



# PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

**AFTERNOON SESSION: 12.03 p.m. – 1.10 p.m.**

**Gibraltar, Friday, 24th January 2025**

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# The Gibraltar Parliament

*The Parliament met at 12 p.m.*

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Judge K Ramagge GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

## Questions for Oral Answer

### HEALTH, CARE AND BUSINESS

**Q64/2024**

**Patient Voice Group –  
Current status**

**Clerk:** Meeting of Parliament, Friday, 24th January 2025.

Answers to oral questions continued. Question 64. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

5       **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Is the GHA's Patient Voice Group which was established in January 2023 still in existence? If so, how often does it meet with the office of the Director General? If it is no longer in existence, when was it disbanded and why?

10       **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

10       **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the Director General agreed, after discussion with the Patient Voice Group, that it should be stood down. The last meeting of the Patient Voice Group was held on 5th February 2024.

15       We are now looking to set up a patient panel, which will be independent from the GHA, and we are drafting a Patients' Rights and Responsibilities Charter and this is currently being produced.

20       **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful. Could the Hon. Minister share some more information as to the reasons behind the initial group being disbanded and this new patient panel being put together?

**Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the Director General informed me that he had agreed with the Patient Voice Group that it be stepped down.

25       **Hon. J Ladislaus:** What is the essential difference between the patient panel and the Patient Voice Group?

30       **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** We are looking to constitute a new group with a different format. We are uncertain as of yet as to the exact constitution of that group, but we are looking to set up a patient forum.

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** By when does the Minister believe that this group will be formed and up and running?

35 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, definitely by the end of the second quarter.

**Q56-57/2025**  
**GHA cardiology –**  
**Average waiting times; number of cardiologists employed –**  
**Supplementary questions**

**Madam Speaker:** Next question. (*Interjection*) Sorry, yes, I have a note here. We will take supplementaries to Question 56.

40 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, the schedule I have before me has Question 56 and 'Answer to Question 57' as well, so I shall take them together.

In the schedule that has been provided, we see that the average waiting time at the GHA is five weeks for January to see a cardiologist. We are given the table and the average waiting times in the NHS. I appreciate that the NHS has been included on there, but I question ... Gibraltar is much smaller. We are not the size of the UK and therefore whether the NHS  
45 averages are included or not is beside the point.

Is it normal for an elderly patient to be left waiting for 12 days to see a cardiologist when they are an in-patient at St Bernard's Hospital?

**Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the NHS waiting times were included alongside it  
50 because yes, we are much smaller than the NHS but the NHS will give you figures broken down per 100,000 of capita and therefore you can work out what the direct correlation is between Gibraltar and the UK. It will also be broken down throughout the UK. So, there is a relevance in showing what the NHS waiting times are, to contrast and compare, to use a figure. We can use Spanish waiting times; the obvious comparator would be the NHS.

55 In relation to the second question, it would not be usual for a patient to be left waiting – I think the hon. Lady said 12 days – particularly now that we have the facilities in the hospital.

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful for the explanation as to the breakdown per 100,000 capita, but doesn't the Hon. Minister agree that it is not just the difference between statistics and how  
60 they are undertaken? What I am referring to is the fact that Gibraltar is a very small jurisdiction and therefore the factors that affect Gibraltar may not necessarily be the same factors that affect the UK. Does the Hon. Minister agree with that?

**Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** No, Madam Speaker.

**Q58/2025**  
**GHA orthopaedics –**  
**Average waiting times –**  
**Supplementary questions**

65 **Madam Speaker:** We will take supplementaries to Question 58.

70 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, in respect of Question 58, the schedule before me shows that from July, when it was eight weeks, to now, January 2025, the waiting time has risen to 13 weeks. I believe this is in respect of orthopaedic surgeons. For what reason has the list risen so much? There is a difference of a month and it has been steadily rising over the past six months. Could the Hon. Minister give reasons as to why the waiting times seem to be increasing to see orthopaedics and why not decreasing?

75 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, there is an influx in hip and knees that have been referred to the orthopaedic department, and this is reflected in the figures.

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** So then, is it the case that there was a backlog in hip and knee replacements that has now caused these waiting times to increase in general?

80 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** No, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Could the Hon. Minister clarify, therefore, why there has been such an increase suddenly in hip and knee replacements in the past six months? The average waiting times in the NHS which have been provided in the table seem to be rather stable, but the 85 waiting times here seem to have a sharp increase from July to date. What is the key to that?

**Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, we have an ageing population. People fall. This is the reason for an influx in hip and knee referrals. If you look at what is happening, the average waiting time goes down, it goes up slightly, it fluctuates, but it is under control in the GHA at the 90 moment.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q66/2025**  
**Land frontier –**  
**Checks on foreign companies**

**Clerk:** Question 66. The Hon. C Sacarello.

95 **Hon. C A Sacarello:** Good morning, Madam Speaker. What measures are currently being taken to ensure that foreign companies crossing into Gibraltar at the Land Frontier have their relevant risks fully covered in Gibraltar, including but not limited to business insurance and public and employee liability insurance?

100 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

**Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, as has been the case historically under all administrations, no measures are taken at the Land Frontier in this respect.

105 **Hon. C A Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, this leaves the consumer locally exposed to risks that are not being covered by insurance when local companies are required to insure themselves for the protection of the consumer. Is the Government intending to take any measures in this area henceforth?

