

4. Questions to Ministers Without Notice - The Minister for Economic Development

The Bailiff:

We come now to the second question period which is of the Minister for Economic Development.

4.1 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister comment how his department is supporting local fishermen in the light of activities of fishermen in France and the effect it is having on the local economies?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf (The Minister for Economic Development):

Last week I received a call from representatives from the Fishermen's Association and I spent some 2 hours with fishermen last night. To put into context, this industry is worth about £5.9 million, according to last year's prices; the majority of exports, some 408 tonnes, are lobster. Fishermen are being squeezed at both ends. They are suffering higher oil prices, higher commodity prices - things like ropes - and, unfortunately, an historic low price in lobster, particularly. Fishermen are feeling the squeeze and we want to do what we can to help them. We are looking at a number of initiatives including looking at harbour dues charges, looking at the way that Customs interact with France in order to be able to get fishermen to land their fish directly in France, looking at ways of reducing costs by putting in place, for example, energy saving equipment on boats. We are looking at eco-labelling to try and boost the revenue from local fishermen and trying to find new markets, particularly the local market which is an important market, and my encouragement to Islanders would be to support local fishermen by buying some of our excellent local bass, whelks, oysters, crabs and lobsters because that is good for a fisherman.

4.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister outline apropos his earlier answer re tourism - his highly optimistic answer - what steps he has in place to extend the self-catering industry and does he work in concert with the Planning Department?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The relationship with the Minister for Planning and Economic Development is excellent and we enjoy a very good dialogue in relation to giving advice to the Planning Department on issues such as self-catering. I mentioned earlier the apart-hotel over the bus station: I know that my tourism officials and the industry is very interested in selling that space but there are strict controls on that accommodation, that accommodation has to be available in some proportion for the tourist market. I am excited by the development at the Les Ormes initiatives for high-class, self-catering units and the Deputy will also be aware that there has been interest in a leading U.K. supplier of self-catering in order to boost this particular area of the market. I think it does have a potential and we are working with Planning and operators to provide the maximum supply for that to support our expanding route network.

4.3 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

I hope that the Minister is aware that in the Education Scrutiny Panel's Early Years report a recommendation was made that the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture should work with the Minister for Economic Development to undertake a cross-departmental economic assessment of the case for investing in sustainable childcare. I ask the Minister whether he is aware of that and whether, indeed, there will be such an assessment undertaken between the departments?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I was very pleased to be able to give the Deputy and her panel evidence in relation to her review and, of course, that I am aware of the important recommendation that she gives with that. I think

that it is important in order to give working mothers - and working fathers - the opportunity of providing work if they wish to and that means that we need to be able to provide childcare and childcare arrangements. There is also unequivocal evidence all across the world that investment in young people at a very early age helps in their formation and helps in their development, *et cetera*. So, yes, I am aware of the recommendation and I share her panel's view and enthusiasm in order to find a solution to that and, of course, we will be working with the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture to try and meet that recommendation.

4.4 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Several months ago I did ask the Minister whether in consultation with the Minister for Home Affairs he could look into the sale of alcohol to juniors and what penalties could be increased to avoid this. Will the Minister update Members, please?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The whole issue of alcohol sales is the subject of a statement that I am going to be making in a few minutes in relation to the whole licensing review. It is very clear that the licensing review - and the Deputy of St. Martin has been one of those key promoters of the streamlining of the licensing review - does need to take account of other issues in terms of alcohol sales, public order issues, and there has been some very strong representations from Health. My short answer is the issue of the sale to young people is being dealt with generally in relation to the licensing review, which is the subject of the statement I am going to make shortly.

4.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister state to Members when he will be in a position to bring forward a detailed business plan on his proposal to spend additional money on direct marketing for Jersey Finance as laid down in his provisional business plan?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

As the Deputy will be aware, having given evidence to his panel on the overall Economic Development business plan, the Assembly gives each department an overall cash limit from which we deflect money according to industry requirements, according to the performance of the different sectors. I can advise Members that yesterday I received a final draft of a request from Jersey Finance to boost the investment in a number of growth markets. The Deputy and other Members will be aware that the global sand-shifts of economic power are changing; we are seeing decreased business in the United Kingdom and the United States and we are seeing the global economy shifting its attention to Asia Pacific. Frankly, I hope the Deputy will support the initiatives required to match or exceed the competition. Jersey needs to take a place in the Indian, Chinese and other growing markets and I will be shortly signing-off, in the next few days - based within the existing business plan that Economic Development have - a further increase in the funding initiatives for that and it is absolutely vital that we do so. We are seeing a credit crunch and I want to insulate the Island's economy to as greater extent as we can do by boosting activities in the growing areas of the world.

4.6 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister acknowledge that his desire that the Tourism Information Office move was not done for reasons of tourism, it was done at the behest of W.E.B. and, therefore, has not been a success?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I have to say to the Deputy I was not responsible for the move of the Tourism Office. That was an issue that I inherited from the previous Economic Development Committee and I would remind the Deputy that it was the subject of a States debate at which this Assembly made the final decision. What I can say is that the move to the Tourism Building has worked extremely

well, staff are happy in the new building. It is a far better fit for purpose for the work of the Tourism Department. We have moved in as well - we are on the third floor - and I am absolutely delighted with the information that is given to our tourists. We have some excellent staff in relation to advising tourists and I monitor generally the numbers going into the Tourism Office and it is becoming very much a feature of tourists' arrival and getting information. I think they are doing extremely well.

