

Thursday 5 December 2013

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

Enterprise and Environment

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (Scottish National Party): To ask the Scottish Government how Scottish independence would improve economic circumstances in rural Dumfries and Galloway.

(S4O-2677)

Derek Mackay: The Scottish Government believes that independence is the key to economic success. Full control over economic and fiscal powers will unlock our potential, boost business growth and create sustainable, fairly-rewarded jobs across rural Scotland, including Dumfries and Galloway.

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it has taken to deter people from taking out payday loans in the run-up to Christmas.

(S4O-2684)

Fergus Ewing: The Scottish Government launched its '12 days of Debtmas' campaign on 18 November 2013. The aims of this bold campaign are to help prevent people getting into unmanageable high interest debt and, to raise awareness of credit unions as one alternative to pay day loans in the lead up to the festive period.

Almost 8500 people have responded to the radio advertisement or Daily Record features by visiting the campaign website 12daysofdebtmas.com since 18 November 2013. Almost 1300 of those people have searched for details of their local credit union. The website highlights the risk associated with high-interest lending and promotes credit unions as sensible, ethical alternatives.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (Scottish Liberal Democrats): To ask the Scottish Government how much (a) twitching and (b) bird-watching contributed to the economy in (i) 2009, (ii) 2010, (iii) 2011 and (iv) 2012 and has contributed in 2013.

Holding answer issued: 3 December 2013

(S4W-18439)

Fergus Ewing: The Scottish Government does not hold the specific information sought. We recognise the contribution twitching and bird-watching can make to the Scottish economy.

As 2013, the Year of Natural Scotland, comes to an end, we welcome the fact that our rich and varied bird-life continues to be a draw for people in Scotland and our visitors alike; from the renowned Fair Isle Bird Observatory, the famous RSPB osprey reserve at Loch Garten, to the award winning Scottish Seabird Centre in North Berwick.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Scottish Green Party): To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S4W-17672 by Fergus Ewing on 23 October 2013, when it will publish its consultation on the regulation of the coal industry.

(S4W-18479)

Fergus Ewing: The consultation *Opencast Coal Restoration - Effective Regulation* has been published on-line at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/12/7688>

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government whether not (a) collecting and (b) publishing data on (i) salmon mortalities and (ii) sea lice infestations at salmon farms could have an impact on the marine environment, and what the reasons are for its position on this matter.

(S4W-18522)

Paul Wheelhouse: The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) collects and publishes data on mortalities as part of the Agency's contribution to the Scotland's Aquaculture Database

<http://aquaculture.scotland.gov.uk>. This web-based resource provides detailed information on fish farms from datasets held by Marine Scotland, the Food Standards Agency (Scotland), The Crown Estate as well as SEPA.

Scotland's aquaculture stocks are internationally recognised as having a high health status, maintained by a regular inspection programme that includes the evaluation of mortality and sea lice numbers by Marine Scotland's Fish Health Inspectorate. The Scottish Salmon Producers' Organisation publishes quarterly Fish Health Management Reports which provide data on sea lice from fish farms over 30 recognised wild fish catchments. Marine Scotland Fish Health Inspectors are able to visit farms within each of the 30 catchments to drill down into the causes of infestation at a higher level of granularity and the 2013 Act delivered additional powers to sample fish where this is justified. The Scottish Government supports these voluntary management reports and regards them as balanced, proportionate and helpful as regards public transparency. The Government has committed to keep these voluntary publication arrangements under review and through the 2007 Act retains powers to legislate on data provision in relation to sea lice numbers if the voluntary reporting arrangements do not operate as expected.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (Scottish National Party): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the recent decision of the Salmon Net Fishing Association of Scotland to start netting salmon six weeks earlier than has previously been the practice.

(S4W-18554)

Paul Wheelhouse: There has been no blanket decision taken to start net fishing when the season opens in February.

The Salmon Net Fishing Association of Scotland has discontinued its voluntary national postponement of the start of the salmon netting season in favour of local discussions between individual members of the association and their respective District Salmon Fishery Boards on conservation measures.

I understand that discussions are underway in many areas and I encourage all parties to work together to develop and implement local agreements. In recent years significant support has been shown by both netsmen and anglers to protect vulnerable early stock components. I strongly support these voluntary conservation measures which have delivered high levels of catch and release and voluntary delay of netting activity to protect spring stock.

It is my intention to ensure the remit of the forthcoming review of management of wild fisheries will cover the suitability of current arrangements for management of salmon netting activity.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (Scottish National Party): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the economic impact of the claim in the report by Lawrence Tomlinson that RBS put "good and viable businesses" into default to improve its balance sheet.

(S4W-18585)

John Swinney: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills provided Sir Andrew Large's independent review team with evidence assembled by Lawrence Tomlinson, entrepreneur in residence at BIS, in relation to alleged maltreatment of businesses by RBS's Global Restructuring Group. This matter was out-with the remit of the Large review, and the validity of the accusations made in the dossier were not investigated by Sir Andrew Large who recommended a separate investigation into the claims of alleged maltreatment.