110

**Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, it may be the case that it is not the best place at the Land Frontier to take into account these measures. For example, in the construction industry, if there is a subcontractor that requires insurance it is the contractor that will be required to make sure that the subcontractor has the relevant insurance. Therefore, placing the burden on the Land Frontier to check insurance documents, as the specific question relates to ... The Land Frontier may not be the best place to carry out these checks.

**Hon. C A Sacarello:** Notwithstanding that, there are businesses, Madam Speaker, that do come through and service providers that can be checked there. Would it not make sense to have some form of checks, albeit on an ad hoc basis, just to hold people to account and make them aware of the importance of the protection of the consumer within Gibraltar?

**Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** No, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q67-69/2025**

**AquaGib –**

**Details of recent workers' dispute; financing of purchase**

**Clerk:** Question 67. The Hon. C Sacarello.

**Hon. C A Sacarello:** In the light of the Government securing the full ownership of AquaGib and AquaGib no longer being a privately owned company, could the Minister please shed some light on the reasons behind the recent workers' dispute supported by Unite the Union and the conclusions of said dispute?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

**Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 68 and 69.

**Clerk:** Question 68. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of the Hon. R M Clinton.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, can the Government advise how and on what terms is the Gibraltar Savings Bank financing the £7.5 million purchase of the AquaGib Ltd shares by the relevant Government holding company?

**Clerk:** Question 69. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of the Hon. R M Clinton.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** On 19th December 2024, the Chief Minister advised that 'the Government of Gibraltar has acquired the remaining 67% shareholding in AquaGib from Northumbrian Water Group, bringing the company into full public ownership'. In answer to questions of clarification, the Chief Minister stated that the purchase was to be financed by the Gibraltar Savings Bank and held via Gibraltar Aquagib Holdings Ltd. Given that no company of this name exists on the Gibraltar Companies House Register, can the Government confirm that the relevant company is in fact GAH Ltd, company number 116663, previously named GEWP Ltd?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

**Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, in answer to Question 67, the water network department took selective industrial action recently over a perceived delay in response to a claim for an increase to certain terms and conditions that affected salaries and is going through the AquaGib dispute resolution procedure. The Government will not, however, comment on any industrial relations matters in any of the Government-Owned Companies where management runs all the industrial relations independently.

In answer to Question 69, I can confirm that the company which acquired the 67% shareholding in AquaGib from Northumbrian Water Group is GAH Ltd, with company registration number 116663. The company was previously known as GEWP Ltd.

In answer to Question 68, GAH Ltd issued a £7.5 million debenture at 4.5% per annum to the Gibraltar Savings Bank to finance its purchase of the AquaGib Ltd shares.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, in relation to Question 69, given the Minister's confirmation that this company is GAH Ltd and not Gibraltar AquaGib Holdings Ltd, which does not exist, which is the information given by the Chief Minister to the House, does the Chief Minister want to correct the record?

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** No, ma'am.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Very well, but the information clearly was inaccurate at the time, given that the Minister has now confirmed as much.

Madam Speaker, in relation to Question 68, in terms of the terms of the facility, the hon. Lady has mentioned that it is 4% per annum. May I ask for how long?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the information was not inaccurate at the time. As the hon. Gentleman will know, when you create a company with initials it has to have a word which is relevant to each initial, and so although the company is called GAH Ltd, the words that I gave the Parliament are the words behind those initials.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, if I may, first of all, my question has not been answered, so perhaps the Minister will answer it. But in relation to this issue, the Chief Minister did not just say GAH. What he said was Gibraltar Aquagib Holdings Ltd, hence the question posed by my hon. Colleague Mr Clinton, whose question this is, in that having done a search, that company simply does not exist. I ask him again: rather than slither away from the inaccurate information, does he really not want to correct the record, given the Minister's answer?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman's use of language is always designed to deprecate, when in fact what we should be trying to do is get to the information. If I had told them JAH Ltd, they would have asked me what does JAH stand for. *(Interjection)* That is exactly what they asked me when I told them the initials that we use for other companies. *(Interjection)* I am not surprised the hon. Gentlemen keep asking the same question, because they do not shut up whilst one is giving them the answer. They just spend the time, from a sedentary position, saying things which prevent them from hearing the logic of what they are told. *(Interjection)* And so, Madam Speaker, because I gave them more information – *(Interjection)*

**Madam Speaker:** Would the hon. Member not comment from a sedentary position? He can ask any supplementaries he wants to in a moment.

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I forgive the Hon. Mr Bossino everything. I saw him last night on *Viewpoint* having a Biden moment when faced by Gibraltar's very spritely Father of the

House. I know that he has become a cantankerous old man in his middle age, and I am not surprised that he is sitting there trying to cackle, but for the purposes of being clear, Madam Speaker, JAH means Gibraltar AquaGib Holdings. I was not slithering away from providing information; I was providing more information. That is the reality.

I know that from the Opposition benches things can seem easy to prick about, and I am not surprised that they should be the ones doing the pricking, given how one might wish to regard the way that they conduct their politics, but that is the information.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, it is incredible to hear the Chief Minister, who said to this House in answer to my colleague Mr Clinton, who is not here today because he is unwell, that the company was called Gibraltar Aquagib Holdings Ltd. My colleague Mr Clinton then does a search several times, discovers this company does not exist. We ask the question and the Chief Minister still does not want to correct the record from the inaccurate information he gave to the House. May I ask the Minister to answer the question that I posed when the Chief Minister intervened not to correct the record, which is what is the length of the facility granted by this company?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, not with a preamble that once again suggests that I have somehow misled the House or given it inaccurate information, because I have not. I would remind the hon. Gentleman that the only individual in the parliamentary history of Gibraltar, even when we had a Legislative Council and we had a House of Assembly, who has been found by a motion of this House to have misled the Parliament is him, not me.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, we were all in the front line of the kangaroo court constructed by the Chief Minister when he warped the facts of the case and turned his inaccurate information into the nonsense that the Members on this side of the House had misled Parliament.

