

# NESBITT'S NEWSLETTER

*Keeping you up-to-date with UUP Strangford MLA Mike Nesbitt*

Issue 7, January 2012

## **Dear Strangford Resident,**

When I was elected last May, I was very conscious that over half those entitled to vote did not. Today, I was reminded why: the top reason is that people are too busy; the next is that they do not see the point. Both suggest politicians need to make themselves more relevant. So I have dedicated myself to work equally for those who voted for me, those who voted for another candidate, and those who did not vote at all. As part of that

commitment, I offer these updates on my activities. On the pages that follow, I hope you get a flavour of what I do, and also note the many ways you can contact me.



At the time of writing, 10:54pm on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> February (according to my computer clock), this Newsletter should be done and dusted, but events have overtaken, as they do in politics. Yesterday, I was appointed Vice Chair of the Northern Ireland Assembly's Education Committee, and the diary was trashed! Do not get me wrong; I am delighted to serve in that area, although needless to say, would not have chosen the circumstances in which the opportunity arose. Education is one of my passions, my parents sacrificed much for mine, and I would not have had the life I have enjoyed without committing myself to lifelong learning.

So, I now serve on the Committee of Education and the Committee of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, but for you, the residents of Strangford, I am here to advocate on your behalf across any and all areas of government. Please take a look at the issues we deal with in the Constituency, it is a broad range, proving the point that all politics is local. On which point, let me take the opportunity to thank Richard Smart, Jean Carson and the rest of the team who support me in South Street, and share the spirit of work ethic and public service.

In taking up post as Vice Chair of Education, I say goodbye to two positions I cherished: I step away from the Enterprise Trade & Investment Committee at Stormont, but with a determination to continue my interest in growing our economy and spreading wealth to all our citizens; and I step down as a Trustee Governor of Campbell College, so I can be seen, clearly and transparently, to work for all children, in all schools.

