

5.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of the Minister for Economic Development regarding restrictions placed upon private aviation for the summer period.

Why have restrictions been placed upon private aviation for the summer period and is the Minister satisfied that the new Air Traffic Control system is able to cope?

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

The temporary measures to which the Deputy refers have been introduced as a safety requirement agreed by the independent Director of Civil Aviation. This temporary change followed consultation with all relevant parties. I have assurance from Jersey Airport that these temporary measures are under constant review during the current transition to the new A.T.C. (Air Traffic Control) facility. The new Air Traffic Control system represents cutting edge technology and is one of the most advanced systems in the world. I am confident from all the details that I have been given that it will bring significant operational benefits for the airport in delivering a safe, effective and efficient Air Traffic Management system.

5.5.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Thank you. Despite those remarkable assurances that the Minister has received and which have pleased him, would he not accept that a new Air Traffic Control system which is dealing, from the date of its original inception 2008, with 18 per cent less traffic which is in a type A airport, which is unbelievably unusual, given the classification of big U.S. (United States) airports as type B and which allow private aviation to fly in without the kind of bureaucracy surrounding Jersey, would he not believe that these controls are totally out of place and represent basically a farce given the supposed benefits of the new system?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

No, I do not agree with the Deputy. I think they are perfectly prudent and safe. That is certainly the view of the Director of Civil Aviation who we have spoken to. It is a safety matter during the transition period and as far as the system itself is concerned, I have been up, I have had a look. In fact, I took the new Group Chief Executive of the ports up there. I took the Chief Executive of Economic Development and Senator Routier came with me. We had a look at the new system. We had a full presentation on it and I am satisfied that the transition is working well and this is a very prudent and safe measure to have taken.

5.5.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

In olden times when I was flying, Jersey was, I think, probably the third busiest airport in the U.K. and the A.T.C. coped well with the numbers using pencil and paper. Now that we have all this new equipment it seems that the Air Traffic Control system finds it difficult to cope. What is the problem? Is the system a Rolls Royce when we should have had a Ford?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I am not sure of the arrangements that Senator Ferguson was referring to. In the bygone days of biplanes [Laughter] there were very different regulations in terms of managing traffic flows but nevertheless, as I have pointed out to Members, I have been up very recently and seen the system. I am satisfied that it is going to deliver for Jersey a first-class air traffic management system. It is in a transition period at the moment, as Members would expect, as controllers get used to using the new system but it is something that other airports around the U.K. have begun to come to Jersey to

look at. I can tell Members, for example, that the Norwegian Air Traffic service provider has been here and is considering rolling it out in Norway at the Norwegian airfield.

5.5.3 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Is the new computerised system sufficiently flexible to deal with the problem of a private plane landing on the taxiway as a jet is coming round the corner to taxi for takeoff?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I cannot comment on the exact detail that the Senator is referring to as a scenario. What I can say is that this particular system is flexible, as Members would imagine, and as it has been put in place, it has been evolving and the airport management are working very closely with the manufacturers and N.A.T.S. (National Air Traffic System) to ensure that it fits Jersey's needs, as indeed it should do.

5.5.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier:

The truth of the matter is that air traffic in Jersey has fallen 18 per cent fewer movements than before we were bringing in tighter restrictions. There is 12 per cent less movement in the whole of the Channel Islands. The main question I have got for the Minister is, is the system working because my understanding is it is not working completely? There is a problem with the strip system, though they have been getting rid of Air Traffic Assistants, who used to ...

The Bailiff:

So your question is, is it working, Deputy?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Is it working? In his own comments, he says "will". He keeps on talking about the future; he has problems at the moment. Will he elaborate on what the problems are?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

The question is is the system working? I saw it for myself with my own eyes last night. It was working very well. I had the opportunity to speak to controllers. One controller who was there has been working at the airport as a controller since the 1980s. It was very interesting to hear his view on the system and, indeed, the confidence generally that staff at the airport have with this system as it evolves. As far as numbers falling, I should point out that this prior permission system that has been put in place as a temporary measure through the summer was in place 3 or 4 years ago. It was the norm, it was not always enforced, but indeed it was taken off for the simple reason that the air traffic movements fell. As Members would expect, following the global crisis, air traffic movements dropped quite considerably. That allowed air traffic controllers to remove this restriction. It has now been put back in place as a temporary measure during the course of the transition.

5.5.5 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Will the Minister confirm that there are no technical problems with the software at the present time at the airport?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

What I can tell the Deputy and Members is that the system is new. It is going through transition. There are changes being made to the system as Members would expect, a new system as it is bedded in, and the airport management are working closely with the manufacturers and N.A.T.S., but they are all very satisfied that it is moving in the right direction. It is delivering, it is safe and it is efficient and I believe that the Island should be proud of this particular facility.

