

2017.11.27

3.6 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of the Chief Minister regarding the steps taken to ensure Islanders' safety when out at sea: [1(624)]

As you say, we might be covering similar ground with this one. Yes, covering similar water. Following the withdrawal of the all-weather lifeboat service from St. Helier, provided by the R.N.L.I., what steps have been taken by the States to continue to ensure Islanders' safety when out at sea?

The Deputy of St. Martin (The Minister for the Environment - rapporteur):

Before recent developments at the St. Helier lifeboat station, it was very difficult to get involved publicly in what was in effect an internal dispute inside the Institution. Government's role, however, is now very clear and that is to get services returned, working collaboratively and as quickly as possible. In that regard, in the last 7 days I have held meetings with the Jersey Fire and Rescue Service, senior management of the R.N.L.I., St. Catherine's lifeboat management and crew, officers and crew of the Norman Le Brocq, the fisheries vessel, the emergency planning officer and I have also met with the former crew of the St. Helier lifeboat. I have met almost on a daily basis with civil servants from the Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture Department and the Harbourmaster. I can only reiterate again that I am pleased that the Institution have announced their plan to return both lifeboats to St. Helier. Our only priority is to have search and rescue assets declared back as quickly as possible.

The Bailiff:

Supplementary?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

No, Sir. I think everything that I would have asked was asked on the previous question.

3.6.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

Has the Government considered purchasing its own boat? It seems that we have a crew. They do not have their own boat to man at the moment - excuse the sexist term, the verb - but is that a consideration that has been given? Then we would not necessarily need to be in a situation again where we are potentially held to ransom by one party or another.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I am not sure about being held to ransom, but I do not think it has ever been the intention of Government to provide lifeboats. We have always had the Institution there. They have always provided a boat with crew, with training, with equipment. I will not go on again, but it would be my hope in the future that whether it is the Institution or an independent lifeboat that Government will continue to stand aside from that and not get involved in this, which can be a quite tricky and technical matter.

3.6.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Ideally that would be the case, but as Deputy Kevin Lewis said in his previous question, it is the ultimate responsibility of Government to maintain the safety and guarantee the safety of all residents. It is not down to a charity, even though they have been doing that. In the absence of either a charity being able to maintain the confidence not just of the crew but of the Island, is it not time that the Government step in in some form or another, even if it is in the short term, to secure a vessel, which I am sure after a few years could be paid for by the very generous people of the Island?

The Deputy of St. Martin:

The Harbourmaster is responsible for rescue co-ordination and using those search and rescue assets that I have listed. If he felt that there were not enough assets on this Island to provide the safety cover that we required, I am sure he would be only too quickly speaking to us about helping. But I must say to the Deputy that since 1960, our own Fire and Rescue Service have had their own inshore craft. We are the only Fire and Rescue Service in the U.K. that do this type of work offshore. Indeed, it was the R.N.L.I. that came here and to Brittany to see how we operated before they started using those very small craft very successfully on their own. In our own small way, Government already have a large part to play in sea rescues. We continue to support our Fire and Rescue Service and those brave people who go to sea on our behalf as part of Fire and Rescue. In our attempts to get these lifeboats back in service just as quickly as possible, we have indirectly acted as Government inasmuch as our Fire and Rescue personnel are working with R.N.L.I. volunteers, as I said, this afternoon and indeed all weekend, this week coming and next weekend, to put the inshore lifeboat back in service in St. Helier. That is just as quick as it could possibly be done.

The Bailiff:

A final supplementary? We now come to Questions without notice. The first question ...

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I thought you said I could ...

The Bailiff:

I am so sorry, I did. Thank you, Senator. We go back to question 1, which Senator Ozouf was going to ask the Minister for Housing.