

3.11 Deputy T.M. Pitman of the Chairman of the Electoral Commission regarding the authenticity of submissions to the Electoral Commission:

Given the financial cost of promoting genuine public engagement by submissions to the future reform of the States and in light of the concerns I have expressed to the Commission regarding bogus submissions using false identities, can the Chairman advise how many of the submissions made to the Electoral Commission were by email with no address to confirm authenticity?

Senator P.M. Bailhache (Chairman, Electoral Commission):

When the Electoral Commission launched its consultation at the end of May, it was keen to encourage Islanders to engage as easily as possible in giving their views. We therefore set up a website with a special electronic form to enable submissions to be made and we encouraged people to make their submissions by email. Although we also made it clear that submissions could be made by post, I am sure that Members will not be surprised to know that the vast majority of the 340 or so responses to our consultation came electronically. Submissions received have been published on the Commission website, as long as the person making the submission has given a name, and in the case of an electronic submission, an email address.

[11:15]

I accept that in this digital age, there is potentially a possibility that someone might give a false name in making an electronic communication. I cannot judge how many of the submissions fall into that category, but if Members take the trouble to have a look at the website, I am sure that they would agree that the overwhelming majority of the submissions are serious submissions and are genuine.

3.11.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

A supplementary, Sir. I have to say, I am quite amazed by the answer. I have probably got more than one question. What I would firstly like to put to the Chairman then is Deputy Maçon, who is for the first time I can ever remember not in the Chamber - perhaps we should have a vote on something quickly to catch him out - as Chairman of the Scrutiny review into Tasers, he has managed very quickly and easily to identify more than 200 fake submissions on whether or not we should have Tasers introduced. Is the Chairman really telling us, the Assembly, that he and his colleagues on the Commission cannot display that same level of professionalism on such an important issue, just to check these matters out? What I would like to put to the Chairman is that surely it is better to have 10 genuine submissions than 290 false ones, because I have already identified 2 which were malicious and used stolen identities.

Senator P.M. Bailhache:

I do not think that the Deputy should seek to ventilate his private family squabbles on the floor of this Assembly and I do not propose to deal with the second part of the question.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

That is outrageous.

Senator P.M. Bailhache:

I do not propose to deal with the second part of that question. So far as the first part is concerned, I have already said that the Commission is entirely satisfied that the vast majority of the submissions that have been made to the Electoral Commission are valid submissions and sensible submissions and indeed useful submissions. The Commission's limited resources would not be well-used by seeking to discover whether one or 2 or 3 even of the submissions that have been made have been made in a false name. I should perhaps add for the benefit of Members that the Commission is not taking these submissions as some kind of opinion poll or survey. The Commission is taking these submissions as an indication of the views of members of the public

and the fact that one or 2 submissions may have been made in false names would be completely immaterial to the conclusions of the Commission.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I must ask that you request the Senator to withdraw that totally unsubstantiated suggestion of family squabbles or I will have no recourse but to call him a liar.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Senator, the suggestion that Deputy Trevor Pitman has used this Assembly to ventilate a private family squabble is capable of being an imputation on his motivation. Is that what you intended?

Senator P.M. Bailhache:

That is not what I intended, Sir, and if it can be construed in that way, then I shall withdraw it. There are matters which lie underneath the questioning of the Senator which I do not think are appropriate for discussion on the floor of this Chamber, and I will leave it there.

3.11.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Has the Chairman conducted any checks in order that he can state that the vast majority of the submissions are accurate and correct and from genuine, bona fide representatives of the Jersey population?

Senator P.M. Bailhache:

There was one complaint of which I am aware, which resulted in my having direct email correspondence with the individual who had made the submission and I was satisfied that it was a valid submission.

3.11.3 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Just in pointing out that my question has nothing to do with any family matter. I have referred them correctly to 2 individuals who are no relation to me whatsoever, quite in contrast to the Senator's words. Does he not agree with me that it has to be a problem when we have malicious stealing of identities, and one of these gentlemen has already been in touch with the Commission; another is the stolen identity of a 14 year-old child, yet the Chairman is going to leave it. Is he that desperate to have submissions that support his preconceived ideas of electoral reform?

Senator P.M. Bailhache:

I think I have already answered that question.