

## **5.6 The Deputy of St. John of the Minister for Economic Development regarding the new Air Traffic Control system.**

Following the reports that new regulations relating to aircraft movements are to be put in place in the coming months, is the Minister satisfied that having spent millions of pounds on the new traffic control system, it will not be out of date or obsolete?

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

Déjà vu, Sir. I think the Deputy is referring to rumours as opposed to actual reports. I can assure Members that the air traffic control facility continues to operate to the highest standards. I am perfectly satisfied with the investment that has been made and I think that we can be proud, as I have already said, of the facility that we have at the airport for managing air traffic movement.

### **5.6.1 The Deputy of St. John:**

Given in the 1990s in the heyday of tourism, when we had over 1 million visitors a year and over 450 rotations per day at the airport and that was the norm in the summer season, we have approximately between 30 and 40 per cent of those numbers coming in today and yet we have to put in place visual flight rules requiring prior permission. Does the Minister not consider that this is a backward move and given the 18 per cent decline in the last 2 years in flights alone, we are going backwards? Will he confirm that I am correct?

### **Senator A.J.H. Maclean:**

I hate to disappoint the Deputy but I do not agree with him. I do not believe it is a backward move. I think it is a very prudent move in terms of safety. That is what Islanders would expect us to do, to be prudent, safe and that the facility of the airport, which we invested considerable money in, is efficient as well. We are moving towards a system that will give us long-term viability at the airport.

[10:30]

### **The Bailiff:**

Now, this is a very similar question. I propose, therefore, to invite questions from those who were unable to ask their questions during the last time first. Deputy Le Claire? He is not here. Deputy Trevor Pitman.

### **5.6.2 Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

I did try to get in last time but I was a bit slow because I was thrown by the thought of Senator Ferguson flying, but there we go. Could the Minister tell us ... Deputy Higgins has just said his Scrutiny Panel were not allowed to come and look at this and we recently saw objections to the Deputy chairing that Scrutiny Panel; could the Minister not explain if those 2 things are linked and does it not concern him a little because surely Scrutiny should be having access to all these things in the course of doing a thorough job?

### **Senator A.J.H. Maclean:**

I think the Deputy is inflating issues. I would welcome a review by Scrutiny. I have always said that and that is a consistent position. I have also said that Members are more than welcome to come and view the facility. As far as Deputy Higgins is concerned, the matter was purely one of perceived conflict, totally unrelated.

Members are welcome to see the facility, Scrutiny is more than welcome to review the air traffic control facility and that is as simple as that.

**5.6.3 Deputy F.J. Hill of St. Martin:**

Is the Minister aware of the potential loss of revenue from visiting aircraft and has he a contingency fund in place to cover the shortfall which is now obviously occurring?

**Senator A.J.H. Maclean:**

Well, it may come as a surprise to Members - not that I do not value general aviation, it is important - but in purely aeronautical charging basis for the airport it loses money. We get less revenue from it than we contribute towards the aero club and the facilities there. So, I am afraid that from a financial point of view it is a very small part of the revenue generation at Jersey Airport. Members would expect the commercial air traffic movement is the key revenue generator for the airport.

**5.6.4 Senator J.L. Perchard:**

The Minister has informed the Assembly of teething problems with this project and the extra safety levels in place currently. My question is about budget and would the Minister confirm whether the project is still within budget and if this is not the case, who is liable for the overspends?

**Senator A.J.H. Maclean:**

Yes, I can confirm to the Senator that the new air traffic control facility, the tower, was delivered on time and on budget, and I am very pleased about that. There is an ongoing charge in the revenue budget in relation to maintaining this particular facility as Members would expect with any computer-based system. The budget for that is £100,000 a year and again we are inside that budget and would expect to remain so unless any significant changes are asked for in the future to meet changing needs.

**5.6.5 Connétable P.F.M. Hanning of St. Saviour:**

It is quite simple. It is not fully operational there at the moment. The Minister has said this. How long was this lead up period before it was fully operational intended to be, and how long will it be before it is fully operational?

**Senator A.J.H. Maclean:**

I am afraid the Connétable is not correct. The air traffic control tower and facility are fully operational. All we are referring to here is a management flow issue. It is requiring general aviation, that is small aircraft, to get prior permission for slots so we can better manage the approach of light aircraft. That is a system that can be done by telephone. There is a hotline that has been installed to help general aviation flyers and it takes no more, online or by telephone, of a few minutes to do that. It is a system that was in place some years ago.

**5.6.6 The Connétable of St. Saviour:**

A supplementary. I am sorry, I think we are being confused here. If the system could cope without them having to telephone before they came before, how can the new system be fully operational or have you introduced a system that does not cope?

**Senator A.J.H. Maclean:**

No. The system is fully operational. All we are talking about is a flow management exercise for safety purposes for light aircraft on the agreement of the Director of Civil

Aviation for safety purposes as controllers get used to the transition into this new facility. It is a temporary arrangement for 3 months through the summer and controllers and the airport management inform me that they expect that when that is concluded there is no reason why the original system will not be put back in place and the temporary measures removed permanently.

**5.6.7 Deputy A.E. Jeune of St. Brelade:**

I am really concerned with what I think I heard and I would like the Minister to clarify it. Is it correct that a member of Scrutiny has not been allowed to visit or is it a case, rather like I think the Deputy of St. Peter, they have not yet been invited to visit, and I would like that clear?

**Senator A.J.H. Maclean:**

There has been absolutely no prevention of Scrutiny, either an individual member or anybody else not being able to undertake a review. The exception, so I can be absolutely clear, is that when Deputy Higgins was chairman of the Scrutiny Panel he and his panel were interested in doing a review. It was felt that there was a potential conflict with the Deputy and that was the only reason, and that was nothing to do with the decision from my department; that was independently verified. They are perfectly at liberty to scrutinise.

**Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

I think the Minister might be slightly misleading the House. Yes, there was the perceived conflict of interest which we dealt with. However, documents were asked, straightforward documents were asked in February of this year and were never delivered, even up to the time when the perceived conflict of interest matter was dealt with. February to May ... these were straightforward documents that should be in the public arena.

**The Bailiff:**

I am sorry, Deputy, the question is whether anyone was prevented from visiting the control tower.

**Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

Well, I am sorry it was getting information. We were prevented from getting anything.

**The Bailiff:**

No, the question was about visiting the control tower. So, that is not relevant. Final question from the Deputy of St. John.

**5.6.8 The Deputy of St. John:**

How many additional staff are employed to operate the visual flight rules and what cost implications are there, and from which budget is the funding coming?

**Senator A.J.H. Maclean:**

Sorry, can I ask the Deputy to repeat that? There was some noise. I unfortunately could not hear what he said.

**The Deputy of St. John:**

How many additional staff are employed to operate the visual flight rules, and what cost implications are there and from which budget does the funding come?

**Senator A.J.H. Maclean:**

As far as I am aware, the system is operated by the air traffic control assistants and the controllers. It is operating, as I have already stated to Senator Perchard's question, within budget. It is coming from the revenue budget set aside by the airport for the management and operation of this particular facility. I would also point out that Deputy Higgins' comments earlier were inaccurate.