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5.1 The Connétable of St. Helier of the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture regarding the operation of Jersey's sea links with the U.K:

Is the Minister satisfied that the current operation of Jersey's sea links with the U.K. (United Kingdom) provides adequate reliability, customer care and value for money and, if not, what steps, if any, is he taking to improve the service?

Senator L.J. Farnham (The Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture):

There is no doubt over the last year the car and passenger ferry services to and from the Channel Islands have faced significant operational and weather-related challenges. I have made my views known regarding the need to greatly improve the services on a number of occasions. I am in regular contact with senior management of Condor and met with their chairman on Friday of last week in Jersey to both review past performance and discuss their plans for making the necessary improvements. I am pleased to say that Condor are going to be making a number of improvements to this service. They have appointed a new chief executive officer. They are about to introduce a comprehensive plan to completely restructure all aspects of their customer service programme. They are in quarter one of this year introducing a new online booking and call-handling system. They are going to be spending in excess of £1 million in the U.K. and France in 2016 promoting the Channel Islands as holiday destinations. Furthermore, on the 27th of this month officials from Jersey, Guernsey and Condor will meet to agree the final terms of reference for the comprehensive service review that I have insisted be brought forward from 2017. This review will define the optimum configuration of car, passenger and freight vessels that will service the U.K. and French routes in the medium to long term.

5.1.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

I wonder if the Minister would share my concern that some tour operators, members of the hospitality industry, are advising potential customers who are thinking of coming to Jersey not to book a sea crossing because of the unreliability that has been demonstrated over the past year. What can he do to re-inspire confidence among tour operators that the sea links are indeed going to be effective this year?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

We - when I say "we" I mean the Economic Development Department, Visit Jersey and the tourism industry - are acutely aware of the problems and we are aware, as are Condor, that they are simply losing business from it. Fortunately the impact on Jersey is minimalised by the fact that we have very strong air links, so there is a choice and we are managing to retain most of the business. Nevertheless it is of serious concern because failure by Condor to address the situation this year could lead to permanently damaging Jersey's reputation for sea travel. But having said that, I am confident that the talks I have had with Condor have been positive. They are extremely keen. In fact they have to improve their service, the future

of their business is at stake if they do not and they are acutely aware of it, and I am working closely with them to make sure that happens.

5.1.2 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

Surely it is the performance of the boat which is the central issue here. What information did his officers have when this tender was first made about the suitability of the boat under consideration for local and Channel waters?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I am less concerned about the suitability of the Liberation as opposed to its operational performance. There has been a recent and thorough safety review which has confirmed its safety credentials. I am about to publish the benchmarking review - I saw the first draft yesterday and will share that with members shortly - which had to look at Condor as a prudent operator. That also covers the extensive research that was done prior and testing prior to the purchase of the Liberation, and I will be sharing that information with Members shortly. I have no long-term concerns as to the suitability of the Liberation vessel. The real problem and the real issue Condor have to get to grips with is making sure they can get the boat to run on time and when it does not provide proper contingency and proper customer service backup.

5.1.3 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Does the Minister accept that the problems experienced by Condor and their passengers is not simply one that is operational but is ultimately systemic and that the only way to resolve that is either by competition on the route or by nationalising the route?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

No, I absolutely disagree with that point of view.

5.1.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Can he elaborate why because presumably we are told constantly by this Government that competition is a good thing but not when it comes to failing an expensive ferry service, which cannot provide a basic service for businesses and passengers in the Island? We also know that nationalisation in extreme circumstances can be used and has been used by our sister island for transport links. So can he elaborate his position?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Firstly, I am not sure that the example of nationalisation in our sister island is a good one. I disagree simply because I believe that Condor will resolve these issues and will get the service back to what it should be. We know the routes are unsustainable with competition and perhaps we do need a further regulation introduced at some stage. I have been and will continue to discuss this with Senator Ozouf, so those are my reasons.

5.1.5 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Would the Minister agree with me that notwithstanding the difficulties that have been experienced by the travelling public that anyone who has experienced them - and I know I have - has nothing but praise for the staff at the sharp end who operate on the ferries and look after the public very well?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Can I thank the Constable for acknowledging that fact and, yes, we agree? My thanks does go out to the Condor staff on the front line who have had to deal with, quite frankly, some shocking circumstances. The Assembly can rest assured that Condor and their staff, the whole management team, are determined to rectify the problem.