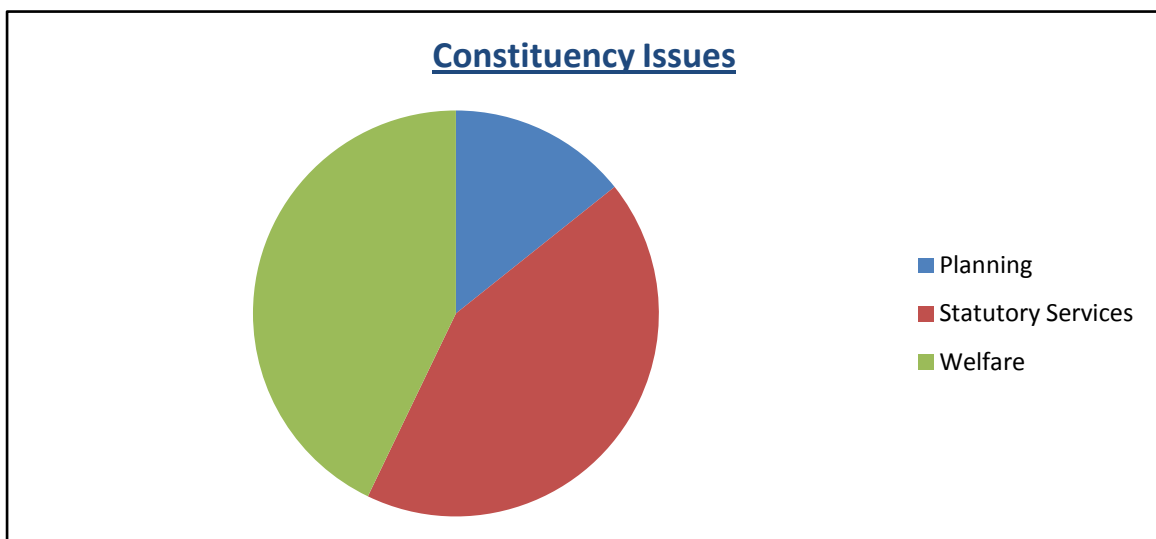
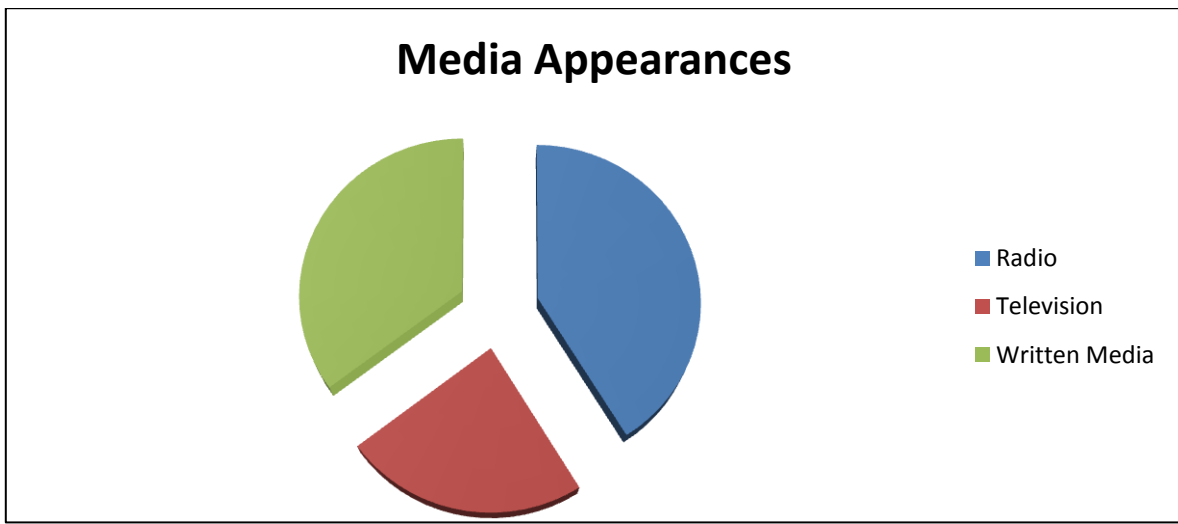
I take a simple view of what our education system should achieve. Inside every child lies a spark of ability, creativity and talent, and our challenge is to ensure our schools, supported by families and communities, and above all by government, offer every child the chance to discover that spark and develop it, whether it is sporting, artistic, vocational or academic – we should value all equally. I look forward to working with my Party colleague, Joanne

Dobson, and all the members of the Education Committee, to ensure the debate on the future of education puts the individual child first.

Meanwhile, rest assured we put you first and invite you to keep an eye on us, so you can trust us to look after you when you need us.