May I ask the Minister, again, to answer the question that I have asked, which is what is the length of the facility?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, not with a preamble like that, which is obviously going to require me to remind the hon. Gentleman that the only person who sought to set up a kangaroo court was him, because the only person who brought a motion saying that anybody had misled the House by amending my motion, which did not talk about misleading the House, was him. He tried to warp the facts in order to fit the predetermined circumstances that he thought were helpful to him.

Madam Speaker, given everything that is going on in the world, and indeed everything that is going on in Gibraltar, it is quite remarkable that what the hon. Member wants to talk about is the fact that he got more information than just the initials of a company, and he wants to go back to things that happened a few months ago. It is a matter entirely for him. People will see how he discharges the functions of the Leader of the Opposition, and perhaps, because that is what they saw, that is why he continues to discharge only the functions of the Leader of the Opposition and not of the Leader of this House.

**Madam Speaker:** There is an outstanding question in relation to, I think, the percentage. Let's deal with that.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** If I may, Madam Speaker, of course, but what is incredible is that I have asked a question several times and the Chief Minister continues to butt in defensively because of the inaccurate information he gave to the House. So I ask again, for the fourth time, how long was the facility?



**Hon. Chief Minister:** Utter nonsense, as usual –

**Madam Speaker:** The question before the House is how long was the facility.

265 **Hon. Chief Minister:** That is why you are there and we are here for many years.

**Madam Speaker:** Order! (*Interjection*) The question before the House is how long is the facility.

270 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the debenture does not have an end date; it has an annual review.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q70/2025**

**Ex-Amar's Bakery site development –  
Residents' concerns**

275 **Clerk:** Question 70. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Is Government aware of the concerns of residents and neighbours in relation to the proposed development at the ex-Amar's Bakery on Linewall Road; and, if so, are they considering what possible action or position to take?

280 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

285 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the Department of Town Planning and Building Control can confirm that an application has been submitted for a proposed development at the ex-Amar's Bakery site on Line Wall Road. The application is currently open to public participation, with the last date for receipt of any comments being 29th January 2025. At the time of drafting this answer, no representations had been received.

290 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Sorry, may I just clarify? No representations had been received by the Department or by the Minister?

**Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** No formal representations had been received by way of objection to the Department.

295 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** But is the Minister aware of representations either made to her or indirectly made to other people? Is she aware of those concerns?

**Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Yes, ma'am.

300 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And in light of that, because I imagine those concerns have reached the Government as well as they have reached the Opposition – normally it would not be that the concerns only reach us; they presumably will have trickled to the Government – does the Government take a position in relation to those concerns? Are there meetings to be held to discuss those matters with those people concerned in the neighbouring area?

305

**Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the Government does not own that building. In any event, we have to wait for the representations to be received by us in order to determine the outcome.

310 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Sorry, I did not hear: did the Minister say that the Government will await whether representations are received? Is that what she said? I did not hear it.

**Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the application is going through the proper DPC process. Therefore, the objections have to be received by the DPC, and the DPC has to take a view.

315  
320 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, that is understood, and the Minister has given, I think, a deadline of 29th January for that. What I was asking is not a question to the Government on the basis that this is a DPC issue – the DPC will make its mind up – but given that there are Government Ministers who sit on the DPC and may have a view on it and may have received comments or be aware of them ... whether the Government has a position in relation to that development.

**Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, as I previously stated, it will run through the DPC process and the DPC will come to its own conclusion. There are Government Ministers who sit on the DPC, but the Government Ministers represent their own view on the DPC.

330 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, understood. May I ask the Minister, to the extent that she is on the DPC, and others, to perhaps make herself aware, and Government Ministers, of the nature of the representations and objections that neighbours have to throw into the mix? From our perspective, when we have looked at the nature of the development and the impact on the area, there are certainly a lot of residents that are going to be affected quite significantly by that development, so perhaps that should affect the thought process that is going on in relation to that application.

335 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the first thing I would say is that I need to clarify that I do not sit on the DPC. I am responsible for the DPC but I do not sit personally on the DPC. I would expect that any of my colleagues would prepare themselves for the application in the same way that they prepare for every application, and therefore that they would read the papers along with any objections received.

340

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

#### Q72/2025

#### GHA Director of Finance – Whether post currently occupied

**Clerk:** Question 72. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

345 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, does the GHA currently employ a Director of Finance?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

**Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, yes ma'am.

350 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see, and is the Director of Finance supported by other individuals within a particular finance team in the GHA at the moment?

**Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Yes, ma'am.

355 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Presumably the Director of Finance would be responsible for control of expenditure and other issues, so why was it necessary to employ someone now for some kind of internal audit process?

360 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, as I would have expected the Hon. Leader of the Opposition to understand, internal audit is entirely different to the finance function within any organisation.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** So this function was not fulfilled by the Director of Finance previously – is that what the Minister is saying?

365 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, of course not. Internal audit is an entirely different function to the finance function.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

#### CHIEF MINISTER

Q95-101/2025

Disability benefits –

**Outstanding applications and meeting dates of panels;  
outstanding appeals and meeting dates of panels**

370 **Clerk:** Chief Minister's questions. Question 95. The Hon. A Sanchez.

