

23.07.17

17 Deputy C.D. Curtis of the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture regarding medicinal cannabis (OQ.157/2023)

Given that in his Ministerial priorities the Minister states that he wishes to support the development of the medicinal cannabis industry into a highly regulated, robust and innovative, export-focused element of our rural economy, will he advise what action has been taken to address this part of his plan?

Deputy A. Curtis (Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture - rapporteur):

I will just confirm for the record that the Minister and I did discuss over the phone the 3 questions that I am delegated for, as well as obviously preparing in advance. As outlined in the delivery plan, further strategic work has been commissioned and it is anticipated that this work will be completed by quarter 3, 2023. This work will assess the key risks to the industry and advise on how to maximise the opportunity in the medicinal cannabis industry and develop our jurisdiction as a premier location for medicinal cannabis. The Minister has also reconstituted the Medicinal Cannabis Ministerial Group and an officer-level group to co-ordinate Government activity.

4.17.1 Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Is there a long-term policy in place now to drive the development?

Deputy A. Curtis:

As I mentioned, work is under way. The plan is to be looking 10 to 15 years within our policy development on this sector.

4.17.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

May I ask the Assistant Minister what communication has been undertaken with the Minister for Health and Social Services and the Minister for the Environment in order to ensure that whatever industry is developed is compliant both in terms of World Health Organization rules on medicines and the environmental impact of what is effectively a monoculture?

Deputy A. Curtis:

The Minister does meet with the Minister for Health and Social Services, the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs, and the Minister for the Environment and they do routinely discuss the industry and the relevant challenges that each Minister has.

4.17.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I ask then, does the Minister have a view on the role of cannabis in terms of its medical use and whether or not there needs to be a change in the direction of the industry so that the product produced is more exportable?

Deputy A. Curtis:

I believe that we have a regulatory regime that is compliant against both the U.K. issuing import licences and others and Jersey issuing export licences with regards to medicinal cannabis and I believe, speaking with the Minister and officers, that we are content with the current regime.

4.17.4 Deputy M.R. Scott:

When the Assistant Minister says he is content with the current regime, then could he please explain why he is looking to revise it and what his position is regarding the World Health Organization rules and the lack of a national regulatory authority?

Deputy A. Curtis:

I daresay we are getting very technical in an area that I will profess is not my expertise. Speaking to officers, I did ask about our position as I have been approached by different individuals about our position with regards to World Health Organization standards. I have been reassured that our processes conform to that. That is a separate thing to obviously developing a 10 to 15-year plan for medicinal cannabis as an industry in Jersey.

4.17.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Can the Assistant Minister assure that Jersey is being treated in the same way as any other producer that might be offering similar products through the U.K. and is not in any way being singled out in this process?

Deputy A. Curtis:

I am not aware that Jersey is being targeted any differently to industries. There are a number of factors at play here and there have been relevant or recent headlines around industries. It is important that we split the production of hemp and medicinal cannabis in this conversation, though. But I am not aware of a fundamental difference.

4.17.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Assistant Minister explain whether part or all of the issue here is that there are traces of T.H.C. (tetrahydrocannabinol) coming through in what is otherwise supposed to be C.B.D. (cannabidiol) products? Is that the case?

Deputy A. Curtis:

Can I ask the Deputy to clarify if he is talking about a specific case or any particular instance in which this is meant to be happening?

Deputy M. Tadier:

My understanding is that when Jersey is looking to export non-T.H.C. content C.B.D., so products which are destined potentially for medicinal use but you do not need a medicinal licence to use C.B.D. products, it is quite common for there to be an element of T.H.C. trace element in it. Is it the trace elements which are causing the issue for the exportation of the product? Of course, if he does not know, that is also fine, it is not his area, but he could maybe offer to come back with that information.

Deputy A. Curtis:

The process for export is to require a valid import licence from the place in which it is received. So I believe as long as processes and import licences are granted, Jersey will follow suit with export licences. The specifics on any individual case, and I know there are some that are live, the department and Government are not looking to comment on individual cases, and I make that point at this time.

4.17.7 Deputy S.G. Luce:

In the Assistant Minister's 10 to 15-year plan, can he tell the Assembly how much financial return he is expecting to the Exchequer?

Deputy A. Curtis:

No, I cannot at this point.

4.17.8 Deputy S.G. Luce:

Would he agree with me that there will be no financial return to the Exchequer?

Deputy A. Curtis:

I cannot agree with that right now. The previous States agreed a tax position on medicinal cannabis, and while the industry is in its early stages I think it is right that we see out how the industry develops and pays through that mechanism.

4.17.9 Connétable D. Johnson of St. Mary:

The Assistant Minister will be aware that there was a fairly critical report by the previous Economic Development Scrutiny Panel as to the regulations in force. I will make my question brief. Who now constitutes the Oversight Policy Group in Ministerial terms which was promised during the course of that panel's review?

Deputy A. Curtis:

I believe that the Connétable is discussing the Ministerial group I referenced, the members of which are the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture, the Minister for Health and Social Services, the Minister for Home Affairs, and the Minister for the Environment.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

Thank you. That is fine. That is all. Thank you.

4.17.10 Deputy C.D. Curtis:

The Assistant Minister mentioned key risks being looked at in the work ready for quarter 3. Does this work include a risk assessment on the legislative base for this sector?

Deputy A. Curtis:

I would suggest that we return with a more formal position as to what all the work covers to the Deputy. I do apologise as one Deputy who has risen for the lack of attendance by Ministers in this session.