

3.9 Deputy M.R. Higgins of the Chief Minister regarding the discontinuation of the Business Tendency Survey:

Will the Minister advise whether the Business Tendency Survey has been discontinued and if so, for what reasons this has been done, whether the Fiscal Policy Panel agreed with the decision not to collect this economic data, and explain how equivalent economic data will be gathered?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

The Business Tendency Survey is an important survey and should take place. I am sure the Fiscal Policy Panel would concur. Nevertheless we do need to reduce the cost to the public sector and this can be difficult. We are working with the chief statistician on savings, including bringing public health statistics into the Statistics Unit and finding other efficiency savings wherever possible. As part of this we do now intend to reduce the savings required for the Statistics Unit, so hopefully Members will have seen our comment to the second M.T.F.P. amendment. This will enable the Business Tendency Survey to be reinstated.

3.9.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Could the Minister tell us why, other than cost, they decided to discontinue this particular survey because the Business Tendency Survey filled an important gap in the data that was collected on the economy. We all know that we have insufficient data on the economy and to see how well government policies are working. Will the Minister explain why, other than cost?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I think, as I said in answer to questions from Deputy Southern at the last States sitting, there was some confusion about what funds were going to be available, what savings were going to be requested of the Statistics Department and how any redesign could be delivered. That confusion between the independent Statistics Unit and officers in my department has now been clarified. Vacancies that were in place are in the process of being filled and that is why I say that the Business Tendency Survey will be reinstated.

3.9.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Just for clarity's sake. Could the Minister inform Members that in fact what is taking place is that a post which was already lost by a departing statistician, moving to another department, will now be replaced as soon as possible, and that is likely to be in December, so that the Stats Department can eliminate the backlog, which they have already got in terms of publications, and get on with their main job?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

That is my understanding although it is a moving situation, as I sit here this afternoon in preparation for Deputy Southern's amendment tomorrow. But that is now my understanding.

3.9.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Just reflecting on the answers the Chief Minister gave. Did he or his department consult with the Fiscal Policy Panel before they took the step to do away with that survey?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I did not make the decision to do away with the survey and I therefore did not consult the Fiscal Policy Panel.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Could the Minister just elaborate and explain whether anybody spoke with the panel beforehand?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I think your original question was: was the Fiscal Policy Panel consulted? So, Minister, are you able to answer that?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am not aware that they were.