

2.7 Deputy K.C. Lewis of the Minister for Economic Development regarding the allocation of digital television frequencies to Jersey:

Following the announcement that the analogue terrestrial television transmitters in Jersey will be the last to be switched off in 2013, would the Minister inform Members what progress, if any, has been made with the U.K. and French authorities to allocate digital frequencies to Jersey?

Deputy A.J.H. Maclean of St. Helier (Assistant Minister for Economic Development):

I can reassure the Deputy and consumers that the importance of switchover and its complexities has not been overlooked. For the past 2 years, my officials have been meeting triennially with counterparts in the responsible U.K. departments on the specific issue of digital television switchover. At the International Telecommunications Union's Radio Communications Conference in Geneva last year, which included the French authorities, frequency assignments were agreed. More detailed bilateral agreements between the U.K. and France have been completed while further discussions are ongoing. It has already been agreed that following switchover all public service broadcasts will be available in digital, terrestrially by aerial. This will ensure that Jersey consumers will benefit from far greater programme choice than is currently available. I have also agreed a targeted help scheme will be established in Jersey to ensure the disadvantaged or vulnerable do not lose out. This will be funded directly by the B.B.C. through the licence fee.

2.7.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Would the Assistant Minister assure Members that everything will be done to preserve the analogue television system until such time as a new television system can take over?

Deputy A.J.H. Maclean:

Sir, I believe the switchover will happen simultaneously. The important point to remember is we need to protect the work that has been going on over the past 2 years, and which will go on into the future until changeover in 2013, and that the switchover will be simultaneous. Analogue will be lost at that stage. The 2 cannot run side by side but, of course, there will no loss of service.

2.7.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Assistant Minister's answer mean that the response given by his Minister earlier in the week to inquiries about television services - that they would in future come down the telephone wire - is not relevant?

Deputy A.J.H. Maclean:

I would not say, Sir, that it is not relevant. I think the Minister was referring to some other potential delivery mechanisms that are being considered at the present moment and in the future these may well offer some additional advantages above and beyond the digital service.

2.7.3 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains of St. Clement:

The Assistant Minister spoke of far greater programme choice in the future than is currently available. Sir, because Islanders receive a reduced service compared with those who are able to receive digital television, could I ask him what progress has been made to date, if any, to enable Islanders to receive their television licences at a commensurate, reduced cost? I fail to see, Sir, why Islanders should pay the same price as their U.K. cousins for possibly the next 5 years when they are only receiving half of the programmes.

Deputy A.J.H. Maclean:

There is no increase in the licence fee at the present moment from that which is being charged. I think it is fair to say that the charge currently made is, or could be, deemed to be reasonable value when one considers the population size of the Island compared to similar regions in the U.K. The level of service we get for the licence fee we pay is what we believe to be of a good value.

2.7.4 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

Would the Assistant Minister agree that for the same price we pay, we receive a far lesser service?

Deputy A.J.H. Maclean:

No, Sir, I would not.

2.7.5 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

Does the Minister then, Sir, have the facility to enable people with televisions to receive digital in the Island at the present time?

Deputy A.J.H. Maclean:

As I said earlier, Sir, digital is not going to be switched on until 2013, so it is not available at the present time. However, we have negotiated a situation where there are going to be 6 multiplexers - muxes, as they are known. Of those 6 muxes, 3 are already agreed for the Island. Currently the Island has 4 channels that it can receive by 2013 at the digital switchover. That will mean that the increase goes from 4 to 30 with the 3 muxes and negotiations are ongoing to obtain the remaining 3.

2.7.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

For clarification, can the Minister confirm that all households in Jersey will, in future, be able to receive digital television via an aerial?

Deputy A.J.H. Maclean:

The digital delivery is via aerial, yes. I can confirm that.

2.7.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can he answer my question; will all households be able to receive digital television via aerial?

Deputy A.J.H. Maclean:

All households that have a suitable aerial and suitable equipment at the present time will be able to receive digital transmission from 2013.

2.7.8 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

I wonder if the Assistant Minister could clarify a previous answer he has given to me which I am unable to understand. It does seem to me he is suggesting - and could he clarify whether or not he is suggesting - that we, in the Island, receive a service commensurate with those in the U.K? He has told us we currently receive 4 stations. People in the U.K., then, can presumably receive 4 stations?

Deputy A.J.H. Maclean:

We have additional services that are not available in the U.K., for example, Radio Jersey which is a bespoke service for the Island which, quite frankly, for a population of 86,000 you would not find being established in a similar region in the U.K.

2.7.9 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:

Could the Assistant Minister confirm whether the new system will be able to utilise existing masts and aerials?

Deputy A.J.H. Maclean:

There will need to be, as we understand it, improved equipment to be able to facilitate the downloading of the digital signal. Most importantly are set-top boxes to convert the signal when it comes into the television and, of course, certain televisions will need to be able to receive digital as well.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Final question, Deputy Baudains.

2.7.10 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

Could the Assistant Minister, therefore, assure us that the set-top boxes do currently work in Jersey as they do in the U.K?

Deputy A.J.H. Maclean:

They do not currently work in Jersey because we do not have a digital signal in Jersey at the moment, Sir. **[Laughter]**