

21.07.19

6 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade of the Minister for External Relations and Financial Services regarding EU vessels fishing in Jersey waters: (OQ.156/2021)

Following the repeated extensions to the deadline for allowing E.U. (European Union) vessels to fish in Jersey waters will the Minister update Members on his engagement with the U.K. Government departments that have responsibility for E.U. negotiations with regard to Jersey management of its territorial waters as agreed in T.E.C.A. (Trade and Economic Co-operation Agreement)?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Minister for External Relations and Financial Services):

I briefed Lord Frost ahead of the first meeting ahead of the E.U.-U.K. Partnership Council, which he co-chairs. Since the commencement of the most recent extension I have met with U.K. Fisheries Minister, Victoria Prentis, and also the E.U. Ambassador to the U.K. The Chief Minister and I have been in regular contact with Lord Wolfson, the lead Minister for the Crown Dependencies at the Ministry of Justice and Lord Wolfson, all being well, will visit Jersey later this week. Part of his itinerary includes an excursion aboard our Norman Le Brocq fisheries patrol vessel. In addition to all of that of course External Relations and marine resources officials engage frequently on fisheries matters with officials at the Cabinet Office, Defra and the Ministry of Justice, all of which have a role in delivering and overseeing the E.U.-U.K. Trade and Co-operation Agreement.

4.6.1 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I thank the Minister. Would he also confirm, while it may not be directly in his remit but that of the Minister for the Environment, that our fisheries are not being prejudiced by this long, drawn-out action, which is a great disappointment to our fisheries industry in Jersey generally?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It is difficult to see how one could reach that conclusion when one visits the harbour and sees the amount of Jersey produce being exported into the European Union on a weekly basis. We understand the dissatisfaction among some in the fishing industry who would like the full co-operation agreement to be functioning, even though some of those same voices did not necessarily welcome the agreement in the first instance. It is by far preferable to work through those detailed technical issues in slow time rather than prejudicing positive relationships with the European Union and with the U.K.

4.6.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier:

Can the Minister tell us whether there is any realistic chance of an agreement with the French authorities in particular before the French presidential election, which is almost a year away, and does he accept that we may have to keep on making concessions until that time when people will get a formal resolution of the problem?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It is a good question and I really hope that is not the case, and that is why it is very important that we are using both informal and formal channels. There has been productive engagement on a quadrilateral basis, that is Jersey, U.K., European and French officials talking about some of the technical issues. They are not resolved. I think it is fair to say to Members they are some distance from being resolved and I have got no doubt that of course there is not just the technical issues that need to be resolved, but also as ever with these matters a dose of politics as well. The Deputy rightly points to one of these difficult political processes on the calendar.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I thank the Minister.

4.6.3 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Would the Minister update the Assembly as to whether he is engaging the U.K. and, as a result, the E.U. authorities with the idea of devolving in any way, shape or form some element of the decision-making with regard to fisheries in our seas and the Bay of Granville area to the Island of Jersey and the regional authorities in France?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

That was something that we spoke about in the run-up to the formal agreement between the U.K. and the E.U. It did not find favour, and even when I have spoken to some regional political representatives where we have discussed that possibility it has not unfortunately found favour with Paris. What of course we cannot do, which is what some would like, is to go back to the Bay of Granville agreement, because the terms of that agreement are not appropriate where we are now for matters of fishing and access to markets considered third countries. We of course continue to raise that as an option, but it has not found favour with Paris and that is why we continue on the engagement on a quadrilateral basis. I think a bilateral basis has got us to where we are and that is why it needs to be quadrilateral.

4.6.4 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Given the Minister's answer, would he therefore agree that the E.U.-U.K. T.E.C.A. has resulted in Jersey losing an element of its autonomy? While we have a 3-mile exclusive area outside of that all decisions are being made very far from this Island; indeed, they are being made in London and Brussels and not in Jersey.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It is completely incorrect. The decisions are being made as the T.E.C.A. envisages by the Jersey Minister for the Environment and of course the Jersey Minister for the Environment, in my view rightly, agreed to an amnesty extension in the best interests of Jersey. It is not in my view right to think or to read it in any other way.

4.6.5 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister, in his continued negotiations, agree not to be diverted from the original theory of the T.E.C.A., which was to protect our fishing rights and our waters for our future generations?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The T.E.C.A. deals with a number of issues. One is access to waters; the other is access to markets and importantly for Jersey and for the environment team, and I share this, it deals with sustainability as well. These are technical issues and they must be managed in an appropriate, calm and technical manner if we, in Jersey's interests, are to get the best for our future out of the arrangements negotiated, which we approved.