375 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government provide the number of outstanding disability benefit applications broken down as follows: (a) applications pending for less than one year; (b) applications pending for more than one year; (c) applications pending for over one year, with a detailed breakdown specifying the exact number of years the applications have been outstanding; (d) further broken down by the number of child and adult applicants?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

380 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer together with Questions 96 to 101.

**Clerk:** Question 96. The Hon. A Sanchez.

385 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government provide the number of outstanding or pending appeals against decisions to refuse or disallow disability benefits, broken down as follows: (a) appeals pending for less than one year; (b) appeals pending for more than one year; (c) appeals pending for over one year, with a detailed breakdown specifying the exact number of years they have been outstanding; (d) further broken down by the number of child and adult applicants?

390 **Clerk:** Question 97. The Hon. A Sanchez.

**Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government provide the figures from 2022 to the present date for appeals against decisions to refuse or disallow disability benefits, broken down as follows: (1) by child disability benefit and adult disability benefit; (2) for the following categories; (3) appeals received; (4) appeals successful; (5) appeals unsuccessful?

**Clerk:** Question 98. The Hon. A Sanchez.

**Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government provide the exact dates on which the board or panel specifically constituted for determining child disability benefit applications convened to make determinations during the following years: 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 to date?

**Clerk:** Question 99. The Hon. A Sanchez.

**Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government provide the exact dates on which the board or panel specifically constituted for the determination of adult disability benefit applications convened to make determinations during the following years: 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 to date?

**Clerk:** Question 100. The Hon. A Sanchez.

**Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government provide the exact dates on which the board or panel specifically constituted for the determination of appeals against decisions to refuse or disallow child disability benefits convened to make determinations on such appeals during the following years: 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 to date?

**Clerk:** Question 101. The Hon. A Sanchez.

**Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government provide the exact dates on which the board or panel specifically constituted for the determination of appeals against decisions to refuse or disallow adult disability benefits convened to make determinations on such appeals during the following years: 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 to date?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, there are 78 applications that have been pending for less than one year; 53 in respect of adults and 25 in respect of children. There are no applications that have been pending for over a year. That is in answer to Question 95.

In answer to Question 96, there are 22 appeals that have been pending for less than one year for reconsideration as a result of an appeal against decisions to refuse or allow disability benefit; 17 in respect of adults and five in respect of children. There are 21 appeals that have been waiting more than one year; 15 in respect of adults and 6 in respect of children. Of the adult-related claims pending for over one year, 1 claim has been pending for three years and seven months, 1 claim has been pending for three years and 28 days, 1 claim has been pending for two years and 10 months, 1 claim has been pending for two years and one month, and 11 claims have been pending a maximum period of one year to five months or less. Of the child-related claims, 1 claim has been pending for three years and 15 days, 1 claim has been pending for one year and six months, 1 claim has been pending for one year and five months, 1 claim has been pending for one year and two months, and 2 claims have been pending for one year and one month.

In answer to Question 97, since 2022, 65 adult-related appeals and 11 child-related appeals have been received. Of these, four have been successful and nine unsuccessful.

445 In respect of Questions 98 and 99, I now hand over schedules with the information requested.

**Answer to Question 98/2025**

The following are the exact dates on which the board or panel convened to make determinations on Child Disability Benefit applications:

**2020**

19/11/2020

26/11/2020

21/12/2020

**2021**

21/06/2021

**2022**

28/02/2022

08/09/2022

**2023**

11/01/2023

25/04/2023

06/06/2023

28/06/2023

10/08/2023

11/10/2023

08/11/2023

30/11/2023

**2024**

18/01/2024

28/02/2024

24/04/2024

13/11/2024

**2025**

To date, 1 panel is scheduled for January 2025

**Answer to Question 99/2025**

The following are the exact dates on which the board or panel convened to make determinations on Adult Disability Benefit applications:

**2020**

16/12/2020

24/11/2020

**2021**

03/03/2021

20/04/2021

04/05/2021

15/06/2021

20/09/2021

27/09/2021

13/10/2021

20/12/2021

**2022**

09/02/2022

22/09/2022

05/10/2022

**2023**

31/01/2023  
28/02/2023  
07/03/2023  
01/06/2023  
21/06/2023  
27/07/2023  
07/09/2023  
27/09/2023  
24/10/2023  
15/11/2023  
17/11/2023  
29/11/2023

**2024**

12/01/2024  
24/01/2024  
20/02/2024  
23/02/2024  
26/06/2024  
09/10/2024  
21/11/2024  
25/11/2024

**2025**

09/01/2025

Madam Speaker, the board convened to reconsider child disability benefit claims on 21st December 2020. The board or panel convened to reconsider adult disability benefit claims on 1st December 2022, 8th May 2024, 26th June 2024, 9th October 2024 and 9th January 2025.

In answer to Question 98, the following are the exact dates on which the board or panel convened to make determinations on child disability applications. Madam Speaker, instead of reading those out, I have asked for a schedule to be prepared of my answer to that and to my answer to Question 99, which I hope will be more convenient for Members of the House to see rather than my reading out a litany of dates.

**Madam Speaker:** We will come back to Questions 98 and 99 once the hon. Member has had a chance to look at the schedules. Any supplementaries on Questions 95, 96, 97, 100 or 101?

**Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, in relation to Question 96 and the figures for appeals, the figures given suggest that there are several appeals that have been pending for over one year and several other appeals that have been pending, some for two years, some for three. Could the Hon. the Chief Minister perhaps elaborate as to why the appeals might have been pending? I know that he cannot specify the details, but perhaps why we are seeing delays of this nature?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful that the hon. Lady has asked me why and has not made the assumption that there is some failure on the official side in respect of those lengthy waits. For example, the claim that I told the House was pending three years and seven months: the individual has been repeatedly contacted and has not come in to deal with the claim. The claim that has been pending three years and 28 days: the individual was in prison and therefore his case has not been taken forward by the panel. There is a claim which has been ongoing for two years and one month and cannot continue because there is a delay in the submission of paperwork by the person making the claim. There is one that has been waiting for two years and 10 months which requires a specially constituted panel with members who do not form part of the initial panel that took the decision, and I understand that has not been possible to convene for professional reasons. In cases where there is inordinate delay, it would appear

that it is not the official side that is in any way failing, but we do have to give the statistic of this being a pending claim, even though it may be a claim that is no longer being pursued by the individual that we repeatedly contact and is not coming forward.

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**Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, I ask this out of genuine concern because the area of disability benefit and other constituents who are experiencing issues with delays in applications or the determination of appeals has to be one of the areas most constituents come to speak to me about. In most cases, they seem to be writing to the Department of Social Security and they keep receiving letters about the board not having met to convene, only perhaps a year later to receive the same response that the board still has not convened to determine their application. Although this is not intended as a criticism of the board, and their hard work is obviously to be appreciated, and their service, is there any way that the system perhaps could be reviewed to see if it could be improved and the applications or appeals determined in a more timely or efficient manner so that individuals do not have to experience the uncertainty of this waiting time and the undue stress that this makes them feel?

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Lady will know that in very great measure this has changed in some respects in the time that we have been in Government because we have added more criteria. The criterion when we were elected was simply that people had to be born with a disability. The board met to decide whether you were born with it or not born with it, and if you were not born with it you did not get the benefit. We changed this considerably to see whether the disability that you have is affecting your life and your ability to live your life in the normal way. Therefore, we have added many more people to the numbers that are receiving benefit – literally hundreds more people to the people who are receiving benefit. That has added a cost to the exchequer. We are constantly criticised for the cost that we incur to the exchequer, but of course this is the right cost to incur to the exchequer. When you look at all of the costs that we have added to the exchequer in the time that we have been elected, I would argue that it would be difficult for hon. Members if they were to break down, when they tell us that we are spending too much, which are the spending that they would consider to be a waste. In terms of the time, therefore, that it takes to make these assessments, because they are not just straightforward assessments of whether somebody is born with a disability or not, they do have to take longer but they lead to a benefit. They do not take inordinately long. If you look at the number of claims that have been pending for a very long time, it is not that many compared to those that have been assessed, the more straightforward ones, probably, and the benefit is flowing.

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I therefore think that we need to be grateful for the work that the panel do. I think they do it to the best of their ability. They are not telling us that it is a question of them needing more resources; it is just a question of making these difficult assessments, and that sometimes takes time.

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**Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, several questions are referring to the board and the dates when the board convenes. Just picking up from that point, would the Hon. the Chief Minister happen to know, in case the process might have changed, is it that all applications have to go through the board, or is it the case that some applications go directly to the Director of Social Security for his discretion?

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, none of these questions ask me about the procedure, and therefore I do not want to say anything which may be incorrect.

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**Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, I know that it has been asked in this House before, but in case there has been any change since it was last asked, would the Hon. the Chief Minister be able to confirm when the criteria for disability benefits were last reviewed?

530 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, I cannot give that information on top of my feet. Neither do I think it is a question that arises in any foreseeable way from these questions.

**Madam Speaker:** Is the hon. Member in a position to ask any supplementaries on Questions 98 or 99, or would she like some time? No supplementaries?  
535 Next question.

**Q102/2025**  
**Pedestrianised areas –**  
**Security measures re vehicles**

**Clerk:** Question 102. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Is the Government considering any enhanced security measures in pedestrianised areas around Gibraltar, such as but not limited to Main Street, to minimise the risk of vehicles being used to harm members of the public?  
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**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the safety and security of all who live, work and visit Gibraltar is and always will be the first order of Government. As such, I want to reassure this House and the public that the relevant authorities and other security stakeholders continuously review and assess the security measures in place and potential threats in all areas. I want to reassure anyone listening, watching or referring to this exchange that Main Street is secure and our streets are secure. Our people are secure.  
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550 Madam Speaker, as the hon. Member should have considered at the time of submitting this question, it is not in the public interest, for obvious reasons, to share the details of these considerations or any specific measures across the floor of the House.

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful. I did consider. Would it be possible for the Hon. the Chief Minister to perhaps give me that information behind the Speaker's Chair?  
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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Although I do not have all of it with me today, yes, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q103/2025**  
**Foreign commercial vehicles –**  
**Land Frontier entry point**

560 **Clerk:** Question 103. The Hon. C Sacarello.

