

4.5 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains of St. Clement of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding the details of a recent fish monitoring exercise undertaken in Portelet Bay:

With regard to the recent fish monitoring exercise in Portelet Bay, would the Minister advise how many staff were involved, the total cost, and what was achieved?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel of St. Saviour (The Minister for Planning and Environment)

The research was carried out by 3 staff from my department, together with a colleague from the University of Hawaii. The fieldwork took 4 days with staff working an additional day on the weekend on a voluntary basis. Preparation of the mooring systems also took one member of staff one day and their deployment involved 2 additional staff for half a day. The writing of the scientific paper was completed mainly in officers' own time. The moorings cost approximately £60 each. There were 4 so that was a total of £240 with some components being provided by our colleagues from T.T.S. (Transport and Technical Services). Monitoring and tagging equipment was provided also through our partnership with the University of Hawaii. Other expenditure related to small operational costs such as the vessel fuel for the Norman Le Brocq and air for diving. This study provides data that feeds into the department's wider research programme looking at marine protected areas. Establishing these areas is an obligation set out in the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Strategy, which the States approved in October 2008 and also in various international agreements, which the Island has also signed up to. I am supportive and pleased that my department has taken this rigorous and scientifically robust approach to providing the best information possible to assist in the management of our coastal waters.

4.5.1 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

I wonder if the Minister would further explain on the amount of time taken. Has it, as on my understanding as he has just told me, taken 4 days? I thought the monitoring went on for a longer period of time. It does seem to me that if it took 4 days, then the monitoring was pretty mild. What actual data has arrived from this which warrants the spending of this amount of money in these times of austerity?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I think the Deputy has not probably read the technical report that was revealed on 4th January in a news release to all Members of this House and the general public. It was not a case of officers sitting round for up to 618 days watching fish kind of pass them by and counting them. Indeed, it was an exercise in electronic tagging. A number of fish were caught. Certain transmitters were placed in the peritoneal cavity of the fish or attached to their fins and a mooring cable was attached in 4 different places in the Portelet Bay area and as the fish with the transmitter inside swam past, it triggered responses from a receiver and after a period of time, that receiver was recovered and the data downloaded to computer so that the analysis could take place. Of what use is the data? Albeit that the statistical sample of fish was fairly small and perhaps in my experience should have been a little bit larger, some useful results have occurred. The wrasse is a very important fish for angling, particularly tourist angling. There is talk and work underway to establish certain areas, Portelet Bay being one of them, and perhaps further areas in the open seas as marine refuges to encourage fish breeding and to support both the marine species that are present and, indeed, our tourism industry. That primarily is the basis of the work that is being undertaken. For the expenditure that was spent, although the Deputy is absolutely right, we are living in hard times, because a number of the costs were defrayed by working with the University of Hawaii and that was done on a free basis and certainly by cadging bits and pieces of equipment from the university and from our colleagues from T.T.S., the costs have been kept to a minimum.

4.5.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Notwithstanding the Minister's love of grass skirts and highly coloured shirts, would he explain why the University of Hawaii has been the partner when we have on the south coast one of Britain's finest fish marine laboratories at the University of Plymouth?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Yes, one of the authors to this report is, I think, doing some work with the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology and it is only right and proper that Jersey persons who are doing their research studies abroad should offer the opportunity to the Island to participate in local opportunities for advancing scientific knowledge.

4.5.3 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

I can assure the Minister I did read the report, which has triggered my concern that this seemed like an enormous waste of money. It took 4 days and the Minister has rightly said there was a lot of work involved in tagging the fish. It does seem to me that that is quite a short period of time to get accurate information. My question to the Minister is while they have monitored rockfish and rays, would he not concede that it might be more important to monitor the problems with bass?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I certainly would and that would be an alternative line of inquiry that I would support but, indeed, if the Deputy's comments are to be taken literally, he is perhaps suggesting that no work should be undertaken because the monies expended so far on these studies is a waste of funds.