

3.2 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding the potential impact on Jersey of the oil spill off the coast of Louisiana:

What advice, if any, has the Minister sought and what preparations, if any, has the Minister made in relation to the potential impact on Jersey and the Channel Islands should oil from the recent BP oil spill off the coast of Louisiana reach us via tidal currents?

Senator F.E. Cohen (The Minister for Planning and Environment):

Deputy Duhamel will answer this question as he has special responsibility for that.

Deputy R.C. Duhamel of St. Saviour (Assistant Minister for Planning and Environment - rapporteur):

The Minister is keeping a general weather eye on the situation and doing, as the rest of us are doing, reading the media reports that are appearing day-to-day. There are provisions for civil emergencies in this Island and obviously if the worst did happen and oil of a significant quantity and toxic nature did arrive on these shores then extraordinary circumstances would require extraordinary measures. I would have thought that a proposition would be brought to this House in order to take monies perhaps from the Rainy Day Fund in order to bring about the security to the environment that one would expect from the Minister for Planning and Environment and all those concerned with the environment.

3.2.1 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

After the last oil spill off of the British Isles the Ecology Fund was set up with money from the States to deal with such contingencies and while I appreciate the States are quick to act to spend money, I am wondering what other measures the Minister has identified in relation to equipment, personnel and vessels, *et cetera*, that might be needed in the very unlikely eventuality that this does come our way.

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

As one can appreciate from reading the newspaper and media reports this is very, very early days. One item that appeared in the *Baltimore News* as of yesterday from Professor Michael Kearney, Professor of Geology at the University of Maryland, who is also keeping a close eye on the situation, has suggested that if indeed the oil does get into the Gulf Stream it is not likely to happen until the end of July. He goes on further to say that if the Florida Keys are impacted within the next several weeks that would provide a good indication of how much oil is moving up the east coast. The Deputy is aware of the substantial distance between ourselves and the Gulf of Mexico. The oil spill is in the Gulf of Mexico, albeit there are transport mechanisms that will take some of the oil outside of that loop and put it into the Gulf Stream. One further comment that the Professor from the university made is that one benefit Maryland might see is the oil to start to break down by the action of wind and tide, and experts are saying at the moment that the most toxic components of the crude oil should evaporate along the way.

3.2.2 Deputy P.J. Rondel of St. John:

The last time we had a spill in this area was the *Torrey Canyon* in the 1960s; we had many, many hundreds of metres of booms. Could the Assistant Minister give us an indication what amount of booms we have in stock at the moment and also other

disbursement equipment like the liquid which would need to be sprayed on to any oil spill?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I am not aware of a stockpile of any booms and certainly to put a boom or several booms around the Island would be a prohibitively expensive exercise. I should imagine that it would not just be Jersey that would be affected. The *Torrey Canyon* and the *Amoco Cadiz* spills were substantially closer to the Island and therefore the oil did not have a chance to break up in a way that perhaps will happen all the way from the Gulf of Mexico. I think it is probably foolhardy of the Island to think itself into a situation where we would have a stockpile in some agricultural shed somewhere of several thousand booms and tens of millions of pounds of equipment which would not necessarily be used except in very, very rare circumstances.

3.2.3 The Deputy of St. John:

Can I come back in on to that? I would have expected the Assistant Minister for Planning and Environment to have had some indication of what is held in stock in the event of an oil spill. We have oil tankers up and down the English Channel daily going up to Rotterdam and beyond and therefore I would expect to have some equipment and for him and his department to be aware of that.

The Greffier of the States (in the Chair):

That is not a question, Deputy.

The Deputy of St. John:

Will the Minister please look and notify Members later in the day of what equipment is held in the Island in the event of an oil spill?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I am happy to do that.

3.2.4 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I think this does follow on from the Deputy of St. John. I think what we have heard - and the Assistant Minister may correct me, - is that, yes, this oil spill may be quite a way away but we could get an oil spill off the coast coming our way any time. Is he telling us his department does not have a strategy or a plan that he can call to action? I would like to hear his remarks.

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

That is not a question that necessarily comes out of the question because specifically Deputy Le Claire asked: "What were the preparations that the Minister has made in relation to the potential impact on Jersey and the Channel Islands should oil from the recent BP oil spill off the coast of Louisiana reach us via tidal currents?" If indeed a longer-term emergency situation event, recovery or whatever the jargon is, a programme is required then I do agree with the questioner that perhaps it should be looked at but at the moment with monies being spread very, very thinly around, I should imagine that the likelihood of having monies set aside from the general pot and put into a general situation to provide for equipment that might not be used over a substantial number of years would not rank very high on the priority list. But I am happy to advise the questioner of whatever emergency procedures we have got for spills other than the ones that have been referenced by Deputy Le Claire.

3.2.5 Deputy J.A. Martin:

The Assistant Minister for Planning and Environment, every answer he has given - forgive the pun - has been totally a slippery answer. He is telling us we have got no plan and if I would like to meet him for a coffee he will tell me some sort of thing he could pull out of the back of the hat. The question is I would hope, as the Assistant Minister for Planning and Environment, he would put this at a much higher priority. It is not about money; it is having a plan and a plan that is costed but something that we can put into action at short ... I know what I mean. [Laughter]

[10:00]

The Greffier of the States (in the Chair):

I am not sure that was a question.

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I thank the Deputy for her suggestion.

The Greffier of the States (in the Chair):

Do you wish a final supplementary, Deputy?

3.2.6 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I did find the Assistant Minister's answers akin to something that I would be hearing from perhaps BP or somebody. I did specifically put this question to elucidate from the Minister and the Ministerial benches some kind of understanding as to our preparedness for containment of an oil spill. I would like to repeat the question and get a more responsible answer if I can from the Deputy that the Deputy of St. John put: will he undertake to investigate immediately what resources are available and circulate a paper to States Members to allay any concerns that there are not adequate facilities to deal with an oil spill should it come to Jersey from wherever?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I am happy to do that.

The Greffier of the States (in the Chair):

Very well. Just before I call the next question I am able to announce the result of the ballot for the membership of the States Employment Board. The Connétable of St. Lawrence received 29 votes; Deputy De Sousa received 29 votes; the Deputy of St. Martin received 26 votes and accordingly Deputy De Sousa and the Connétable of St. Lawrence are elected as Members of the Board. We come now to question 3. Members will note from the Supplementary and Consolidated Order Paper this question was redirected to the Minister with responsibility who is the Minister for Economic Development. I will ask the Deputy of St. John to ask the question.