5.5.6 Deputy P.J. Rondel of St. John:

Will the Minister answer the question? Are there any problems with the system at the moment? Secondly, will he tell us what the ...

The Bailiff:

One question at a time, Deputy.

The Deputy of St. John:

It was in what he said but okay.

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

Is it working? The answer is yes, it is working. I saw it for myself last night. It is working very well. There are improvements that are being put in place in terms of speeding up the access to the information that comes through but the controllers are satisfied; I spoke to them myself, a controller that has been there since the 1980s.

5.5.7 The Deputy of St. John:

The Minister mentioned the controller that has been there since the 1980s. Is that officer 100 per cent happy with the equipment he is using?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

When questioned yesterday, there was no indication from him or anybody else that I saw at the tower that there were any significant issues in relation to this system. It is evolving very nicely and there is a great deal of confidence that it will deliver a first-rate service into the future. It is a long-term solution for the airport whereas the old system was costing a lot of money in terms of maintenance. This is a major step forward. It is cutting edge technology and the Island can be proud of it.

5.5.8 The Deputy of St. Mary:

I am not going to comment or ask the Minister about the need or otherwise for these extra measures, the transitional measures, but I am interested in the consultation aspect. He said in his first answer, and I quote, that introducing the new arrangements "follows consultation with all relevant parties." I would like him to square that with the claim of the Pilots Association that: "Jersey A.T.S. have failed to consult the general aviation community properly at any point in this process." Would he care to comment on the gap between his statement and their statement?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I think the relevant word there perhaps is "properly"; as I said at the beginning, all relevant parties have been consulted. Some may have a different view as to whether the consultation was effective enough. My belief is, from what I am told, that it was. It certainly provided the necessary information and if parties think it was not, it may

well simply be that they do not like the temporary measures that have been put in place.

5.5.9 The Deputy of St. Mary:

We had in the past considerable problems with consultation down at the harbour. I remember a storm about the marina arrangements and I want to ask the Minister whether this new Group Chief Executive will be sensitive to the need to properly consult with stakeholders when creating policy?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I have no doubt that the new Group Chief Executive will be very sensitive to all relevant issues. He has just taken up his post. He is going to be a major asset for the ports. I would also point out that it would be of interest to the Deputy of St. Mary's slight tangent that this new system has significant environmental benefits in terms of management of foam.

The Bailiff:

That was not the question, Senator.

5.5.10 Deputy C.H. Egré of St. Peter:

Having some expertise in this particular field and having been responsible for commissioning radar systems, both at Royal Air Force Brize Norton and the London Air Traffic Control Centre, I understand the Minister's comment regarding safety. Would he confirm that the reason why it is safe at the moment is the fact that the system is not working up to speed and that reduction of zone control has been put in place to make it safe? Will he accept the fact that at this particular moment in time, all is not well within the Air Traffic Control Network?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I would not entirely agree with what the Deputy has said, although I have to say that I am not entirely sure exactly what the thrust of his argument was. The system is safe. The system is operating efficiently. There are improvements being put in place which will help rectify some areas that need to be improved, and I would accept that. What I will say is that I would invite any Members who are interested in this particular issue to contact me. We will arrange for them to go up to the airport to see the facility, to see controllers, and to see it in operation. I went and it was a first-rate viewing and I think Members will be reassured if they come up and see it.

5.5.11 The Deputy of St. Peter:

Would the Minister accept the fact that I asked to make such a visit myself and I was not invited to go?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Also the Scrutiny Panel could not do its scrutiny!

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

The Deputy has asked to go and he is more than welcome. **[Laughter]** All I would say is that he is still more than welcome but I did want to view the facility myself first and I only had an opportunity due to diary commitments to go yesterday. Of course, Deputy, I am sure we can find room when the busy schedule over the next 2 weeks is complete.

5.5.12 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Given his highly enhanced knowledge of air traffic control, would the Minister specify whether he asked the authorities what Jersey was doing with general aviation comparable to what other similar sized airports and indeed larger airports were doing or were we being over-bureaucratic, over-cautious? Secondly, given his enhanced knowledge, would he say that it is remarkable that a newly installed system, which was meant to deliver so much, cannot work with a reduced capacity?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I think I must make this clear. The system is working very efficiently. The Deputy talks about a reduced capacity. Restrictions have been put in place for safety reasons for a temporary period during the summer. It is as simple as that. As far as the other part of the Deputy's question, I have absolutely no doubt that because of the Channel Islands Control Zone which we have, which generates millions in terms of revenue, these measures put in place are absolutely appropriate and appropriate to the class A airspace that the Island has.