**Hon. C A Sacarello:** Could the Hon. Chief Minister please explain why foreign commercial vehicles are being allowed to enter via the tourist land Frontier entry point carrying tools and materials, instead of being directed through the commercial vehicle entrance at the East Gate, where the correct enforcement and policing of local jurisdictional requirements can and should be conducted?  
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**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

570 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, foreign commercial vehicles carrying non-specialist tools are allowed entry through the Four Corners Examination Station when these are supported by an ATA Carnet. Alternatively, a specification, i.e. a list of items, is accepted and the importer is required to complete a personal undertaking form to cover any liability for import duty. On exportation, the procedure requires importers to report back to Four Corners to allow 575 HM Customs to examine the tools and ensure that all tools leave the jurisdiction. HM Customs will recover any duties due if any items are missing. As regards materials, HM Customs will collect import duty on consignments that comprise a few items. That is to say, for example, a few tubes of silicon. Commercial vehicles carrying high-value tools or which import goods will be escorted to the entry processing unit at the commercial gate. It is also important to note that 580 commercial vehicles transporting goods or high-value tools will be directed to the commercial gate by the Spanish authorities anyway, even before they reach our jurisdiction.

**Hon. C A Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Chief Minister for that detailed and sensible explanation of this. However, there are concerns from local businesses that 585 sometimes some of these businesses coming through, albeit declaring a small number of tools and so perfectly legal and practical in that sense, are not asked whether they actually have a licence or permit to work in Gibraltar. Would this be part of the Government's thinking, to increase the measures to check for the legality of businesses coming to work within Gibraltar, as the Hon. Minister Arias-Vasquez mentioned a couple of months ago?

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, in part, and as I mentioned some months ago too.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q104-112/2025**

**Sales tax –**

**Level at which to be set; consultation; format as presented in treaty;  
whether proceeds to be retained in Gibraltar; product categories;  
double taxation implications; additional support for Income Tax Office;  
frequency of payments; modelling**

**Clerk:** Question 104. The Hon. C Sacarello.

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**Hon. C A Sacarello:** What level will the sales tax the Chief Minister mentioned in his New Year's Message be set at?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer with Questions 105 to 112.

**Clerk:** Question 105. The Hon. C Sacarello.

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**Hon. C A Sacarello:** Were business organisations or bodies consulted and informed about the sales tax prior to the Chief Minister's New Year Message; and, if so, when?

**Clerk:** Question 106. The Hon. C Sacarello.

610 **Hon. C A Sacarello:** In the Chief Minister's oven-ready deal, does the tax on goods appear as a transaction tax on the cost of goods or as a sales tax on the selling price?

**Clerk:** Question 107. The Hon. C Sacarello.

615 **Hon. C A Sacarello:** Will the revenues generated from the imposition of a sales tax be retained entirely within our tax jurisdiction?

**Clerk:** Question 108. The Hon. C Sacarello.

620 **Hon. C A Sacarello:** Could the Chief Minister please provide the House with information as to which product categories the sales tax will apply and if there will be a range of levels?

**Clerk:** Question 109. The Hon. C Sacarello.

625 **Hon. C A Sacarello:** How will Government ensure that there is no double taxation in the event of a sales tax being introduced, as there will be an overlap naturally where duty will have been paid on certain goods imported under the previous regime?

**Clerk:** Question 110. The Hon. C Sacarello.

630 **Hon. C A Sacarello:** How does the Government intend to support and resource the Income Tax Office ahead of the change to the new sales tax in anticipation of a successful treaty outcome?

635 **Clerk:** Question 111. The Hon. C Sacarello.

**Hon. C A Sacarello:** Will sales tax payments be due monthly, quarterly or other?

**Clerk:** Question 112. The Hon. C Sacarello.

640 **Hon. C A Sacarello:** Would the Government be able to provide us with any modelling it has conducted on sales tax revenue generation?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

645 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I refer the hon. Gentleman to my New Year's Message. For obvious reasons, I cannot expand further on the detail of the negotiation.

I am surprised the hon. Gentleman felt it was appropriate to ask these questions across the floor of the House. It is one thing to ask for a general update on progress of the negotiations, but it is quite another to ask for specific details, as the hon. Member has done today, knowing it cannot be provided without endangering our negotiating position.

**Hon. C A Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, thank you to the Chief Minister for his answer. I am fully aware of the sensitivity of the negotiation, but I am sure the Chief Minister will also be fully aware of the sensitivities of the livelihoods of the thousands of people affected by decisions such as this. They are, in certain circumstances, existential.

It is not a hypothetical scenario. This is a very real and live issue, which he himself mentioned in the New Year's Eve Message and then followed this up with a broadcast on the radio, so there is an understanding and there is a reality that has been elevated to the public domain. This is not something that I am asking for unfairly. What I am asking for is simply the basic information of the Government's position on these areas, albeit some areas are unable to be specified, but can

some of the important issues such as will it be a tax on the selling price rather than on the cost of goods ...? This is something which is very basic and is not part of detailed technical negotiations. Hitherto the trade organisations – I beg your indulgence, Madam Speaker – and businesses have been informed that the tax will be on the cost of goods. It is a hugely different concept, and all we are asking for is ... When the Chief Minister has mentioned that they are that close, within kissing distance of a trade deal, the Chief Minister must know what his position is on this, and that is what I am asking.

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Yes, Madam Speaker, I do know my position.

**Hon. C A Sacarello:** And would the Chief Minister care to share that with the House and the rest of the populace?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I do not regard people as the populace. I regard people as my employers, the people I owe myself to.

For the reasons I have already given this House, I am unable to provide further information; not because I do not want to, not because I would not wish to, but because I am unable to do so in the interests of the negotiation delivering the best outcome for Gibraltar and for the people that the hon. Gentleman is saying he is concerned about. Because I am equally, if not more, concerned about them, I do not want them to have any existential challenges. I want this deal to be good for traders in Gibraltar and for everybody else in Gibraltar, and for that reason, although it is difficult, I prefer to take the difficult route of saying I cannot say more at this stage.