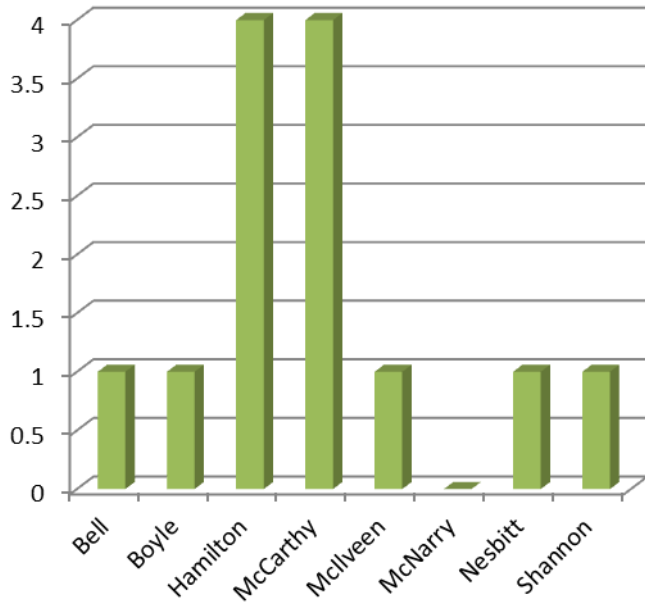
With best wishes

*Mike Nash*

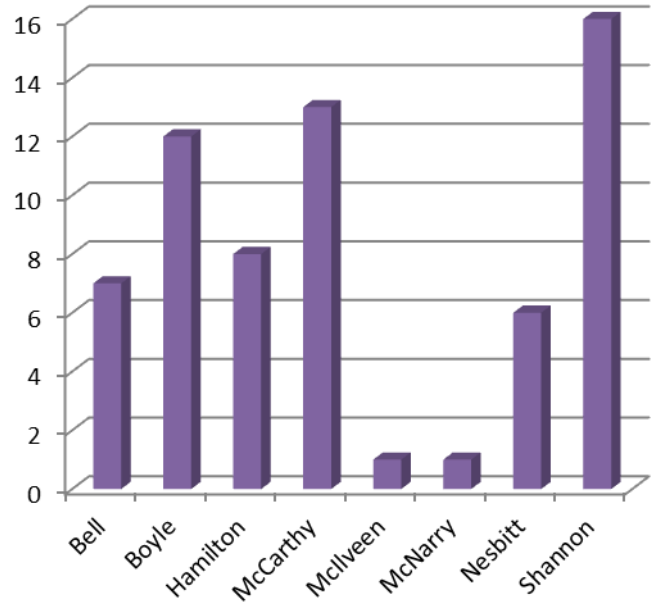


## Press Coverage

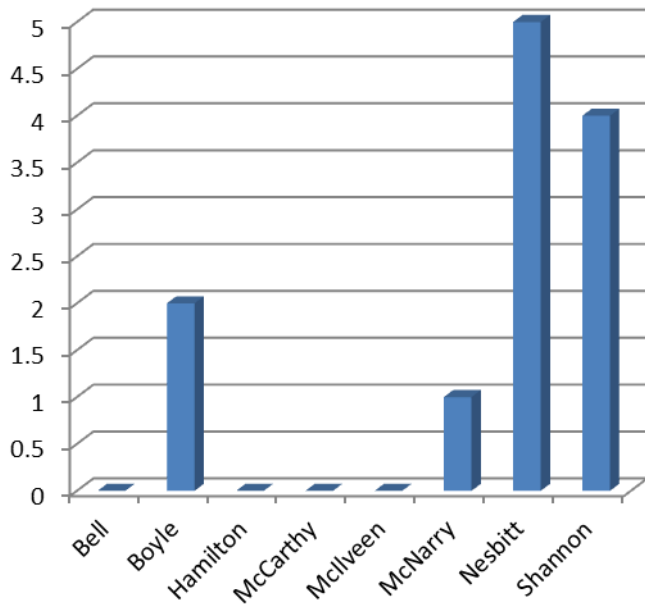
### Pictures



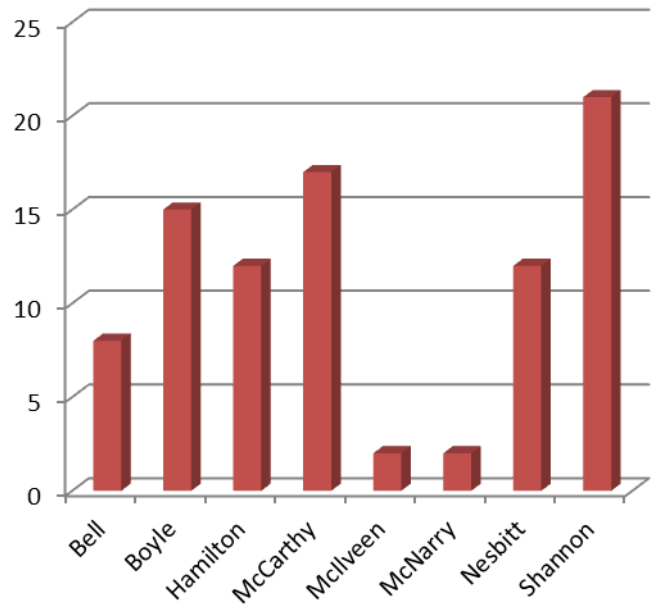
### Editorial



### Letters



### Overall



## **The Week at Stormont 23 – 27 January**

### **Monday**

- Constituency business, including individual advocacy
- Spokespeoples' Meeting
- Assembly Group Meeting
- Support Robin Swann MLA's campaign to preserve Atlantic Salmon stocks
- Speech re: future of Strangford Lough <http://tinyurl.com/6uzqmc2>
- Oral Question to deputy First Minister re: Victims and Survivors Service
- Oral Question to Justice Minister Re: strip searching of prison visitors
- Constituency business
- Speech to Drumbo Branch, Ulster Unionist Party

### **Tuesday**

- Constituency business
- Assembly Group Meeting
- Question to deputy First Minister re: victims' issues
- Question to Social Development Minister re: Pay As You Go home heating oil
- Private meeting re: party business
- Private meeting re: the economy
- Party meeting re: veterans' issues
- Speech re: Ballynahinch Bypass <http://tinyurl.com/6lpzv3c>
- News Release re: Ministers' failure to answer Oral Questions <http://tinyurl.com/719eubo>



### **Wednesday**

- Constituency business
- Advocacy for constituents (issues including health and education)
- Party business
- Hosted Linking Generations NI, England, Scotland and Republic of Ireland event, Parliament Buildings
- Further news release on Question Time
- Committee of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
- Constituency business
- Speech to Upper Bann Ulster Unionist Association A.G.M.

### **Thursday**

- Constituency business
- Committee of Enterprise, Trade & Investment
- Private briefing, NI's natural minerals
- Private briefing, energy issues
- Constituency business
- Guest Speaker, East Belfast Ulster Unionist Association

### **Friday**

- Constituency office

