

4.3 Deputy R. Labey of St. Helier of the Minister for Economic Development regarding the Condor Liberation:

Would the Minister advise Members what advice the Economic Development Department received in relation to the suitability of Condor Liberation for cross-Channel ferry operations and, in particular, detail what advice was received on the vessel's seaworthiness and unique design and indicate who provided that advice?

Senator L.J. Farnham (The Minister for Economic Development):

I think I would have preferred to stay en défaut for a few minutes longer. The Economic Development involvement through the Harbourmaster and Maritime Administration was to supervise but not to approve the company's introduction into service, including ensuring the various certification and safety provisions conducted by U.K. Maritime and Coastal Agency, as well as the registering authority in the Bahamas, and the professional classification society were carried out. It is the responsibility of the operator to obtain these certifications and without them they would be unable to trade commercially. Maritime authorities in the Channel Islands, U.K. and France are satisfied that due diligence has been taken by Condor Ferries and that all appropriate certification was in place prior to introduction into service. This certification will be regularly reviewed by the flag state in the Bahamas and if required can be inspected at any time by the relevant port authorities. Furthermore, as has been widely reported in recent days, the States of Jersey and Guernsey together with Condor Ferries have commissioned an independent report to confirm the sustainability and review the performance of Condor Liberation. The combination of the berthing incident, disappointing reliability and punctuality, together with some uncomfortable crossings have led to a raft of ill-informed and inaccurate comments which has undermined the confidence of some Islanders in the Condor Liberation. We want to draw a line under this speculation which is causing untold damage to the reputation of both the company and our tourism offering. Further details of this report, which will be funded by Condor Ferries, including the name of the independent body that will carry it out, will be finalised over the next few weeks and Members will receive from me later today a full letter of update on the Condor position.

4.3.1 Deputy R. Labey:

Most of the criticisms are not ill-informed speculation. They are fact, as perceived by ferry passengers, and I would invite the Minister to withdraw that. Some of these passengers are marine architects, naval engineers, one I read in the Guernsey press was a Royal Navy sailor with 35 years' experience on the high seas, 50 foot waves in the South Atlantic and never had seasickness until he travelled on the Liberation.

[10:00]

Does the Minister not accept that most of these complaints are legitimate and wholly justified and very damaging when they appear in TripAdvisor?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

No, I will not withdraw it and I do not agree with all of the reviews on TripAdvisor. I think we must separate safety from the comfort of a ride. Now the sea is a very unpredictable place to be. Many Members here have enjoyed a very pleasant crossing in the bar ... I mean on the Liberation from Guernsey to Jersey while we had flat seas then. The Channel is a notoriously challenging stretch of water and different ships have different characteristics. Now there have been some scurrilous and unsubstantiated scaremongering in my opinion on the safety of the vessel. I am not confusing that with discomfort. Of course we listen very carefully to those passengers who have suffered discomfort and we are putting pressure on Condor to investigate that, look into the

characteristics of the ship to see if they can improve that. But I stand by my comments that there have been some scurrilous and inaccurate reviews on the ship's safety.

4.3.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

It sounds almost like the Minister is acting as a rapporteur for Condor rather than necessarily in the public interests which he should normally be doing. He has told us lots about the scurrilous rumours that have been going on about Condor but perhaps could he elucidate us on the concerns that he thinks are valid and which do need to be addressed by Condor on their new boat and which of the comments are factual and need addressing?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I work in the best interests of this Island and the people of this Island, and our tourism industry and our economy. That is certainly not best served by pedalling ill-informed rumours about the safety of a ship. Condor provides a lifeline service in freight and they have maintained those schedules well during this difficult period and my department, together with my counterpart, my colleagues in Guernsey, the Minister for Commerce and Employment, the External Transport Group based in Guernsey, the Ferry Services Steering Group over here, are regularly holding Condor to account. We are meeting with them again at the end of next week in a joint Channel Islands session and the pressure is on for them to sort out the problems that they do have, which relate to customer service communication and understanding the discomfort of some passengers on the ship. But I am acting in all of our best interests.

4.3.3 Deputy R. Labey:

An independent review or inquiry has to be seen to be independent. If it is being paid for by Condor and Condor are appointing the board, the panel, the reviewers, does that look independent?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Just to be clear, I do cover this point in the letter I am going to send to States Members later. The naval architects who will carry out the review will be appointed by the External Transport Group and the Ferry Services Steering Group and Condor will pay for it.