

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT
BY DEPUTY K.F. MOREL OF ST. LAWRENCE
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 21st JANUARY 2020**

Question

What measures, if any, is the Minister's Department taking to assess the number of visits to the Ecréhous, particularly during wildlife breeding seasons, and the impact of any such visits on the wildlife in the area?

Answer

Les Écréhous are an important local and regional offshore reef whose biodiversity, archaeology, history, culture and economic significance have been globally recognised. The protection of the reef through its designation as a Ramsar (Wetland of International Importance) Site and OSPAR Marine Protected Area ensure that its key habitats and species are conserved to an international standard.

Les Écréhous has traditionally been a popular destination for leisure vessels coming from ports in Jersey and Normandy but in recent years there have been reports of what has been termed 'unmanageable' or 'excessive' numbers of visitors on the reef. This includes anecdotal reports of upwards of 80 vessels mooring in the small anchorage area and of repeated daily visits by commercial RIB vessels depositing up to 20 people at a time on the reef.

The reef holds no facilities for visiting boaters such as visitors' moorings, toilets, freshwater, shops, etc., and it has been suggested to the Minister's Department that at certain times of the year Les Écréhous are experiencing overcrowding leading to the disturbance of wildlife (principally seals and nesting birds) and residents.

These and other potential issues have been raised with the Minister's Department by individuals, the residents' association and conservation groups in relation to both Les Écréhous and Les Minquiers and has attracted publicity in the national media. Departmental officers have met with individuals and representatives from major stakeholder groups and from this have created a list of potential issues and possible solutions associated with one or both the reefs. Where possible and practicable these issues are being addressed by departmental officers sometimes in conjunction with NGOs such as the Ramsar Management Authority.

There are several potential ways of addressing the reported overcrowding at Les Écréhous which ranges from simple awareness initiatives to financially and resource heavy management measures involving wardens, dedicated patrols, permits, etc. The need for and effectiveness of management measures relating to overcrowding has to be tailored to the scale of the problem. This means having a sound statistical understanding of the way in which the reef is being utilised by visitors especially in terms of their numbers, where they are coming from, when they are choosing to visit and how long they are staying. To be statistically relevant, such data must be gathered in a consistent and independent manner across a period of time.

During 2019 departmental officers worked with the residents' associations to keep a log of visitor and boat numbers at the offshore reefs and with Ports of Jersey regarding commercial RIBs. For Les Écréhous this did not generate enough information to provide a clear picture of the reef's usage.

For 2020 it is proposed that the use of remote monitoring techniques should be considered to help gauge site usage but also, where practicable, to determine any impact on wildlife sites. This option remains under discussion with the reef's stakeholders but from the viewpoint of departmental officers it is the only practicable means of collecting data that could be used to design any appropriate and effective management.

It should be noted that wildlife and other management at Les Écréhous is also being enacted via the Ramsar Management Association, Société Jersiaise and other organisations.