- Nolan Show, BBC Radio Ulster, tourism debate
- Constituency business
- Lunch event for benefit of Phoenix Group for ex-security force members
- Private briefing, social housing
- Constituency office

### **Saturday**

- Constituency advocacy

### **Sunday**

- Service to celebrate 100 years of Ulster Women's Unionist Council, Armagh

## **The Week at Stormont 16 – 20 January**

### **Monday**

- Private meeting, NIO
- Spokespeoples' Meeting
- Assembly Group Meeting
- Barnardo's briefing on primary school counselling and support
- Question to Enterprise Minister re: broadband provision in rural areas
- Constituency advocacy (planning, and Council issues)
- Private meeting, business leader
- Constituency business
- Reception Assembly and Business Trust
- Constituency Association Meeting



### **Tuesday**

- Assembly and Business Trust Breakfast Briefing (Confucius Institute, linking NI to China)
- Constituency business
- Assembly Group Meeting
- Question to First Minister re: meeting of British Irish Council
- Question to Health Minister re: remote medical services
- Briefing on SeaGen tidal energy experiment, Strangford Lough
- Party Meeting with Trades Union officials re: economy
- Interview Downtown Radio re: abolition of Department of Employment & Learning
- Constituency business

### **Wednesday**

- Facilitator, News Conference for Support After Murder & Manslaughter (SAMM NI)
- TV interviews, BBC NI, UTV, GMTV re: SAMM NI
- Meeting, Sport NI
- Committee of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
- Event promoting Voice of Young People in Care

### **Thursday**

- Briefing from Ulster Wildlife Trust re: Strangford Lough

- Committee of Enterprise, Trade & Investment
- Written questions to various government ministers
- Private lunch, business spokespeople, re: draft Economic Strategy
- Briefing from OFTEC (heating oil federation)
- Briefing, public sector insurance issues and opportunities
- Meeting of school Board of Governors

