

4.6 Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour of the Minister for Economic Development regarding tourism figures and the Tourism Strategy:

Would the Minister advise whether tourism figures so far this year have been positive; what the effect of the volcanic ash disruption has been and whether the Minister will be taking any action to revise the whole Tourism Strategy, and if not why not?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean (The Minister for Economic Development):

Tourism in Jersey, as in most other countries, has not been immune to the global recession. Last year our staying leisure visitor numbers dropped by 3.8 per cent; in many respects this was a good performance compared to other holiday destinations. 2010 started with some optimism as tour operators reported good forward bookings. That changed with the closing of U.K. (United Kingdom) space for 6 days after Easter. We estimate that it resulted in the loss of about 4,000 leisure and business visitors to the Island. I can, however, reassure Members that in this challenging economic climate we will continue to do all that we can to support our valuable tourism industry. The key to this is working ever more closely in a fully integrated way with the industry to find the best solutions. That is why we recently established the Tourism Marketing Group with key industry representatives. Thank you.

4.6.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

It has recently been reported that 2 St. Helier hotels may be redeveloped. It was famously said by the Head of Jersey Tourism several years ago that we are managing decline. What steps is the Minister taking to reverse that decline?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

As I have stated in my question, we are living in very challenging and difficult economic conditions that are not unusual to other destinations. Having said that, we are working very closely with the industry. In 2008 when the global financial crisis started we set up the tourism taskforce and agreed a 10-point plan with the industry, with their full support, looking at, in particular, areas like building on Jersey's strength, brand value, tactical actions and ensuring that we utilise technology like the websites. That we are doing with some degree of success, but the conditions are difficult.

4.6.2 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

It is encouraging to hear the Minister say that he works closely with other Ministers and the tourism industry. Could he tell me how closely he works with Education? Does he know that Highlands College this year has not one course for travel and tourism and many disappointed students who were hoping to get on to the course?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I do work closely with all fellow Ministers, including the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture and I am clearly disappointed by what the Deputy says, and I will look into the matter. What I can say is that from the tourism point of view, jointly with the Jersey Hospitality Association, there was funding and a project put in place to encourage young local out of work people to get involved in tourism. The aim of that particular project, Bienvenue, was to get people off the unemployment register and into work rather than importing people into the Island. That project is not as successful as I would have hoped and we will continue to try and encourage it.

4.6.3 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Could I just ask a supplementary on that? Yes, I had heard of this other training but when looking further I was told it was only for 6 months, which would only see them halfway through. So other than take a 6 months into training and then being left high and dry and no course at Highlands because you would be halfway through any course, people have not opted to do this. Could he look into the way that ... at least it would cover a year of training and then if people did want to return to college after that year they could, in the next year they are open?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

Yes, the Deputy is correct; the project was for the season. Of course it was there to encourage employment of local people rather than importing which was the aim. What I will do is raise the matter that she has mentioned today with the Skills Board. Clearly my department, Education, Sport and Culture, and Social Security form part of the Skills Executive and it is that body that should look at the matter that the Deputy has raised and I will bring it to their attention. Thank you.

4.6.4 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

My actual question was asked by Deputy Lewis in his supplementary. However, in April we heard mention of £10 million that had been voted for tourism some years ago yet only £2 million, I believe, had been forthcoming. Can the Minister advise whether he has been pursuing the Minister for Treasury and Resources to see where that £8 million has gone?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

Yes, the Deputy is referring to the funds voted in principle by this Assembly some years ago for the Tourism Development Fund. That in principle decision was made at that time and the Deputy is also correct about £2 million is all the funding that we have currently had. I have had discussions with the Minister for Treasury and Resources, but clearly we are in a difficult climate at the moment and there is simply not the money available, as I understand it, to bring those funds forward.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

May I just correct something? The question is the money was voted. The money was never voted, it was just an expression of this Assembly. This Assembly makes decisions on voting and there was never an amendment to the Business Plan for it.

4.6.5 The Deputy of St. John:

As a former member of the Tourism Committee, would the Minister agree that it is not all doom and gloom, given that some businesses, even with the volcanic ash, have been able to succeed? I am thinking of Condor, they have been able to pick up business from airlines at a very difficult time of the year and therefore would the Minister agree it is not all doom and gloom but there is some light at the end of the tunnel.

[10:45]

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

Absolutely. I am delighted to agree with the Deputy of St. John. There are businesses in the Island in the tourism sector that are performing well in the current difficult climate, that are seeing their figures up and it is a good example of good business working hard and with innovation to develop the market. We understand it

is challenging, obviously, but nevertheless there are business that are performing quite well. I might add to the end of March total arrivals in the Island were down 1.6 per cent, air arrivals were down 3.3 per cent but sea arrivals were up by 6.7 per cent. So, as the Deputy says, there is very much a mixed picture and we will continue to support the industry in all ways we can.

4.6.6 Deputy D.J.A. Wimberley of St. Mary:

That was a lovely closing line: “We will continue to support the tourism industry in every way we can.” We have had an interesting reinterpretation of the Tourism Development Fund from the Minister for Treasury and Resources that it was never voted at all, and I will check that. But I want to ask the Minister for Economic Development about the Tourism Development Fund. You said these are hard economic times and wonder whether other jurisdictions, when there are hard economic times and one of their leading export industries is facing a tough time, simply walk away? I want to know from the Minister what his commitment is to re-establishing the T.D.F. (Tourism Development Fund) and showing some genuine support for this industry?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I take exception of what the Deputy says. There is no question of anybody walking away, certainly not my department and certainly, I am sure, the tourism industry has the full support of all Members of this Assembly. I have no doubt about that. That commitment will remain as it has in the past, it will so do in the future. But we are in difficult times, there is less money available, we have to work much more closely, as I have said, with the industry and I believe we are currently doing that. I think there is, as the Deputy of St. John said, some degree of optimism. Jersey had advantages that other destinations do not have, for example the currency exchange differentials are seeing more people choosing Jersey than perhaps European destinations. So I think there is room for optimism but we have to work hard at it.