

2025.02.04

Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée of St. Helier South of the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development regarding food supplies (OQ.20/2025):

Following recent occasions when food supplies in shops have been low, will the Minister explain the reasons behind this shortage and advise what steps, if any, are being taken to ensure that there is consistent and regular supply of food in the Island?

Deputy K.F. Morel of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (The Minister for Sustainable Economic Development):

All the recent cancellations have been due to seasonal bad weather. The winter season can make sailing cancellations more likely, as I am sure we all know. However, as of 31st January there were, in fact, fewer sailing cancellations this year than across January 2024. In events such as these, consumers sometimes may notice depleted stocks of certain fresh food items in some retail stores. Whereas this is often a visible indicator of a certain level of sailing disruption, retailers are able to maintain good levels of dry and ambient food products for longer periods. We have seen in recent years that the Jersey supply chain is resilient, particularly during COVID and through Brexit, but Government closely monitors risks and any impact to its operation. In collaboration with the emergency planning teams the Government and Ports of Jersey maintain a number of functions to monitor and secure Jersey's supply chain.

4.12.1 Deputy T.A. Coles of St. Helier South:

Can the Minister outline what the trigger points are for any emergency supplies that would come into the Island?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

That would depend on which emergency supplies the Deputy is referring to.

Deputy T.A. Coles:

I think in this instance we are referring to a lack of food supplies within our supermarkets.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I am not aware of those trigger points. What I know is that my department and, as I said, even the emergency planning team maintain good and close links with supermarkets to understand their stock levels and when there is a depletion of stock to an extent, then they would act on that. During the whole of COVID and during disruption caused by Brexit, at no point was it needed that we had emergency food supplies delivered to the Island. That was never necessary. I can certainly seek to find out if there are particular trigger levels, but I am not sure that there would be.

4.12.2 Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central:

A fish processing facility for freezing fish and shellfish could assist in ensuring food security in Jersey. Is the Minister informed of the progress of this processing facility, which was also a priority in the Marine Spatial Plan, and if so can he update us on the progress?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I am unaware that any fish processing facility appears in the Marine Spatial Plan. That would not seem an appropriate place for such a facility to appear. There is, as I understand it, at the moment no work ongoing on a fish processing facility.

4.12.3 Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I believe that it is in the Marine Spatial Plan, but this has been a matter in discussion since 2021. So could the Minister explain why he is not up to date on any progress on this matter?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

To date I have received no business plan. I have received no proposition from anyone in the marine resources sector with regard to a fish processing plant. All I have heard is people mention that it could be a good idea to have one, and I have said to the marine industry provide me with a business plan and show me how that will operate and then we can talk about it. But to date I have not received any of that information.

4.12.4 Deputy R.S. Kovacs of St. Saviour:

Given this growing and ongoing concern over empty shelves when ferries cannot deliver for any reason, which strategic recommendations from the recent food system resilience report commissioned by his department to Hypha will the Minister prioritise to address this issue long term and ensure a more reliable food supply?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I am sorry, Sir, I am going to have to ask the Deputy to repeat the question.

The Bailiff:

Yes, Deputy, could you say that again? I absolutely did not hear almost any of it.

Deputy R.S. Kovacs:

No worries. Thank you. Given this growing and ongoing concern over empty shelves when ferries cannot deliver for any reason, which strategic recommendations from the recent food system resilience report commissioned by his department to Hypha will the Minister prioritise to address this issue long term and ensure a more reliable food supply?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

The report that the Deputy mentions was commissioned by Farm Jersey, and I could not state which strategic recommendations from that report are appropriate for this.

4.12.5 Deputy R.S. Kovacs:

If the Minister had to choose one key action to reduce our reliance on the ferry for a consistent food supply that he could start implementing now, what would that be?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

One key action is to have a much more reliable ferry service. Indeed, the new ferry service that we will see come into operation at the end of March will be providing greater lane meterage, which will enable faster reduction in backlogs. Obviously, because it is a Jersey-only service, those vessels will have greater space on them so we should be able to see any backlogs being reduced much more quickly.

4.12.6 Deputy B.B. de S.V.M. Porée:

I thank the Minister for his initial answer. I really feel that the answer of the Minister saying the food supply is robust is not the case day to day. So is it fair to say that the Minister is relying on the new boat coming in March with the new contract to improve considerably the food safety of the Island?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Food security is of the utmost importance to me and my department. There has been no evidence to date of our supply chain resilience being in any way endangered. It is life on an island. It is the case that there are times when supplies are disrupted. We live on a small Island in the sea. That is a reality of life here. But to date - and I spoke to a big supermarket retailer recently - yes, supplies get run down but they do not run out. We live in a just-in-time society where food is expected to be delivered at all times but, living on an Island, that is difficult. But to date there has been no problem with food security.