

23.11.28.

10. Deputy S.Y. Mézec of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the temporary closure of the abattoir (OQ.233/2023)

Will the Minister advise what action, if any, is being taken to support Jersey's farmers while the abattoir remains closed.

Deputy T. Binet (The Minister for Infrastructure):

This is a slightly more tricky question than it may seem. What action has been taken to support Jersey farmers while the abattoir is closed? Well, while it is closed the only support that can be given, I would suggest, would be of a financial nature by way of subsidising feedstuffs for the continued weeks that animals have to be maintained before the abattoir is open. Strictly speaking, that sort of support would need to ... that question would then need to be addressed to the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development because that is where the Rural Economy Team sits. But if Deputy Mézec would like to know more about the physical things that we are doing to try and reopen the abattoir, I would be quite happy to take supplementary questions on that basis.

3.9.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I thank the Minister for his answer. Of course, these issues are interconnected and in determining how much financial support would have to be provided they would have to know what the timescale is for getting an abattoir up and running again. Can I ask the Minister, therefore, if he has involved himself in any of those conversations so that both of these aspects are taken care of adequately to ensure that Jersey's farmers are supported?

Deputy T. Binet:

Yes, I can confirm that I have been quite actively involved in this. A lot of effort has been made to reopen the abattoir as quickly as possible. We have to bear in mind that the roof of the abattoir is asbestos; 25 per cent of it needs to be replaced. Some holes were torn in the roof. The slaughtering area, which is a food safe area, was badly affected by asbestos and all the electrics were affected by water. The first thing to do is get a new roof on it or replace the sheets that have been broken, then attend to the asbestos through having a deep cleaning process, then attending to the electric. Contrary to what has been said on social media, a huge amount of effort has been made to co-ordinate that and that all takes time. Other difficulties that relate to that are a shortage of scaffolding, because, given the events of last month, scaffolding is being used everywhere. So, all of those things are now in place. In the meantime, we tried to organise to import a mobile unit and, without going into too much detail, that would not have arrived until after the abattoir could be reopened. We have also investigated sending live animals to Guernsey and that is complicated too. They can only take some types of animal and that could not be until after the intended reopening date of the abattoir. We are hoping to get everything done by 10th December, we are doing all we can to bring that forward. We believe there are about 60 animals that will be requiring slaughter at that time. The staff have agreed to work overtime and we think that will take about a week's work. In closing, I would just say we have a great deal of sympathy for people that have been affected but I would just remind the Deputy that meat suppliers are commercial businesses. I was involved in that line of work for quite some time and we always tried our best to have business interruption insurance. I think that is quite an important point to make.

3.9.2 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister be able to tell Members what the implications on the abattoir staff might be with the disruption? Are they employed directly? Are they contractor staff? Perhaps he could clear that up.

Deputy T. Binet:

That is a slightly awkward question. I am not entirely sure how they are employed. I believe that they are employed directly and they have agreed to work consistently. They normally only slaughter one day a week but I think they are going to work consecutive days in order to clear the backlog.

3.9.3 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

My concern was whether they are being affected in a detrimental way by the closure of the abattoir. Perhaps the Minister would confirm that is not the case?

Deputy T. Binet:

I do not believe that to be the case. I do not think they are affected in any way of that sort.