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4 Deputy S.G. Luce of St. Martin of the Minister for the Environment regarding the progress made in relation to the restoration plans for the sand pits at Simon Sand: (OQ.198/2019)

What recent progress, if any, has been made in relation to the restoration plans for the sandpits at Simon Sand, especially give the site's location within the heart of the Island's National Park?

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

I am grateful to the Deputy, the former Minister for the Environment, for giving me an opportunity to highlight this issue. Of course, Members will know that the St. Ouen sand quarry is the Island's only local source of sand and it has been necessary, in the short term, for the quarry to continue to provide much needed sand for the building industry. As a result, an extension of time, not an extension of the area of the site, was granted in 2018 to allow the remaining sand under the existing permissions that could be extracted. That decision followed an earlier meeting in 2017 between the quarry operator and the Deputy, as the former Minister, when, of course, it was agreed that a managed retreat from that site would be required. But I say here, I am determined to see the quarry returned to nature at the earliest opportunity. The owner is legally required to do that and meet the cost, as per their planning permission. We are promised that the restoration plan for that site will be with the Planning team by the end of the year. But, of course, our mineral strategy, the replacement of that site has to be under review and it is in the Island Plan, because the quarry gets to the end of its working life. I can be clear that, as far as I am concerned as Minister for the Environment, I would not support any further extension and the Island will need to prepare for sand importation in the future.

3.4.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Will the Minister make it a priority then to look for alternative imports of sand in the as near future as possible and certainly before the Island Plan is agreed?

Deputy J.H. Young:

I am not sure where the responsibility for this lies. We have an Island Plan policy and a mineral strategy, which sets out that task. I asked the question of the officers: who is doing this? Ports of Jersey. When I ask Ports of Jersey: "What is happening?" Not much. I think, to message out there, whoever it is, whatever Minister, whatever quango, this is a task to be done, otherwise we will end up with no sand. I will do my best. When somebody has that responsibility and that kind of illustrates the Deputy's earlier question, this question of responsibilities. The regulatory side is that that quarry will run out in 2023. The Island Plan will need new policies and part of that will be a new way of importing sand and we are open. It would be wrong for me to stand here and say I am going to invite commercial bids or what. I leave it to those Ministers around the table to take that forward. But if Members feel that is my role, I will give that consideration.

3.4.2 Deputy K.F. Morel:

If the Minister is having such difficulty finding the appropriate responsible person, should he not take that to the Council of Ministers and ask them to decide and give a ruling on where responsibility lies?

Deputy J.H. Young:

Yes, good idea, that was my intention. But, of course, the Deputy's question pre-empted that and I think I have been trying to be honest at what the situation is and use it as an opportunity to highlight the importance of this issue.

3.4.3 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Will the Minister guarantee that, in the future, the utmost protection will be afforded to this National Park site from any possible degradation, contamination, pollution during its remediation, especially given its vital importance to both the environment and the ecology?

Deputy J.H. Young:

I do not think I can give a guarantee, but I think without causing alarm, Members will know that there are significant environmental risks in such a project of restoration. We already know and this was in the P.F.O.S. (perfluorooctane sulfonate) report, that the water in that site is heavily polluted with P.F.O.S. at very high levels. Fish in there have been P.M.d (*post mortem*) and we found those levels. Obviously, the worry also is Jersey water extracts from boreholes nearby and if there is anything that changes the hydrological gradients that could, potentially, affect it. Those issues have got to be looked at in a proper scientific hydrological study. I have made it clear to the Planning officers that needs to be done as part of the work on a restoration plan. There is never a guarantee, but I think we clearly see the risks and I shall make sure we do our best.

[10:15]