**Hon. C A Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, just one final question. Why has the Chief Minister, for four or five years, led the Trade Organisations to believe that this was always going to be a tax on the cost of goods, similar to our import duty at the moment, and now, all of a sudden, there has been a change of heart, a change of negotiation? Was that something that was always intended or is that something he has been forced into?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** That is not the case, Madam Speaker. I have had many discussions with the Trading Organisations, where all the options have been discussed from the very beginning, so the hon. Gentleman's premise is entirely incorrect in every respect.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

#### Q113-18/2025

##### West View reclamation project –

**Assessment re effect on marine-related activities; commencement of works;  
finalisation of contractual arrangements; amount of Eastside rubble to be made available;  
financial and land arrangements; parties allowed to deposit rubble**

**Clerk:** Question 113. The Hon. D J Bossino.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** What studies or assessments have been undertaken as respects the effects of the recently announced reclamation project in front of the Harbour Views promenade to the marine-related activities in the area?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer with Questions 114 to 118.

**Clerk:** Question 114. The Hon. D J Bossino.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** When is it expected that the works in relation to the recently announced reclamation will commence?

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**Clerk:** Question 115. The Hon. D J Bossino.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** When will the contractual arrangements in respect of the recently announced reclamation project be completed such that the Chief Minister will be able to make a detailed statement in respect of it?

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**Clerk:** Question 116. The Hon. D J Bossino.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** What amount of rubble in cubic metres will be made available from the Eastside for the recently announced reclamation project?

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**Clerk:** Question 117. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, will the Government publish the heads of terms entered in respect of the proposed New Harbour reclamation or provide further details on the financial or land arrangements?

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**Clerk:** Question 118. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** In respect of the harbour reclamation announced in the Chief Minister's New Year Message, will parties other than those who signed the heads of terms with the Government be allowed to deposit rubble at the reclamation; and, if so, at what cost?

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**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, a number of technical studies have been carried out in relation to the West View reclamation. These include a wave study to determine the effects of the reclamation on the wave regime within the harbour, and a navigational study to assess the impact on the movement of vessels within the area.

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Works in relation to the West View reclamation are expected to commence as soon as the project has completed the planning process.

Work is currently ongoing to conclude the contractual agreement. An announcement will be made at the appropriate time once that process is completed.

The developer for the West View reclamation will use whatever amount of rubble is deemed necessary from their stockpile at the Eastside to create the land. The exact amount cannot be stated, as it can vary depending on the final design for the reclamation, which will be finally determined after the DPC and EIA process has been completed. None of these processes are expected to delay the project at all.

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As was stated at the time of the public announcement of the West View reclamation, the project will be delivered at no cost to the Government. The Government will end up owning 60% of the total area created at no cost to it. The Government will not publish the heads of terms, but once the contractual arrangements are finalised a further announcement will be made about the final details of the contractual arrangements.

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The intention in relation to the West View reclamation is for the land to be created using rubble from the developer's stockpile on the Eastside.

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**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** In relation to Question 118, do I take it from the very last part of the Chief Minister's answer, when he says the intention is to use the Eastside rubble, that the answer to the question is that no other parties will be depositing rubble there?

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Only Eastside rubble, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** In relation to Question 116, which in effect deals with the availability of rubble from the Eastside project to create, as I understand it, at no cost to the Government, the new reclamation within the Port area, when the Chief Minister said in his New Year's Message that it will not require the Government to fund the costs of the reclamation up front, can he be more specific? Does that mean that there will not necessarily be an initial cost but there may be an eventual cost to the Gibraltar Government? Or is it the position, as I think the Chief Minister was suggesting, that there will be no cost at any point in time to the Gibraltar Government in respect of this reclamation?

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** The latter, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** I am grateful. Madam Speaker, in relation to the provision of rubble, if I can refer the Hon. the Chief Minister to the statement that was made originally when the Eastside project was announced on 18th October 2021, he may recall that it was stated that 200,000 m<sup>3</sup> would be removed by the Government for two purposes: one was to assist in respect of phase 2 of the Hassan Centenary Terraces project, and also the provision for the creation of the first phase of Victoria Keys. Given that further rubble will be made available to this project, is there any risk that the Eastside reclamation will be prejudiced in any way and will not be going ahead? Can he assuage concerns in relation to that, which have reached us?

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** There should be no such concerns, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** I am sorry – there should be no concerns or there are no concerns?

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** There should be no such concerns, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** Can the Hon. the Chief Minister, given the timeline that he provided in response to questions posed to him by Jonathan Scott on the *Today* programme ... that he was confident that, in effect, keys would be delivered to potential residents of this particular project, according to my calculations, in January 2028 or five or six months thereafter, can he be more specific as to the commencement of the reclamation works? If the Government is going to be keeping to that rather ambitious timeline, in our view, I think it would be fair to understand what the position is in relation to the start line in terms of the commencement of the reclamation works. I do not think that the Chief Minister was particularly informative as far as that particular issue is concerned.

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, as we do not share any of those concerns, we do not feel the need to be more specific.

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**Hon. D J Bossino:** In relation to the first question I posed, the Chief Minister made a reference – this was in relation to studies and assessments and it was with a specific focus on marine-related activities ... The Hon. the Chief Minister, from my recollection of his answer, referred to wave movements and issues like that, but I was thinking more about other areas of human activity, for example the discharging of the sports-related activity in relation to rowing, and I understand that there have also been concerns raised by port operators about the creation

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of this promenade. Have any detailed studies and assessments been undertaken in relation to those areas that I have just referred to in my supplementary?

