

2019.03.12

20 Deputy I. Gardiner of the Minister for the Environment regarding the plans to combat the threat of the Asian Hornet to the Island's bees and pollinators: [OQ.67/2019]

Further to Written Question 173/2018, will the Minister update the Assembly on his department's plans to combat the threat of the Asian Hornet to the Island's bees and pollinators?

Deputy J.H. Young of St. Brelade (The Minister for the Environment):

I am grateful for the opportunity to update the Assembly on commitments since last October. An Asian Hornet management plan has recently been agreed, a very comprehensive one, it will be published this week and it is intended to be implemented from the start of April to the end of October this year. The plan, this detailed plan, content and implementation dates have all been agreed by the Jersey Beekeepers Association, the Jersey Asian Hornet Group - which is a new group from the Beekeepers - and the Natural Environment scientific team. In particular, a co-ordinator has been appointed, who will be taking up that position on 18th March. It is appropriate to recognise the work of the Jersey Asian Hornet Group, they are a group of volunteers, predominantly beekeepers, who have dedicated many hundreds of hours to developing methods to track live hornets and locate nests and help us deal with them and they need to be commended for that effort and commitment for the last 2 years and I am very grateful they have agreed for their continued commitment in 2019. They give us a manpower resource that the department does not have. We are able to provide support, logistics, some modest infrastructure and very limited funding.

6.20.1 Deputy I. Gardiner:

What actions are your team taking to ensure that members of the public can recognise the Asian Hornet, in order to be able to report it? I am asking this question because I have seen lots of photos and pictures over the year but only last week I saw the Asian Hornet – a dry one - and I realised now I know how I can recognise it.

[11:45]

Deputy J.H. Young:

That is absolutely a good question; there is no substitute for looking at a specimen in a little jar and seeing; once you have seen it, they are quite big, so that is the first thing and, of course, they are pretty lethal creatures, but we will manage them and work with our programme of invasive species but we are going to have to learn to adapt to them and find out and increase our ways of dealing with them. Publicity: you will be pleased to know this is a task that our communications unit have agreed to take on, because the Asian Hornet Group, they have just got so much expertise, so much photographic material and, particularly, we have worked hard to make sure the schools and the staff in the schools and the teachers are aware of those risks because, obviously, that is where people are particularly vulnerable. So, that is part of the plan. I am happy to release it now to the Deputy, but, of course, it will be on the website in a few days.

6.20.2 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I am grateful to the Minister for acknowledging the great work that the beekeepers and unpaid people have done on the Island to combat Asian Hornets; it is one of those things we are going to have to accept as climate change and some of these diseases and threats work their way up from southern Europe. Does the Minister also accept that we are now the leaders, at the forefront of the

fight against Asian Hornets in Britain and that people come now to the Island to see the work that we have done to go back to other parts of Britain and to carry on that work?

Deputy J.H. Young:

Yes, the Deputy is spot on. Maybe it might be an accident of geography, because, obviously, Asian Hornets were brought into France and then they have migrated from France into us and, of course, the U.K. are interested because, obviously, they are not very keen on having them as visitors over there. They are learning from us and we have been able to benefit from the work of South Coast University people who have come, so there is co-operative working. Part of my frustration is, obviously, we spend derisory amounts of money on our environment, less than half a per cent of our budget, and one is scraping the barrel to try to find resources. But this year I am pleased that we were at least able to repeat the £35,000 that we put into this, to build up this work, but, frankly, what we have had to do, I am afraid, is use all our budget for invasive species on the Asian Hornets and I am afraid it is not leaving us with anything for other invasive species. So, we may have to come to the Minister for Treasury and Resources, if more emergencies occur.

6.20.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Some of the points I want to make have been covered. I would like to reiterate the fantastic work of our beekeepers and the Jersey Asian Hornet Group, who have really been on the frontline. This year is such a crucial year in the fight against Asian Hornets, because, if they take hold this year, we are not going to get rid of them. So, could I suggest that, perhaps, some of the contingency funding can be used to support this group and to really go all out in order to take on this growing issue? You are absolutely right about further invasive species that will come with climate change.

Deputy J.H. Young:

I am afraid that having an ambition of eradication is probably practically not possible, but there are a number of principles. Firstly, there is no question, I have met with the Asian Hornet Group and these are passionate people, incredible knowledge, who have dedicated unbelievable commitment. But, what we have tried to avoid doing is sending out the public, if you like, on a mission to find these, because there are dangers and so working with that group and trying to build up that training and knowledge and extending that is the best way forward. So, we are going to have to work with the expert resources we have and try and build that gradually, but I am afraid eradication is not a prospect. As the Deputy says, climate change is changing the world; we are seeing all sorts of disease patterns moving around the world, species patterns and, of course, new disease vectors come into the Island, and that can affect us and human beings in all sorts of ways. It does come back to the issue of whether, or not, sufficient priority is given to environment generally and Members know my view and I am probably boring Members that we just have not done so and we need to do so more.

The Bailiff:

Final supplementary? No?