

2019.03.26

17 Deputy M. Tadier of the Chief Minister regarding the steps to be taken by the Government of Jersey to make medicinal cannabis accessible by Jersey patients: [OQ.93/2019]

Given his recent public comments in support of developing a medicinal cannabis industry in the Island, what steps, if any, will the Chief Minister take to ensure that his Government makes medicinal cannabis accessible to Jersey patients in the near future?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré (The Chief Minister):

I will just deal with the first part of that question. The plans to further develop hemp production in Jersey and expand into cannabis production are still under development and they are very much under the purview of the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture. I believe the Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture might have the opportunity to talk to him about it. A licensing and regulatory framework is being constructed, in conjunction with the Health Department, the U.K. Home Office and other consultees. Hemp production in 2019 is scheduled to consent, or extend, to C.B.D. (Cannabidiol) extraction locally and that will facilitate the supply of high value, low volume, local product into the local, E.U. (European Union) and global market by quarter 3, or 4, of 2019. That, I am informed, is consistent with the alternative crop strategy, which is embedded in the Rural Economy Strategy of 2017-2021. The hemp and later cannabis programme is intended to produce high value, culinary oil seeds, fibres, raw ingredients and precursor materials to the internationally regulated nutritional and pharmaceutical markets, not to supply a medicinal cannabis system in Jersey. By 2020, the objective is that a world-class, highly regulated, system will be implemented to permit local production of cannabis raw materials for supply into the internationally regulated pharmaceutical market. The supply and prescription of cannabis-based medicine in Jersey is not a matter for G.H.E. (Growth, Housing and Environment) to comment on and is regulated by the Health Department and those 2 issues should not be mixed. I think that is the important point.

3.17.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

Clearly One Gov only goes so far, because when the questions are inconvenient it becomes: "Let us pass the buck to another silo Minister." Does the Chief Minister agree with the comment and the finding in the Barnes Report, which we have debated in this Assembly, which says that there is good evidence for the efficacy of at least one formulation of cannabis in pain, both for chronic pain and neuropathic pain?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

On these types of areas, I definitely devolve to the advice of the Minister for Health and Social Services and the relevant professionals and that is what I have done.

3.17.2 Senator K.L. Moore:

It was interesting to hear the Chief Minister's response today, which was certainly more fulsome than that which he gave the Scrutiny Panel yesterday, during our quarterly hearing when we touched upon this subject. Now that he has had a little more time to consider his answer, would the Chief Minister like to describe to the Assembly the joined-up thinking that has taken place regarding this issue, particularly in relation to the impact that this new crop may have on the environment?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

The point I think I was trying to make is that, ultimately, it is a matter that the Minister Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture is dealing with on the detail level. Obviously, I am aware of it from a high-level point of view and the principal thing I took is did it have any reputational damage to the Island. I am assured it did not. Secondly, the other method for me is how do we extract the tax revenue from what is apparently a very lucrative industry, if it can be properly regulated. So, in terms of the individual day-to-day conversations that have happened between the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture and the Minister for the Environment, I am assuming that they either have done or, if we are in the early stages, which is what my answer just now alluded to, that they will take place. But, that overall, any new structures are not covered by the present Island Plan and that was effectively what I was saying in Scrutiny yesterday.

3.17.3 Senator K.L. Moore:

The Chief Minister has not at all answered my question, which was related to the joined-up thinking in relation to the environment and in particular the impact on our natural landscape. It was also though, in that answer, interesting to hear the rapid timeframe that is being worked to by whatever the department is called nowadays, so, therefore, one would expect that some joined-up thinking had taken place on such a major policy that was under development.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I think the point is the matter is progressing forward at a rapid pace, as the Senator has alluded to. But, for example, the impacts on the environment may well depend whether, for example, disused greenhouses can be changed into the relevant locations and, therefore, there would be no impact. So, it depends on the circumstances and, as I said, that is very much a detail matter between at least the 2 Ministers concerned.

3.17.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

The reason that a joined-up policy is relevant is because we, as an Assembly, not so long ago passed a proposition saying that we recognised the medicinal value of cannabis and that it can treat chronic conditions, such as pain, and the Chief Minister has said that he is willing for Jersey to produce medicinal cannabis. But, currently, our own residents who might benefit from it cannot access it for practical reasons. One of those reasons is because the chief pain clinician at the hospital is boycotting it. Now, does the Chief Minister accept that, unless we are going to be seen as hypocritical, we need to be making medicinal cannabis available to our own residents, given the fact it is underpinned by legislation, if we are to start producing it for financial gain to the rest of the world?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

As I understand it, it is about providing materials that will then feed into the pharmaceutical markets, as it were. But the point is, I think, that has been made previously by the Minister for Health and Social Services, the decision on whether, or not, it is clinically appropriate to prescribe a cannabis-based product must always rest with the medical professionals and not States Members, nor the Government. We have facilitated it, but it is down to the medical professionals to make that decision.