### **Friday**

- Constituency office
- Meeting re: NEETS, young people not in employment, education or training
- Launch Scrabo Area at Risk website, Ards Town Hall
- Lunch meeting re: economy – cancelled
- Meeting Willie Frazer, re: victims' issues
- Constituency advocacy work
- School Open Evening

### **Saturday**

- Site meeting with constituents re: planning
- School Open Day

### **Sunday**

- Guest, BBC NI tv Politics Programme

## **Belfast Telegraph Opinion Piece**

(Due for publication Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> February)



It is that wonderful time of year when the Ulster Unionist Party demonstrates an almost insatiable appetite for guest speakers, as its unparalleled network of branches, divisions and associations hold their Annual General Meetings. It is refreshing and affirming to be reminded that we are a membership organisation like no other political party operating in Northern Ireland. We have around 2,500 members, people dedicated enough to pay their annual subscriptions, many going on to attend meetings, canvass during Elections, and volunteer skills, experience and expertise that greatly enhance our capacity to do business.

These people are not undisciplined. In fact, if we have a reputation for a lack of control, it must be down to a fraction of one percent of our membership. I shall now disappoint readers eager to hear the Who, What, When, Where and Why of indiscipline past, present, and maybe even planned. Sorry, but you won't catch me washing the Party's dirty linen in public. As an aside, I would be interested to know if certain members of the DUP saw the recent speculation of talks with my Party as a forerunner to Hatfield Two. I was not at the Hatfield talks that took place before the 2011 Westminster Election, and indeed am not sure what their purpose was, but from what I sensed of those discussions, there would be a few DUP representatives who would not welcome a re-run, on the basis that unionist unity would come at a personal cost to them.

Anyway, I grew up being taught very positive things about the Union. I learnt about how Northern Ireland boxed above its weight in its contribution: militarily, with battles like the Somme and soldiers like Blair Mayne; inventors like Harry Ferguson and Frank Pantridge; industrialism, with Short

Brothers and Harland & Wolff creating the Silicon Valley of its day; sportsmen like George Best and Michael Gibson, the latter at least as good a bet as rugby union's greatest ever as Best was as association football's; and literary giants like CS Lewis and Samuel Beckett, a former pupil and teacher at the school I attended. It created in me a huge sense of possibilities.

Yet, political unionism jarred with my positive view of who I was and what I cherished. Unionist politicians were negative: Never, Never, Never, Never; Ulster Says No; Ulster Still Says No. Of course, there were good reasons for negativity: there was an existential threat to the Union; unionists were being murdered; unionist politicians assassinated. But that negativity illustrated an absence of understanding of how the media, messaging and communications work. The media report change, not the maintenance of the status quo. What unionism needed to do, and what Ulster Unionism has the opportunity to do now, is be confident about articulating how we have led the change agenda, to the point where it is old news to say we support a "pluralist parliament for a pluralist people", even though the DUP think they have just invented the wheel. Sinn Féin and the SDLP also promoted a change agenda, but one that would have driven us out of one of the world's strongest economies, into the arms of one of the Eurozone's PIGS.

Today, it is as if there is a finite pool of confidence to be shared out among all unionist parties. This is nonsense, if not propaganda, and if I could inject a characteristic into the DNA of Ulster Unionism today, it would be confidence. I am proud of the tradition of service that defines the Ulster Unionist Party, and given the fact political power rotates, no matter what system you devise, the opportunity is there for revival, restoration, and renewed delivery for all those who live in Northern Ireland.

To those who say my Party is finished, I share this experience of how a group of people can turn matters around. My broadcasting career began as a football commentator in the early 1980s, at the time Billy Bingham transformed Northern Ireland into a team that won the last ever Home Championship, qualified for back-to-back World Cup Finals in Spain and Mexico, and became the only nation in history to beat West Germany home and away in the same competition. The list is impressive, but what is even more astonishing is that he did it with the same core squad of players who had just lost 5-0 and 4-1 to England.