Wherever there is evidence of any irregularities, the Scottish Government expect these to be fully investigated by the competent authorities, including the potential wider economic impact. The report has now been referred to the Financial Conduct Authority to review the allegations.

Governance and Communities

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Independent): To ask the Scottish Government what support it can offer to universal credit claimants who do not have access to the internet at home.

(S4O-2685)

Margaret Burgess: Universal credit is part of the UK Government's package of welfare reforms and it is therefore the responsibility of the UK Government to ensure the right support is in place for people claiming the new benefit.

However, the Scottish Government is committed to doing what it can to help mitigate the impact of the welfare reforms and increasing digital participation, for example, we already fund a number of pilot projects including in Aberdeenshire and Glasgow, to help people claim their benefits online.

We have also raised with the Department for Work and Pensions on a number of occasions the importance of ensuring that there are appropriately resourced alternative methods for claiming and maintaining a universal credit claim.

Learning and Justice

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (Scottish National Party): To ask the Scottish Government how many prosecutions for (a) sexual abuse, (b) domestic abuse or violence and (c) rape in each year since 2007 before a (i) jury and (ii) single judge resulted in a conviction, also expressed as a percentage of such cases.

Holding answer issued: 18 November 2013

(S4W-17913)

Kenny MacAskill: The available information is given in the following tables. Solemn court cases will be tried by a judge and jury, summary court cases will be tried a single judge.

Number of people proceeded against and convicted for a crime associated with sexual abuse^{1,2}, 2007-08 to 2011-12:

Crime/result/court	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Sexual abuse					
People proceeded against					
Solemn court	183	203	224	214	217
Summary court	195	225	206	206	249
People convicted					
Solemn court	149	175	189	168	182
Summary court	146	180	165	169	185
Percentage convicted					
Solemn court	81%	86%	84%	79%	84%
Summary court	75%	80%	80%	82%	74%

Notes:

1. Where main offence.
2. Includes sexual assault, and other sexual offences. Excludes crimes associated with prostitution, public indecency and bestiality.

Number of people proceeded against and convicted where main charge had domestic abuse aggravator recorded, 2007-08 to 2011-12:

Crime/result/court	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Domestic abuse					
People proceeded against					
Solemn court	117	163	184	188	225
Summary court	6,258	7,788	9,975	9,834	10,267
People convicted					
Solemn court	96	131	140	148	178
Summary court	5,554	6,977	8,706	8,416	8,691
Percentage convicted					
Solemn court	82%	80%	76%	79%	79%
Summary court	89%	90%	87%	86%	85%

Number of people proceeded against and convicted where main charge was rape^{1,2}, 2007-08 to 2011-12:

Crime/result/court	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Rape					
People proceeded against					
Solemn court	88	86	93	58	75
Summary court	0	0	0	0	0
People convicted					
Solemn court	35	28	42	22	37
Summary court	0	0	0	0	0
Percentage convicted					
Solemn court	40%	33%	45%	38%	49%
Summary court	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Source: Scottish Government Court Proceedings Database.

Notes:

1. Where main offence.
2. Rape cases would normally be remitted to the High Court for sentencing.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (Scottish National Party):

To ask the Scottish Government how many prosecutions for (a) sexual abuse, (b) domestic abuse or violence and (c) rape in each year since 2007 before a (i) jury and (ii) single judge resulted in a (A) not proven and (B) not guilty verdict, also expressed as a percentage of such cases.

Holding answer issued: 18 November 2013

(S4W-17914)

Kenny MacAskill: The available information is given in the following table. Solemn court cases will be tried by a judge and jury, summary court cases will be tried a single judge.

Number of people proceeded against and acquitted where main charge was a crime associated with sexual abuse^{1,2}, 2007-08 to 2011-12:

Crime/result/court	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Sexual abuse					
People proceeded against					
Solemn court	183	203	224	214	217
Summary court	195	225	206	206	249
Solemn court					
Acquitted not guilty ³	16	15	16	26	22
Acquitted not proven	8	11	15	11	7
Summary court					
Acquitted not guilty ³	30	19	25	15	37
Acquitted not proven	6	7	4	5	8
Percentages acquitted / proceeded against					
Solemn court					
Acquitted not guilty ³	9%	7%	7%	12%	10%
Acquitted not proven	4%	5%	7%	5%	3%
Summary court					
Acquitted not guilty ³	15%	8%	12%	7%	15%
Acquitted not proven	3%	3%	2%	2%	3%

Notes:

1. Where main offence.
2. Includes sexual assault, and other sexual offences. Excludes crimes associated with prostitution, public indecency and bestiality.
3. Excludes cases where a plea of not guilty was accepted.

