

3.5 Deputy S. Power of St. Brelade of the Minister for Economic Development regarding a subsidy to an existing ferry operator

Has the Minister considered an application for a subsidy or grant aid from an existing ferry operator or any new entrant into the local car and freight passenger market, particularly a subsidy or grant application during off-season operations and what is his position in such cases?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean (The Minister for Economic Development):

Yes.

3.5.1 Deputy S. Power:

Can I ask the Minister whether he thinks it is appropriate that a company that has a monopoly should be entering into negotiations with the Minister on subsidies on one of their routes?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I might say that the Deputy has considerable talents and one of those appears to be a psychic ability because it struck me as interesting that his question arrived within the department before indeed the request that he was questioning about. We had no knowledge prior to his question which was somewhat curious. With regard to this, as it has just arrived in the department, we will, like all requests that we receive, give it due consideration. We will look at the commercial merits, the economic benefits to the Island and we will, once we have deliberated, make an appropriate response. I have no personal view. The request did not come into me personally; it came into the department.

3.5.2 Deputy S. Power:

I am just wondering whether the Minister thinks it appropriate that a company that has a dominant position in the Island, both in car, passenger and freight, should appear to be asking his department to subsidise a route for winter operations when there are existing concerns about that monopoly?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

As the request has just come in, I do not think it is appropriate to go into a great deal of detail. Certainly I have not had a chance to give great consideration to the matter. The request that has come in is for a very limited number of sailings for a specific requirement and it needs to be properly assessed and that is exactly what will happen in due course.

3.5.3 Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour:

Can the Minister inform the Assembly if his department has received expressions of interest from any other ferry operator in recent times?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I am not aware of any specific requests.

3.5.4 The Deputy of St. John:

Could the Minister explain why he is not up to speed on this, given that Members have to put in the written questions and the verbal questions a number of days before he has to answer the question from Deputy Power? I am surprised he is not up to speed. In fact, I am more than surprised because, in the past, the Minister has been

very helpful and usually he will come back with that information but he is not prepared to do that on this occasion.

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I did not say I would not come back with information and I am disappointed to think that the Deputy does not think I am up to speed. All I commented on was the fact that my department only received the request for support late last week. I will obviously be assessing that and the department will assess it, as I have already said.

3.5.5 Deputy S. Power:

One final question, Sir. If the Minister is to consider a subsidy or a grant to this particular ferry company, will he be prepared to disclose to the Assembly the amount?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I would be prepared to consider that, yes. **[Laughter]**