So, how did Bingham turn a team written off as losers and no-hopers into a unit capable of taking on the best in the world? Well, I was sitting in the lobby of the Atlantic Hotel in Hamburg, on the match day afternoon of 16 November 1983, a few hours before Norman Whiteside scored the goal that beat West Germany 1-0 in the Volkspark Stadium. Billy Bingham joined me for a coffee – and told me. Sorry to disappoint again, but I no more spill the beans on private discussions than wash dirty linen in public.

Hansard Official Record of 2 contributions in the Assembly Chamber:

## A24: Ballynahinch Bypass Adjournment Debate

**Mr Nesbitt:** I welcome the opportunity to speak and thank Mr Hamilton for bringing the matter to the House. Yesterday, I spoke in the debate on the future of Strangford lough as a Member for the Strangford constituency. I speak in that capacity again today and make it clear, as I did yesterday, that my comments are informed by the priority that the Assembly and its Executive Committee give to the economy. If the economy really comes first, we must check and double-check everything that

we do against its economic impact as well as the more easily measured effects on matters environmental.

I well remember, as a schoolchild, being driven through Ballynahinch en route to the Slieve Donard Hotel in Newcastle, where my paternal grandfather used to spend a couple of weeks every summer, and looking enviously out from the hotel at the golfers on one of the greatest courses on planet earth, Royal County Down. Today, that golf course is enjoying boom times as high-spending golf tourists flock to the land of the modern golf champions.

Many of those tourists will approach Newcastle through Ballynahinch, and although it would be nice to think that coach-loads of people would park up and that the town would bask in the reflected glory of Rory McIlroy, Graeme McDowell and Darren Clarke, we all know that life does not actually work like that. If we can agree that many golf tourists and others who pass through Ballynahinch will never stop, then we can not only do them a service by offering them a bypass to get them much more agreeably to where they want to be, we can also do something much more positive for the residents and the traders of Ballynahinch; we can clear out of the way those who are not going to stop and make room for those who do want to do business in the town, whether they are residents, students or shoppers.

When I was young, we drove through Ballynahinch to get to Newcastle, but we also drove through Ballymoney to get to Portstewart. Either way, the traffic flow then was not what it is today. Now, it is an inhibitor to the economy and to the traders of Ballynahinch. That statement may appear counter-intuitive, not least when you think how often you hear retail businesses stress the importance of increasing footfall, but if you can never get enough pedestrians passing your shop door, how can it be that you can get too many cars? The answer is that the roads infrastructure is long past its capacity to handle the volume of traffic that passes through Ballynahinch, and the results are all negative.

Although I remain committed to the view that the issues on debate today must be seen primarily through the lens of the economy, it would be wrong not to acknowledge the serious road traffic collisions. Mr Hamilton has most eloquently reminded us of the two recent fatalities in Ballynahinch. It is simple logic to conclude that if roads designed to carry 12,000 vehicles a day are now carrying between 18,000 and 20,000, then the risk of accidents is heightened, especially when those 20,000 vehicles include heavy-duty machinery.

In relation to addressing the economy, it was interesting to accompany the Minister to a meeting with residents and traders in the Market House in Ballynahinch a fortnight ago on the 11 January. I came away with many positive impressions, especially with the input from and commitment of the town traders who are taking the sort of joined-up, common-sense approach that my party favours. In particular, I recall the words of Jackson Charles, who sat quietly absorbing and analysing the information until he delivered what I considered to be the telling statement of the morning. His family has been trading in Ballynahinch for 100 years. When the bypass was first suggested many years ago, he was totally opposed to the idea and implacably against it. Today, his opinion has swung 180 degrees, and he is fully supportive of the bypass. That is because he can look out of his shop window and watch potential customers drive on by because the volume of traffic makes it well nigh impossible to stop.