4.6.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Notwithstanding the fact that everybody there seems to be very happy, could the Minister acknowledge; are the numbers of tourists visiting similar or comparable to the numbers who visited the previous office?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am advised that they are slightly down and we have been making efforts in order to signpost that. We have put much more vigorous signposting in relation to Liberation Square. As the Minister... yes he does get involved in issues concerning signposting and I have directed the department to increase the signposting. They have done that but, of course, as we enter now the peak months of tourism arrivals I am sure that we are going to see activities there. I would also tell the Deputy that the website is extremely important in relation to providing visitor information and the new Jersey dotcom website provides a rich content of information, both in terms of events, of holiday opportunities, bookings, *et cetera*, and if he has not already looked at it can I direct him to look at the excellent new website.

4.7 The Deputy of St. John:

I wonder if the Minister could answer this: with the removal of the benefit of duty-free fuel to the leisure boaters in the U.K. will the Minister be looking at any initiatives to highlight the issue of the availability of cheaper fuel in Jersey, as I believe Guernsey already does?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I have to say that the Harbours Department are to be warmly congratulated in their initiative to put on the first Jersey Boat Show. Some 12,000 Islanders visited the Boat Show and, yes, there is now very pro-active working going on with Jersey Harbours to effectively promote Jersey's marine development opportunities. I am also advised that there has been an increased number of berths available to visitors and there is a whole new world of opportunity in relation to East of Albert for developing the marine industry. I have to say that there is a debate to be had and there has been a debate on the Council of Ministers on the issue of marine fuel but that is, of course, a matter for the budget later on this year.

4.8 The Connétable of St. Peter:

Is the Minister aware of all the consultants appointed by his department during 2007 and is a record kept of all the fees paid, noted and available?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Certainly I, along with other Ministers, I think, enjoy a very close working relationship with my department. I meet with departmental officers, including the Chief Officer, on a weekly formalised basis with meetings and certainly I am aware of all the major consultancy issues which are done on political strategy. I may not be aware of all the individual consultants that are brought in, for example, in relation to the tourism spend. Tourism spends, for example, £2.2 million on advertising spend and I might not be immediately alert to that sort of consultancy. But certainly, as far as political consultancies are concerned, I am aware of most of them and, of course, the Chief Officer is required, under the new finance law, as accounting officer for value for money and there is a strict code of directions in relation to tendering of all

consultants. If the Constable would like more information on that I am happy to have the department brief him on that.

4.9 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Further to the horrendous worldwide hike in both fuel and food prices, will the Minister be seeking to encourage local farmers and growers to produce more and, indeed, local supermarkets and vendors to stock more local products?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I refer the Deputy to the comments that I made some moments ago in relation to the fishing industry. That is absolutely a way that we can support our local fishing industry and, of course, the same remarks relate to the growing industry too. We need to support growing industries, we need to support issues like Genuine Jersey which is undergoing a current reform at the moment, there is an investment going in from Economic Development in that and I also have to say that I take great comfort from discussions that we have had with the 2 leading supermarket operators that they will be making a bigger focus in local food produce. There has already been a successful initiative by Sandpiper in Guernsey. There certainly has been the facilitation of discussion between some suppliers and supermarkets about exactly what their requirements are; they need year round supply and certainty. The days when you could simply turn up with an amount of vegetables or something to a supermarket have gone. There needs to be structured arrangements, structured supply and we are doing everything we can within Jersey Enterprise to raise the game of local producers in order to put local food into local mouths.

4.10 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

What lessons has the Minister learned from a gentleman whose application for both advice and possible funding for a new enterprise appeared to have very seriously gone off the rails at an early stage?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am not going to comment on an individual application. I know that a number of States Members have commented. I have to say that I have reviewed very carefully the whole circumstances around that and I have been very conscious not to get involved in the individual determinations of applications for Jersey Enterprise. I think the Minister's job is to concentrate on policy. We have got expert departmental officials within a proper appeals process to deal with applications. I will say nothing more than this that some applicants offer more challenges than others and the best way is to go through the proper formal routes and I am satisfied that the department has dealt with this individual absolutely properly so I have to say that there were no lessons to be learned

4.11 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Will the Minister join me in congratulating the Jersey Cricket Board, the I.C.C. (International Cricket Council), his and other States departments in organising and facilitating what was a very wonderful and prestigious World Division 5 cricket tournament where Jersey held and promoted its name globally with over a million hits on the I.C.C. website from people looking to get an update on scores and information on Jersey? Will he continue to support such prestigious events?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The Senator will be aware that my Assistant Minister bowls better balls than I do and he was the one that was welcoming the officials. I warmly congratulate all the organisers in relation to the competition. I think it has provided an excellent event for locals and I think it has provided excellent opportunities for marketing Jersey outside the Island. That underlines, if anything, my determination to invest in events and to have a fun-packed event-led tourism calendar which I

am delighted to see now also includes the cricket event, which has been an absolute marvellous hit. I had an e-mail yesterday telling me about hundreds of thousands of e-mail hits on the cricket... over a million hits on the website which is absolutely delightful and I echo the congratulations that he made. I also understand there are some good pitches in the Island too.

[Approbation]

The Bailiff:

That concludes the second question period of the Minister for Economic Development.