part of Wales or in Cecilia Keaveney's part of Donegal. That is important. It is good that the political process can have a forum to address those matters collectively. We have no other forum for such points of view to be so trenchantly expressed.

Only time will tell as to the impact that our contributions will have in modifying the policy or reducing its detrimental impact on our respective constituents. If the

Body avails of the opportunity to convey to the respective Governments a summary of the views expressed here, that must be a good thing.

Yesterday, during the debate, several references were made to ruddy ducks. I have forgotten who made those remarks. As you will recollect, Co-Chairman, we had a flurry of political comment about the threatened extinction of the hen harrier in our jurisdiction over the past few weeks. There is a link there. Fishermen in coastal communities face extinction because of the dire economic change that would be visited on them by, in effect, a very brutal policy implementation.

Similarly, in the broader context of food production, farmers, given the current structures, face a significant increase in part-time farming and perhaps a serious exodus of full-time farmers from the industry. They find that economic change dictates that they simply have to move on and find an alternative way of supporting themselves and their families. Both fishermen and farmers are located in rural areas. Aspirational policies pretend that we can develop alternative outlets for sustainable, long-term economic activity in the rural communities. That is not sustainable in the long term. We should stand back and take a serious look at the fishing industry and agriculture industry, and we should ask ourselves whether these policies will lead us down a cul-de-sac, affecting the security of food supplies generally in the European Union. That might be an extreme point of view, but if, as is proposed, people are compensated for non-production — the decoupling of production rights from land ownership — there are profound long-term implications that cannot be quantified at present.

I have gone on a bit, and perhaps I have gone off on a few tangents along the way, but I am glad to have had the opportunity to participate in the debate and to echo the sentiments of those who have spoken so passionately about the various problems.

12.15 pm

Mr Brian Gibbons AM: In the early 1970s, I lived in the docks in Galway city. I could literally see the sun going down on Galway Bay each evening. There was a sizeable trawler fleet in Galway docks, and even then the problems that we are discussing were a day-to-day concern in the area.

The decline of the fishing industry has inevitably meant that almost everyone's speech in the debate has been laden with doom. Cecilia Keaveney talked about the experience of fishermen in her area, which has not been positive. However, there has been some good news in the sector.

The Welsh Assembly Government have made a special effort to target the aquaculture sector. Last week, the Minister for Economic Development issued a statement about the role that aquaculture could play in developing the Welsh economy. Aquaculture is, obviously, linked to

depleted fishing stocks, and so forth. However, in Wales there is a realisation that the sector has much wider potential. Much more must be done to exploit the vast natural resource that lies off our shores.

There are recreational spin-offs and job opportunities. However, something that we are interested to pursue is the integration of the sector into the knowledge economy. It is not an instinctive feeling that the aquaculture industry is part of the knowledge economy. However, one of the schemes that we are working on in Wales is the development of a Technium-type model. Universities will be able to work with the aquaculture sector in order to fulfil downstream opportunities to develop new sectors, as well as to develop the relationship between aquaculture and the food industry. We understand, from the work that is being done in the University of Wales at Swansea, that greater opportunities are linked to healthcare. The aquaculture industry has great untapped potential.

Iain Smith mentioned drawing down European money. Our Objective 1 programme in Wales has been structured so that there is a special measure for the development of marine resources. We are approaching the mid-term review of the deployment of Objective 1 funds. We are considering ways in which we can fine-tune that particular measure under the structural funds in order to make it more relevant to developing the capacity of the aquaculture sector in Wales.

Development projects are under way in three or four parts of Wales. Good links are being developed in north-west Wales between the sector and the University of Wales at Bangor. A considerable amount of work is being done in Pembroke, as people who frequently get the boat back and forwards to Wales will probably know. Aquaculture is being significantly developed in the industrial town of Port Talbot, which is in my constituency. Port Talbot is most famous for its steel industry; it is not a natural or obvious place for the development of aquaculture. The real potential of the sector is, however, becoming more obvious.

A gentleman started off by digging up lugworms on the beach at Port Talbot. When stocks eventually started to decline he began to harvest them. From collecting lugworms with a bucket and spade he is now sitting on a potential multimillion-pound industry that could employ hundreds of people from along the South Wales coast. That is just one practical example. I understand the many reasons that people are pessimistic and negative about the fishing industry. However, there is good news in that particular area. Much more work needs to be done to exploit marine resources more effectively and imaginatively.

