

2020.02.04

9 Deputy K.F. Morel of the Chief Minister regarding the findings of citizens' assemblies established in Jersey: (OQ.40/2020)

Is it the Chief Minister's assessment that the findings of a citizens' assembly should never be binding on the Government of Jersey or this Assembly?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré (The Chief Minister):

The short answer is absolutely. The slightly longer answer is that a citizens' assembly has been proposed to a Carbon Neutral Strategy. The intention for that assembly is to assist the decision making by providing a platform for members of the public to contribute to decision making. As such, I would agree with the Deputy a citizens' assembly cannot be binding on the Government of Jersey, or on this Assembly. So, to summarise, the citizens' assembly is advisory, it will make recommendations to this Assembly and to the Council of Ministers, who will consider those recommendations accordingly. Obviously, if the Deputy looks at, I think, page 91 in the appendices of the Carbon Neutral Strategy I would hope that makes it fairly clear on those pages.

4.9.1 Deputy K.F. Morel:

If I may take that one stage further, then. Will the Chief Minister resist any attempts to try and make citizens' assemblies on carbon neutrality, on the hospital, or any other areas binding on this Assembly, always accepting the primacy of this Assembly?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I absolutely accept the primacy of this Assembly and it is not just me to resist it, no one can bind this Assembly, other than this Assembly.

4.9.2 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

At a recent briefing by Extinction Rebellion Jersey, their spokesperson stated that any climate change citizens' assembly must have binding powers. How would the Chief Minister respond to this demand?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Firstly, I refer the Deputy to my previous answer. I hesitate to use these words, but I am going to say the legal position is that only this Assembly can bind this Assembly, period.

4.9.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

One of the key concepts behind a citizens' assembly is that the decisions they make are informed. They are informed in detail. Will the Minister, therefore, assure that this Assembly, when making decisions as to whether they take on the advice, will be equally as informed and have the opportunity to get the same sort of information, rather than making decisions based upon just uninformed views, which could be a danger if a group of citizens go through that process?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I do not think the Deputy's comments are specific only to the climate emergency stuff. I think it is imperative for all States Members to ensure that they are properly informed when debating any subject, including perhaps all the issues we are going to be facing today. It is important that Members are informed. It is important on a climate emergency side that the citizens' assembly is being given resources. As I understand matters, there is, I think, a Panel that is going to help provide

information to the Assembly, if I remember correctly and I would rather assume that on that basis, as the carbon neutral strategy advances, I am sure the Minister will be absolutely delighted to ensure that Members are properly informed as that debate continues.

4.9.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can the Chief Minister commit to this Assembly having access to the same panel of experts, so that we can inform ourselves in detail on the decisions that have been made?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I am in the hands of the Minister for the Environment on that side. I can see no reason why not. What I would say is that I would imagine that the whole Scrutiny process on this will be taking a very close interest in this area and, therefore, I would imagine that Scrutiny will be availing itself of all the information that is readily available to then inform States Members, as one would normally expect to be the case.

4.9.5 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Notwithstanding what the Chief Minister has said, but does he accept that citizens' assemblies ultimately are made up of lay people and they are not chosen for any particular skills, ability or merit? Ultimately there must be some form of vetting process, so can I ask the Chief Minister, if he agrees with that, what is the vetting process, or criterium, that are being worked to?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

It is quite useful to refer the Deputy to question 17 on the order paper, which is going to be coming up, being asked by Deputy Perchard, which gives an indication of things around citizens' panel selections. I think the same criteria are going to be applied to the citizens' assembly for the climate neutral strategy.