Number of people proceeded against and acquitted where main charge had domestic abuse aggravator recorded, 2007-08 to 2011-12:

Crime/result/court	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Domestic abuse					
People proceeded against					
Solemn court	117	163	184	188	225
Summary court	6,258	7,788	9,975	9,834	10,267
Solemn court					
Acquitted not guilty ¹	8	21	25	30	31
Acquitted not proven	6	9	14	6	14
Summary court					
Acquitted not guilty ¹	323	350	576	613	667
Acquitted not proven	64	67	104	85	114
Percentages acquitted / proceeded against					
Solemn court					
Acquitted not guilty ¹	7%	13%	14%	16%	14%
Acquitted not proven	5%	6%	8%	3%	6%
Summary court					
Acquitted not guilty ¹	5%	4%	6%	6%	6%
Acquitted not proven	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%

Note: 1. Excludes cases where a plea of not guilty was accepted.

Number of people proceeded against and acquitted where main charge was rape^{1,2}, 2007-08 to 2011-12:

Crime/result/court	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Rape					
People proceeded against					
Solemn court	88	86	93	58	75
Summary court	0	0	0	0	0
Solemn court					
Acquitted not guilty ³	26	36	33	27	16
Acquitted not proven	24	18	17	8	15
Summary court					
Acquitted not guilty ³	0	0	0	0	0
Acquitted not proven	0	0	0	0	0
Percentages acquitted / proceeded against					
Solemn court					
Acquitted not guilty ³	30%	42%	35%	47%	21%
Acquitted not proven	27%	21%	18%	14%	20%
Summary court					
Acquitted not guilty ³	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Acquitted not proven	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Source: Scottish Government Court Proceedings Database.

Notes:

1. Where main offence.
2. Rape cases would normally be remitted to the High Court for sentencing.
3. Excludes cases where a plea of not guilty was accepted.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government how much funding the areas formerly covered by the Grampian Fire and Rescue Service receive from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's budget; what proportion of the budget this represents, and how this compares with 2012-13.

(S4W-18511)

Roseanna Cunningham: This is a matter for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS). I have asked the SFRS to respond to you directly on this matter.

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to close the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Delivery Headquarters in Hamilton.

(S4W-18669)

Roseanna Cunningham: Decisions on the allocation of Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) resources, including the future of facilities in Hamilton, are a matter for the SFRS Board.

Strategy and External Affairs

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made in rolling out the International Development Fund Small Grants Funding Round.

(S4O-2686)

Fiona Hyslop: The Scottish Government's International Development Small Grants Programme was launched on Wednesday, 7 October 2013. The programme is being managed on behalf of the Scottish Government by the Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland. The deadline for applications was 12pm on Friday 29 November 2013, with awards being announced in early March 2014. At the closing date, 27 applications had been received.

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Liberal Democrats): To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S4W-17874 by Fiona Hyslop on 13 November 2013, what matters the Minister for External Affairs and International Development discussed with representatives of the government of Syria at the meeting on (a) 16 May 2013 and (b) 9 September 2013.

Holding answer issued: 29 November 2013

(S4W-18373)

Fiona Hyslop: The Minister for External Affairs and International Development has met with Mr Walid Saffour, Ambassador of National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, and members of the Scottish Syrian community respectively on these occasions. The Syrian National Coalition is recognised as the sole legitimate representation of the Syrian people as it is an inclusive body and as such it provides the best opportunity to secure a peaceful transition of power. They discussed the deepening political and humanitarian crisis in Syria, and the effects on the Syrian diaspora and the Scottish Government's pledge of £200,000 to the DEC appeal for Syria. The meetings also enabled the Minister to outline the Scottish Government's position regarding these issues.

The minister raised these issues, as well as the situation in Egypt, in telephone calls with Mr Alistair Burt, former Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Transport Scotland

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party): To ask the Scottish Government how many times there have been closures on the A9 because accident sites have been designated as crime scenes in each of the last three years, and what was the average closure time.

(S4W-18492)

Keith Brown: Details of road closures on the A9 in the last three full calendar years are contained in the following table. Our records for 2013 are not yet complete:

Road	2010		2011		2012	
	Number of Closures	Average time (hrs)	Number of Closures	Average time (hrs)	Number of Closures	Average time (hrs)
A9	10	06:13	28	04:12	40	03:37

The decision by Police Scotland to close a road, such as the A9, is never taken lightly and only occurs when the collision itself has blocked the road, or where there is a need to protect those who might already have been injured and the emergency service staff who are dealing with the incident.

The impact on local communities and the wider economy is always at the forefront of investigators' minds, but there is a need to ensure that incidents are investigated thoroughly to ensure that families

of those killed or seriously injured receive the support and information that they deserve and also to ensure that any safety issues are identified and addressed.

Roads are closed in such cases to gather evidence regarding an accident and the length of any closure can vary, depending on the nature and complexity of the incident.