Senator Paul Coghlan: I was interested in what Donald J Gelling said about the spread of shellfish disease in the waters off the coast of the Isle of Man. Given its proximity to the west coast of England, could the disease have been caused by discharges from Sellafield into the sea?

Mr Michael McMahon MSP: I had not intended to speak in this debate, but as I listened to it develop, I could not help but think how it reflected on my own constituency. I represent a landlocked constituency in what was the former coal and steel community of Lanarkshire. At one time there were 300 mines in our community. Tens of thousands of people were employed in the steel industry. That no longer exists. I represent a constituency which now has more people employed in fish processing than in the former steel industry. What struck me in all of this morning's contributions was our talk about sustaining the fishing industry. It was almost in the same way that I used to talk about sustaining the steelworks and the mines. However, we did not focus on the sustainability of the steelworks and the mines.

My contribution is to ask those who represent the fishing communities to get real. It is not enough to talk about protecting your communities and fighting for subsidies and quotas. All that is valid; that is what we did when we were talking about steel and coal — but we failed, because we were not prepared to change those industries to meet what was required. The fish processors in my constituency — who are profitable, are doing well and are increasing the number of jobs in the constituency — despair of those who supply the fish and who are not prepared to move with the times. When those processors invest in new manufacturing technology, they have to buy the processors in Arbroath or wherever to try to get them to match the modern economy that they require to sustain themselves in their area.

If my contribution is worth anything at all, it is to say: fight for your communities, fight for what is there, but do not allow your emotions to blind you to the fact that change must come. Unless you change and move forward, you will go, as Kevin McNamara said, the way of Newfoundland. In that neck of the woods is the fisherman who caught the last cod. Members should not let that happen to their communities because they are not prepared to tell the fishermen what they need to hear, which is that they must change in order to stay there.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): I call Mr Kevin McNamara MP, a member of the Steering Committee, to make his winding-up speech.

Mr Kevin McNamara MP: I would not have known where to start in summing up this debate. However, the experiment of having a debate of this nature on the adjournment, which is the first time that we have done it, on the recommendation of the Steering Committee, has obviously proved its worth. We have brought in everyone from all the Assemblies, and representatives of the islands, and struck a common chord of a real fear that is shared among us in different ways, whether it is the

highly industrialised fishing of Scotland or the small boats of the Isle of Man. There is a common sense of community identity and feeling, and that is a great thing.

It is my pleasure to bring the proceedings of this plenary to a conclusion by moving the formal adjournment. I would like, first, to thank the hotel staff for the tremendous work that they have done. *[Applause]*. Invariably, in Ireland the staff are very good indeed, and their arrangements here have been superb. On a scale of one to 10, they nearly always score about 15. That seems to be a proper way of recording our appreciation.

Secondly, I would like to thank the members of the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association for the work that they have done. *[Applause]*. The previous plenary conference was the first one that they attended. We value their work very much, particularly now that we can have verbatim transcripts. Being politicians, we like to read our own wisdom several times. It satisfies our egos, but, more importantly, it gives to posterity a record of what parliamentarians from different parts of these islands thought about problems facing their communities.

I thank the conference organisers from all the jurisdictions, including the secretariat, the Clerks and everyone who has played a part in the organisation of this event.

Finally, and not least, I wish to say a special word of thanks to Séamus Pattison TD. The work that he has done in this hotel and in his constituency has ensured that everything went very smoothly. I am told that he did not go as far as sampling all the meals beforehand to make sure that they were up to standard, but, short of that, he has done everything possible. We are extremely grateful to you, Séamus. It was very good of you to do so much, and the conference has been a great success. I beg to move the adjournment.

Question, That the Body do now adjourn, put and agreed to.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD): Colleagues, thank you all for your participation. I wish to say a special word of thanks to David Winnick, my Co-Chairman, for his co-operation, support and advice. I echo Kevin McNamara's words of thanks to the organisers, the hotel, and the staff of Kilkenny Castle and Mount Juliet. I particularly thank the joint Clerks, Jim Mulkerrins and Alda Barry, and their support staff for the work that they have done in advance of the conference and over these few days. The next plenary conference will be held in the United Kingdom.

I now declare closed the twenty-sixth plenary conference of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body.

Adjourned at 12.26 pm.

