

4.12 The Deputy of St. Mary of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding the protection of wildlife on the Ecréhous:

Given allegations of disturbance to wildlife and inappropriate behaviour by some people on the Ecréhous reef, can the Minister advise the Assembly what immediate action is being taken to protect wildlife on the reef in accordance with the Ramsar Convention, particularly, but not only, with regard to nesting birds?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel (Assistant Minister for Planning and Environment - rapporteur):

The Planning and Environment Department is currently investigating an alleged breach of the condition attached to a planning permission for building work on La Grande Brecque Les Ecréhous. This investigation is at a very early stage and officers visited the site on Friday, 7th May 2010. As such it would be inappropriate to comment further at this point. Notwithstanding though the current situation the department takes very seriously its duty to safeguard the environment and its obligations under the Ramsar Convention. This commitment is evident in the ongoing programme to draw-up comprehensive management plans for the Ramsar sites that will seek to balance the needs and expectations of all users of these areas.

4.12.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:

The question is really about the degree of priority and the degree of importance and the issue in question is building work and inappropriate use of parts in use for the petrol generator. But it goes beyond that because boats are landing visitors there in the nesting season. So I just want to know from the Minister ... I have heard a sort of commitment but the question is how fast do things move? An investigation; well the terns have gone, they have not nested this year. So I just wonder what proactive steps the Minister has in mind to make sure this does not happen again?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

The proactive steps, perhaps I could read out the building condition, or at least one of them: "No work shall take place on the Les Ecréhous reef and associated eyelets where the birds are nesting between 1st January and 1st August of any year, and 10 days after the last known fledging has left any nesting sites at La Grande Brecque." So it is quite clear that in terms of building construction work taking place on the reef, that any disturbance to the birds, particularly nesting birds, is covered. I might add that I have been sent pictures of other landing parties for tourism purposes which are conducted not only by Jersey companies but by French companies and indeed I have got a picture of a helicopter flying over the site which undoubtedly would cause disturbance to the birds. Unfortunately at this point in time there is nothing to prohibit French helicopters flying over the reefs or indeed any others and all other people visiting the reefs. This is why a comprehensive management plan will be drawn-up for the Ramsar Area to take into account all the needs and expectations of users as far as possible in the best planning tradition.

4.12.2 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Will the management plan include rapid action provisions so that if someone gets out a petrol generator and starts slicing tiles on the reef then it will be stopped immediately? If so, by whom?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

This is obviously one of the considerations to be considered by my Ramsar Management Group. It might well be suggested if indeed a new King of the Ecréhous cannot be appointed - and come back Alphonse Le Gastelois pretty quick - that perhaps an electronic means of surveillance could be undertaken in order to offset any disturbances which are clearly already earmarked and highlighted within the wildlife section of that law.

4.12.3 The Deputy of St. John:

When can we expect to see the plan for the Ramsar Site for its entirety, given Jersey signed-up to Ramsar many years ago and nothing has yet been produced by the department. Will the Environment Scrutiny Panel be consulted within this area?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

It is my stated intention, and certainly at the first meeting recently, to include all members of any group that has a recorded interest or wishes to record an interest in the Ramsar Area. We have undertaken a public consultation survey and the results of that are being looked at at the moment. A number of meetings have been arranged for the remainder of the year and it is certainly the intention of the working group to deliver the comprehensive management plan by the end of the year.