

3.6 Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour of the Chief Minister regarding the delay in lodging the new population policy for debate:

Would the Assistant Chief Minister explain why, despite various undertakings, the new population policy has not been placed before the Assembly for debate before the summer recess? Thank you.

Senator P.F. Routier (Assistant Chief Minister - rapporteur):

Before I answer the question, I would just like to thank Members' indulgence in recognising that I was speaking at the opening of a very important union conference at Hotel de France where there are 400 delegates which we welcome to the Island. They are discussing lots of things which are of importance to their union, so that was good to be able to do that. So, a report outlining the decision-making policy under the new Control of Housing and Work (Jersey) 2012 Law will be published after the summer recess and then a broader, more-inclusive long-term plan following wide consultation will be brought for debate in the early part of next year. This approach has been chosen because it does not seem sensible to bring a population policy forward in advance of a wide debate about what sort of Island we want.

3.6.1 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

How can the Assistant Minister make that statement when we had that particular discussion about what type of society we want in the Strategic Plan and that is why the population component of the policy was drafted into that plan, which the States agreed, and while during that debate the population policy was supposed to come back in the next summer. It was supposed to be delayed until this summer and now it is going to be delayed again until the beginning of next year. When are we going to get this policy when we have already had that vision debate in the Strategic Plan?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I think what has been recognised is that this is a major piece of work for us all. We need to look at things with regard to the economy, the environment and all the community matters that we all want to think about. The Economic Department and the long-term strategy team are working very hard on bringing forward those pieces of policy for us to discuss. It is just too early, unfortunately, currently but perhaps the decision was in the Strategic Plan ... we believe we are still meeting it in line with the Strategic Plan by having introduced the new Control of Housing and Work (Jersey) 2012 Law which came into place yesterday and is already making some considerable difference to the way we are going to manage the decisions that we need to make. I understand the frustration of the Deputy but I think we need to do this in a structured way and consult with the whole of the Island.

3.6.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I have had discussions with the Assistant Minister and I am absolutely convinced that he does not believe in restricting population within this Island. I feel that his colleagues on the Council of Ministers also do not believe in restricting and capping the population of this Island. I will ask him if he will confirm the fact, but is it not that they are afraid to bring it to the House because they know that we will see things like the hospital, because I think they are projecting about 150,000 population, and other things that you know it will be unacceptable so you are putting off the date. Will the Minister not confirm that?

Senator P.F. Routier:

No, I cannot confirm that at all. I think the Deputy has not recognised the work that has been going on in the recent years with the Migration Advisory Group and the decisions that we have been taking. We have slowed down the inward migration over the last few years. There has

been a real turnaround of the decision-making policy where more people are coming to the Island who were in the non-skilled environment.

Deputy M. Tadier:

A point of order. The Minister is clearly misleading the House. A written answer has been given which statistically shows that the inward migration has not been slowed; it has increased.

Senator P.F. Routier:

No, I think it has been slowed down over the last few years. I think the Deputy may be reading that incorrectly because what we have done is switched around the amount of people coming into the Island. The decisions that we are making are that people with higher skills will get permission to come to the Island if we need those skills. Only if we need those skills. But with regard to the unskilled labour force, we have really dried that up completely in the last few years.

3.6.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Could the Assistant Minister tell us whether he personally believes that we should be restricting the population and not allowing it to go much further than the 100,000 that we are already at?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Restricting the population is what we are doing currently and I believe that it is something we need to do. A number is very difficult to decide upon because I do not think that ... even the number that we currently have, that is a number that was at December of last year. We all know from years of experience that during the summer months ... we are probably well over 100,000 right now because people do come and flow in and out of the Island regularly. We know from statistics that there is a turnaround of 5,000 to 6,000 people a year, so it is quite possible at this very moment that we are over a 100,000 but that is an ebb and flow that happens every year.

3.6.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister stop prevaricating and do the right thing? Will he apologise on behalf of the Chief Minister for having failed to meet one of his 7 strategic aims with a clear priority of bringing a policy to this House by July of this year?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I hope Members will recognise that we need to do this in an orderly manner and with the right information to have a proper debate. It is all very well rushing a debate through this House with incorrect and incomplete information. I would urge Members to understand that we need to do this in a proper manner.

3.6.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Chief Minister and the Assistant Chief Minister have failed to do that in a timely manner. They have had the population projections from the Statistics Office for the last 8 months. Why has no action been taken already? Will the Minister simply apologise for having failed to meet his targets?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I am quite prepared to give the Assembly an apology about not having met that target date but I hope in doing that that Members will accept and recognise that we need to do this in an orderly manner.

3.6.6 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

The Assistant Minister seems to be reluctant to answer the question. Perhaps he would like a simple question like: why is the anecdotal reference to a projected 350,000 population being used for evaluating the required size of a new hospital?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I am unable to comment on anecdotal information.

3.6.7 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Assistant Minister not acknowledge that it is misleading to just dwell on entry figures, that the big issue is the transfer at the 5-year point?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Yes, that is certainly an issue to recognise that people's qualifications do change at 5 years with regard to their ability to work. That is something which we are reviewing in the Migration Advisory Group in the way we implement the new law and that is something we will be looking at possibly changing in the future.

3.6.8 Deputy M. Tadier:

I do owe the Assistant Minister an apology because if you look at question 5, it does show a decrease in the last 3 years, so I put that on record. But I do have to ask the Assistant Minister based on question 5, can he confirm that we used to be working from 5-year averages so we would look over a period of 5 years of what the net inward immigration changes were and it has been presented here as 3-year averages? Can the Assistant Minister explain why that is the case and how that would affect the figures?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I cannot at this stage. I would have to look at that. I think it was just trying to show the progress that had been made in the last 3 years. I honestly cannot give an answer.

3.6.9 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

I hope the Assistant Minister will appreciate I did direct this to the Chief Minister, given that in his election towards becoming Chief Minister he outlined quite clearly the type of population policy he wanted, given that the models and a lot of the backbone work to bring a population policy already exists; they are already established. Given the methods that the Statistics Unit and the Social Security Department have in measuring the population, how can the Assistant Minister explain to the Assembly that more time is needed in coming up with a policy when we have had all this work which is already in existence, when a policy has already been thought out by the election of the Chief Minister and that we have a lot of this information already to hand? How does the Assistant Minister expect the Assembly to accept that this policy can be delayed until the beginning of next year when a lot of those components already exist and already been agreed?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I thank the Deputy for that question. Obviously it is difficult for me to comment on the position the Chief Minister made during election time but I know, having discussed it with him, he does endorse the way we are progressing because he recognises that we need to do this in a structured way. But the other information which is missing is since those comments were made in the Strategic Plan and have been around for some time, is the economy has slowed down dramatically and we have high unemployment in our Island. There are all those sorts of factors that we really need to have a greater understanding on and how we are going to change that; how the future of the finance industry is going to reshape. There are all those sorts of issues. We need to understand how we are going to react to that. That is the information which is being pulled together with all the other information we already have to give a full picture.