

2.12 Deputy K.C. Lewis of the Minister for Economic Development regarding the banning of the public sale of high-powered lasers:

Further to recent incidents of people firing high-powered lasers at incoming aircraft will the Minister, in conjunction with Ministerial colleagues if necessary, take steps to enable the sale of these items to be banned and if not, why not?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean (The Minister for Economic Development):

The general retail sale of high-powered lasers to consumers is already prohibited in Jersey under the 2006 Consumer Safety Law. This law is intended as a safeguard for consumers because of the risk of accidental eye injury, but it is not a mechanism for dealing with misuse. Difficulties can arise when a person has obtained a laser pointer through other means, for example, via the internet, and then subsequently misuses it. That, of course, would be a matter for the police. Indeed, the States of Jersey Police have stated that they will take action against anyone using lasers to point at aircraft and anyone doing so with the intention of harming or disrupting aircrew will face prosecution.

2.12.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

It was partially the internet I was referring to. Also small lasers are still being sold in the Island. If one is out driving late at night and is blinded by oncoming headlights, one has the option of shielding one's eyes and braking. A pilot landing a commercial aircraft does not have that facility. Lasers in the right hands are a wonderful aid to medicine and technology but in the wrong hands can be absolutely lethal. Does the Minister not agree?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

Yes, I do agree with the Deputy and I should say that my department has had discussions with Home Affairs and the police on this matter. I would contend that lasers pointed at drivers of vehicles are almost as dangerous as pointing at aircraft. The matter is taken seriously. The police will prosecute. There have been discussions concerning licensing, but of course that is not always as easy. Enforcement is a problem but I should emphasise that the police do fully intend to prosecute anyone who is caught misusing such devices.

2.12.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister agree that rather than pursuing a heavy-handed approach to ban such items, which may have a legitimate use such as for pointing out at presentations or for shooting, does he not think that it would be better to deal with the misuse of such items rather than a blanket ban?

[11:00]

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

Yes, I do not think I mentioned a blanket ban. I mentioned the way in which we would deal with the difference between high-powered lasers where the issue lies as opposed to lasers, for example, used for pointers at blackboards or in presentations. There is a big difference. It is the high-powered lasers where there is a potential issue and I think, in many respects, many of the public need to be made aware of the dangers associated with importing such items.

2.12.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

While appreciating the danger posed by these lasers, could the Minister put it into context and give us an indication of how many instances there have been over the last 3 years please?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

There has been one well-publicised instance relating to an aircraft. As far as I am aware, that is the only incident in recent times but if the Deputy wants more detailed information I am more than happy to see if there has been anything else recorded. I am not aware at this stage that there has been.

The Deputy Bailiff:

A final supplementary, Deputy Lewis.

2.12.4 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

It was the high-powered green lasers I was referring to. Having said that, the smaller red lasers, the light amplified stimulated emission of radiation, as any schoolchild would know, can destroy the human eye in 17 seconds permanently. It was for the high-powered green lasers that I hoped for legislation.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Are you proposing to introduce legislation, Minister?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

No, Sir. We have had discussions with Home Affairs and the police. We will continue the dialogue in relation to the possibility of licensing but it is not as easy as it appears having had initial discussions.