

3.7 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity of the Minister for the Environment regarding the rationale for reducing the bird-registration threshold from 30 to one under the Article 4(1)(a) of the Animal Health (Bird Diseases) (Jersey) Order 2017 (OQ.18/2026):

Will the Minister explain the rationale for reducing the bird-registration threshold from 30 to one under Article 4(1)(a) of the Animal Health (Bird Diseases) (Jersey) Order 2017, thereby imposing an immediate legal obligation on all poultry keepers, including small-scale and domestic keepers?

Deputy S.G. Luce (The Minister for the Environment):

The number of confirmed outbreaks of avian influenza in the U.K. (United Kingdom) and France in poultry and captive birds is of concern to me. There have been 112 outbreaks in France since October last year, with more than 1.8 million animals dead or culled, and 90 confirmed outbreaks in the U.K. The Island needs to be prepared for any outbreaks and it is important that the States Vet has at this time a database of all poultry and captive bird keepers. Registration ensures authorities know where birds are kept, regardless of flock size, so they can act quickly when disease is detected. Being able to speak to all owners in very quick order is a benefit not only to the States Vet, but to the owners of that poultry.

3.7.1 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

What assessment does the Minister make of how the amendment was communicated? Will the Minister ensure that future urgent changes are clearly and promptly conveyed to avoid unintentional non-compliance?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I am very happy to do that. I would like to apologise to people. Previous to 2017, it was mandatory that all chickens should be registered. The rules were relaxed at that date, and it occurred to me that it would not be very contentious to go back to where we were for the animal health reasons I have mentioned. Consequently, I signed an order in December. The timing was not great. The 14 days after that included Christmas, and before we knew where we were the order had been enacted. So I would like to apologise to those people who were a bit surprised by that. It is my fault entirely but, as the Deputy says, I will take much more notice in the future with this type of order.

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

Does the Minister believe that the order and details within this are clear enough for people so they do not - and I am really sorry for the pun - fall foul of this legislation?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

My brain does not allow me to respond with a quip, but I would say I think it is important. I think everybody needs to be involved in this. If you have got one chicken, 5 chickens, 10, 15, 20, we all need to know where these animals are, and I think it is a good idea.

3.7.3 Deputy T.A. Coles:

This next question comes more because if you ever go to the Parish of Grouville, the last time I was there I counted about 15 feral peacocks that seem to take residence in people's gardens. The question is: where does the responsibility rely around these birds because obviously they choose their area that they live in, and that might be in somebody's garden. Would they then be considered as keeper because that peacock spends a considerable amount of its time in that garden, and if so, is there a way to amend this register?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

Feral chickens, poultry and other birds are a challenge on the Island. We are certainly aware of a number of groups of feral chickens. We can take action where necessary, but wild birds obviously are a real challenge and do not fall under this legislation. However, the peacocks that the Deputy mentioned, it may well be that under certain conditions the States' Vet would decide to act, but it is not usual.

3.7.4 Deputy A.F. Curtis:

This obviously is a new reporting requirement for the last 10 years, for Islanders who could have as few as one chicken. Did the Minister consider whether the processes for those who have to declare are easy enough and whether he should have made any digital process changes to make it easier for people to file this so it is not a more bureaucratic process for those with a very small impact or perhaps a very controllable number of paltry or similar?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I have to hold my hand up and say that I did not delve deeply into the subject when I was requested by the States Vet to consider making this order. I will go back and see how easy it is for people to register and certainly, in this day and age, I would fully expect people to be able to do that online.

3.7.5 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

Could the Minister outline what are the consequences for those who have to register if they do not register? Could the Minister outline how this will be enforced in practice, particularly domestic keepers who are unaware of the change or, for example, what Deputy Coles was talking about, chickens and poultry going into gardens and become residents without having an ownership?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

This is not about trying to criminalise somebody with 2 chickens in their back garden who may have missed this announcement and have not had them registered. It is more about trying to encourage people to comply with the law. We are not running around the Island making sure that every last chicken has been registered in the last few weeks, but this is about trying to get owners of chickens to help each other to act responsibly so that, as I said, if we do have a situation with avian flu in Jersey the vet can contact all the owners, and it is for their benefit as much as the States Vet's benefit.