I commend the Minister for attending that meeting, and for following up so swiftly with what I anticipate will be a very well-received statement in a few minutes' time. It will not be his first well-received statement since he took over the Ministry in May. I also ask him, in the spirit of joined-up and common-sense government, to bear in mind what else we both heard from the traders a

fortnight ago; namely their desire that this Assembly brings a focus to promoting the cultural and historical potential of Ballynahinch, including its role in the 1798 rebellion.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Will you draw your remarks to a close, please?

**Mr Nesbitt:** I know that the Minister, a man steeped in tradition outside his ministerial duties, thinks of little else.

## Strangford Lough Adjournment Debate

**Mr Nesbitt:** I support the motion and speak as another Member of the Legislative Assembly for Strangford. I believe, from memory, that some 11 of us put ourselves forward to be elected to the House for Strangford last May. The range of political views was quite a stretch, from the United Kingdom Independence Party at one end to Sinn Féin at the other, which is a fairly decent definition of a political spectrum. Yet I imagine that one issue on which we could all have agreed is that we want the best for Strangford lough.

The trick is to define what we mean by the best. The Assembly and its Executive say that we put the economy at the heart of everything that we do. If that is so, let nobody belittle the fact that the fishermen who earn a living from the lough do so at great cost to themselves. I do not want to hear anybody tell the House that the value of the fish caught in Strangford lough is only £140,000, nor do I wish to hear, as others have reported, MLAs whispering elsewhere that we are talking about only a couple of dozen vessels and a few people. That £140,000 is very hard-earned money; they may think that it is much harder earned than the salary of a politician.

If we are putting the economy at the heart of all we do, we must support the fishing fleet in Strangford lough, no matter how small that fleet may be. However, to truly support it, we must also protect it from damaging its own future and ensure sustainability, as we have already done. Putting the economy first means that we must recognise the lough's potential for tourism, sailors, cruiser yachtsmen, windsurfers, divers, staycationers and all the rest.

We must also be constant and tireless in monitoring how these activities impact on the lough, on its fish stock and on the marine environment that sustains that stock. If we find evidence that the fishing fleet or anyone else is damaging the long-term viability or sustainability of the lough, we must act as we have acted before. However, the question is whether this is the right time to act. If we have the evidence base that says that something or someone is damaging the lough, then, yes, it is time, but do we have that evidence?

Queen's University was paid a significant sum of money to produce a research paper on *modiolus modiolus* and the threat to the horse mussel reefs. I did not read definitive evidence that any current legal human activity is a threat to *modiolus modiolus*. In fact, given that the horse mussel thrives by filtering water through its system, as my colleague the Member for Strangford pointed out, I believe that the absolute extremes of scientific theory may suggest that the mussel has suffered because we no longer pump raw sewage into the lough. You may see mussels on the menu in the restaurant today, but, if those are *modiolus modiolus*, I suggest you choose the vegetarian option.

The Ulster Wildlife Trust has taken a very serious step in referring this matter to Europe. I spoke with their representatives last week about this, and I am convinced that they believe they had no choice. That is because they believe that two devolved Departments have consistently failed to work in harmony to fix the problem. If the Ulster Wildlife Trust is wrong and we end up paying what they agree could be tens of millions of pounds in infraction fines, I hope they will come with me to Newtownards at the head of the lough and down the peninsula where they can explain to the unemployed why the money that could have created jobs has been denied to them. However, if they are right and the fault lies with the Department of Environment and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, then shame on those Departments. Let their senior civil servants visit Strangford to explain why the money we could have spent on roads, schools and social housing is being bundled up to be sent back to Europe. Our agriculture and fisheries Minister visits Brussels every December to argue against further cuts in quotas for our fleets in the Irish Sea. The argument is always based on contestable, if not straight dodgy, scientific evidence.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Bring your remarks to a close.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Let not inconclusive scientific evidence or a lack of joined-up government be our downfall in this matter; rather, let us demonstrate today to all those with an interest in the lough our capacity for joined-up, common-sense government.

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