

2019.05.21

13 Deputy I. Gardiner of the Minister for the Environment regarding the problem of feral chickens in the Island: (OQ.124/2019)

Will the Minister advise what policy, if any, his department has to deal with the problem of feral chickens causing nuisance through noise, mess and the destruction of gardens across the Island?

Deputy J.H. Young of St. Brelade (The Minister for the Environment):

I am aware that this is a growing problem, in common with many other places and at present we do not have a formal policy for dealing with feral chickens. Incidents and complaints are dealt with on a practical case-by-case basis within the laws that we have. But, of course, recognising that the problem is growing, we have had to deal with incidents in St. Peter, the valley and, obviously, a big problem in Vallée des Vaux. Officers from the Natural Environment Regulation teams have met, they have discussed possible solutions and it is agreed a draft policy will be formulated, which will have cost implications. Environmental Health, the States Vet and other officers, are involved and the project is being led by the Director of the Environment.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

I would like to ask first clarifications from Attorney General, if possible.

The Deputy Bailiff:

No, not during question time to a Minister, I am afraid.

4.13.1 Deputy I. Gardiner:

So, follow-up questions. I think it is reassuring that you are looking into the policy, because, as you mentioned, it has become a big problem across the Island. Residents waking up at 3.00 a.m. in the morning, feral chickens pecking at the gardens, becoming a traffic hazard as they stray on the road and destroying the eco-balance of the system for National Trust woods. With the policy, would the Minister commit to develop a feral chicken and geese - because there is also geese - management plan to provide a framework for the Government-led action to reverse the economic, environmental, human harm caused by feral chickens and feral geese through the activities, which will include donation of the resources, prevention of infestation, rapid and indeed response to public control ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, I am afraid there does have to be a question.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Would the Minister create a whole management plan and also will bring legislative changes, if needed, to deal with the feral chickens case?

Deputy J.H. Young:

I do my best; there are a lot of questions there. At the moment, we deal with it on a practical, pragmatic basis. There is no question that the feral chickens cause a nuisance to people. Obviously, they often start as domestic and then go into a free life, as it were and the law at the moment - we work within the law - landowners may - and the Members may not like this - but it is legal for landowners to dispatch feral chickens on their own land, providing they use humane methods within the law, which is proper pest controllers. They are not protected in the Wildlife Law. Environmental

Health can deal with them, with the landowner's permission, but without landowners' permission, it requires legal processes about statutory nuisance. Of course, it is always open for people to adopt feral chickens and I understand this goes on, but usually, I understand, that many people give up on them, because they are pretty hard work. So, the practical position that we take, I am told we have dealt with 35 in St. Peter and Vallée des Vaux, but it is an ongoing problem and I am sure that we will have to have a better solution. But the plea is: people, do not abandon chickens, because that is what we think causes a lot of it, not just hatching, but people abandoning domestic chickens, which then become feral. So, I will have to produce a paper, but I am looking for practical solutions and not Rolls Royce ones.

4.13.2 Deputy K.F. Morel:

First of all, I would like to ask the Minister if he appreciates that not everybody sees feral chickens as a constant pest and, certainly, not geese, which are often mostly wild, rather than feral; and it is concerning that the Minister was asked about them. Would the Minister ensure that any management plan would start with an assessment of the size and the scale of the problem, because I do feel that it is the sort of problem that can be blown out of proportion, rather than dealt with, as the Minister says, in a practical manner?

Deputy J.H. Young:

Yes, I am afraid I cannot answer; I would have to come back to the Assembly on the question of geese. Obviously, I had to check out, particularly, about the status of chickens and I suspect geese may be in another category, so I cannot answer for that. But I recognise that people have different views in life. Personally, I love the sound of cockerels and chickens, I think they are part of the countryside thing and that is all over the world. For me, I think it is great to be woken up in the morning, when the sun comes up; but, of course, not everybody does. Of course, I think the problem, the most practical route is about the issue of the landowner; that where people own land they control it, but there is at least one case, which I will undertake to look at, where feral chickens are being dealt with on publicly-owned, States-owned, lands and I shall be very pleased to hand that problem to the Minister for Infrastructure to have a look at. That is as far as I can go with practical solutions; that is what I would like to do.

4.13.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Minister state whether he has a plan to deal with intransigent turkeys? [Laughter]

The Deputy Bailiff:

I do not think you need to answer that one in particular.

Deputy J.H. Young:

I was going to suggest that we might have a chicken resettlement scheme. [Laughter]

4.13.4 Deputy I. Gardiner:

If the Minister would be aware that we had changes to the Statutory Nuisance Law in 2017 and now it is illegal to feed seagulls; would feral chickens be considered as wild birds and it will be illegal to feed feral chickens and a person can be prosecuted?

Deputy J.H. Young:

It is an excellent question; I apologise to the Deputy that I forgot to give that from my briefing note. It is an offence for people to feed those wild chickens and we ask people not to do so.