

STATES OF JERSEY



PUBLIC HOLIDAYS: DESIGNATION OF FRIDAY 8TH MAY 2015

Lodged au Greffe on 2nd February 2015
by Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

- (a) to agree that Friday 8th May 2015 should be designated as an extra Public and Bank Holiday for 2015; and
- (b) to request the Chief Minister to bring forward for approval the necessary Act under the Public Holidays and Bank Holidays (Jersey) Law 1951 to give effect to the decision.

DEPUTY S.Y. MÉZEC OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

After reading in the news that the Council of Ministers would not be proposing making Friday 8th May a public holiday this year (as the usual 9th May public holiday falls on a weekend) I have decided to lodge this proposition to offer the States Assembly an opportunity to decide on this.

Similar propositions have been brought to the States before when Liberation Day has fallen on a weekend which have not been successful (though our sister Island Guernsey has taken a less consistent approach and on occasion given an extra public holiday in lieu). I believe that this 70th anniversary of the Liberation is different for a several reasons, and should once again be considered that the Island should have a long weekend to extend the celebrations.

The first of these reasons is that the 70th anniversary is a landmark anniversary, more significant than the usual annual commemoration and could well mark the last major anniversary where a significant number of Islanders who lived through the Occupation may still be with us to share their experiences and join in celebrations.

It is also worth remembering that the 8th May will mark the 70th anniversary of VE Day, which is surely worthy of special commemoration in itself, regardless of it not being an occasion unique to the Channel Islands. It also marks the day when Winston Churchill announced to the Islands that they would be liberated the following day.

The second reason is based on the fact that this is not an ordinary year for Jersey. This year the spotlight is on Jersey because of our hosting of the Island Games. As a result of that there will be a large number of people from outside the Island viewing Jersey as a potential destination.

When so many eyes are gazing upon Jersey, it is important that we do as much as we can to make the most of it and entice people to come to the Island. There have been suggestions about hosting a big street party and there are no doubt other plans in the pipeline. A longer weekend provides more time to pack more in to draw people into the Island. The opportunity that that would present to tourism should be seized.

Arguments against

Some will argue that the cost of having a public holiday is too great. But it must be said that Liberation Day is usually a public holiday anyway, and so the fact that it is not this year is essentially a bonus to the public purse, given that it is a cost that is usually met every year anyway. To provide an extra public holiday is to simply restore the situation to what it normally is every year. On that basis, the cost to the public purse is notional.

It is also worth noting that a precedent has been set before in that in 2011 a public holiday was granted to celebrate the wedding of H.R.H. Prince William and Miss Kate Middleton and in 2012 for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. If we can make an exception for the those, we can make an exception for Liberation Day.

In many other countries when their national day falls on a weekend, it is automatically observed that a public holiday will be given in lieu. This is the case for Independence Day in the USA and Australia Day.

The most persuasive argument against it is that businesses are often very uneasy about extra public holidays, which is understandable. To that though I would use the same argument used by the former Chief Minister Senator Terry Le Sueur when he proposed marking the Royal Wedding as a public holiday by pointing out that whilst there is indeed a cost there, it is also an opportunity to attract tourists here and boost the economy in other ways.

By far the weakest argument which I have heard used against an extra public holiday is that “Liberation Day is the 9th May and a day off will devalue that”.

Nobody is suggesting that the 8th of May should usurp the 9th as the truly special day (not least because VE Day is a special day in its own right), as the 9th is when the States sitting and re-enactment in Liberation Square will take place. The 8th May will simply provide a longer period of time to put on events.

It is also worth pointing out that commemorative events are being held on Sunday, 10th May in the Parishes anyway and no one would argue that that could demean the 9th May as the true Liberation Day.

I would therefore suggest that an extra public holiday would actually enhance the 9th May as Liberation Day, not devalue it.

In fact, when Christmas Day or Boxing Day fall on a weekend, we are given extra bank holidays to make up for that and I have never seen the argument utilised that those days off devalue the meaning of Christmas.

Financial and manpower implications

Current advice given by the Treasury estimates the cost in terms of public sector pay at £1.4 million, whilst previous precedents (such as the public holiday for the Royal Wedding in 2011) show that the estimated cost of one day’s leave for public employees is approximately £1.5 million. It should be noted that Liberation Day is normally observed as a public holiday each year and is funded as such from departmental budgets.