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** All of those matters have been considered by the Chief Technical Officer and those advising the Government, Madam Speaker.

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**Hon. D J Bossino:** May I ask one further specific question in relation to that question on the Order Paper? The extension jetty, from the designs that we have seen, does not feature. I think this was created as a result of a private company at its own expense. Can the Hon. the Chief Minister give some information to the House as to what the issues are in relation to that? Is it the case that the extension jetty will, in fact, be removed, or was it incorrectly removed from the photograph that we have seen of the expected reclamation project?

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the extension jetty was created by the Ministry of Defence some 40 or 50 years ago. It was not created by any private entity in Gibraltar. The extension jetty will be demolished. The hon. Gentleman's firm represents the party that currently operates the extension jetty: I wonder whether he wants to declare a conflict of interest.

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**Hon. D J Bossino:** I am happy to do so, if it is correct that we are acting in relation to this matter; I was not aware.

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**Madam Speaker:** A further supplementary on any of the questions? Next question.

#### Q119-20/2025

#### Eastside project –

#### Whether communications received from Spanish or UK governments or Junta de Andalucía following comments made by Spanish Foreign Minister

**Clerk:** Question 119. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, has the Gibraltar Government received any formal communication from the Spanish Government or the United Kingdom in respect of or following the recently reported comments of the Spanish Foreign Minister in relation to the Eastside project?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer with Question 120.

**Clerk:** Question 120. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Has the Gibraltar Government received any formal or informal communication from the Junta de Andalucía or its President in respect of or following the recently reported comments of the Spanish Foreign Minister in relation to the Eastside project?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the UK Government received a note verbale from the Spanish Government on this matter dated 5th December 2024, which the UK Government has

shared with HM Government of Gibraltar. This is, of course, inconsequential, as the reclamation is indisputably British waters and has, in environmental terms, been approved even by the European Union Commission during our period of membership of the EU. The works to follow are coastal protection works for the existing reclamation.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Is the Chief Minister aware whether the United Kingdom has replied to the Note Verbale?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** I am, Madam Speaker, but I am not at liberty to share anything in relation to that, because it is not information that I own; it is information that another Party owns.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see. The Government issued a press release on the eve of Christmas, headed 'The Eastside project is indisputably on British waters', a position with which, of course, we concur. Has the Government directly informed the Spanish Government of its position, other than by press release, given that it is also in negotiations with them on a wider sphere and the person who wrote those letters to the Junta de Andalucía was the direct interlocutor?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Repeatedly.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q121-23/2025**

**Victoria Keys reclamation project –  
Current and expected maximum size of plot adjoining Coaling Island;  
envisaged size of development;  
update re contractual and financial agreements, lease and development licence**

**Clerk:** Question 121. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, how big is the current reclaimed plot adjoining Coaling Island that would form part of the proposed Victoria Keys development, in square metres?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer with Questions 122 and 123.

**Clerk:** Question 122. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** What is the current expected maximum size of the reclamation adjoining Coaling Island that would form part of the proposed Victoria Keys development, in metres, and the current and envisaged size of the proposed development itself?

**Clerk:** Question 123. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Will the Government update the House as to whether it has now entered into contractual agreements or financial agreements, a lease or development licence in respect of the Victoria Keys project?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, as at 16th January 2025, an area of 16,250 m<sup>2</sup> has been reclaimed at what we are calling Coaling Island. It is not possible at this stage to say what the total size of Victoria Quays will be or the size of the development to be built on it, as it remains subject to DPC and EIA considerations. The Government continues to be involved in negotiations over the Victoria Keys project and will make an announcement once the arrangements are finalised.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Given that it is coming up to almost six years since the Government, with great fanfare, announced the Victoria Keys development and it became the centrefold of its 2019 Election manifesto, does the Government have any expectations in case of timescale on the conclusion of these longstanding negotiations?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** I have told the hon. Gentleman repeatedly, Madam Speaker, that whenever I am negotiating with anyone I never put a deadline on those negotiations because if I do I make the negotiation harder for myself. I know he would like negotiations to be harder for me; I am not going to fall into that trap.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I understand he has said that previously, but he also created expectations in April 2019 and it became the centrefold of his Election manifesto, so does he not think that the people of Gibraltar might share our view that it is rather peculiar that he is still negotiating six years on?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, because they put me here and put him there at the Election that followed that one.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q124/2025**  
**EU treaty –**  
**Update on talks**

**Clerk:** Question 124. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, will the Chief Minister update the House on talks with a view to exploring the possibility of agreeing a treaty on a new relationship with the EU for Gibraltar?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, in recent statements from 20th January, the Spanish Foreign Minister, Jose Manuel Alvarez, underlined that whilst there is no fixed date for the conclusion of our negotiations he remained convinced that a deal would be reached. Mr Alvarez knows that I share that sense of optimism, and I take from the unwavering commitment that all sides of these negotiations have demonstrated that all remain of the view that arriving at a deal which crosses none of our collective red lines is the best way forward for Gibraltar and the surrounding area of Spain. I am certain that there is a way through; indeed, we have proposed what that way through should be.

Madam Speaker, we have made so much progress. We have found solutions to problems which seemed insurmountable. Through dialogue, by working together, we have moved forward in ways which could only have been dreamt of in those dark Margallo days. We have come so



far, but we are not there yet. We need to take just a few final steps together on this journey which we started so long ago; and do so we will. In a marathon, of course, it is the last mile that is the hardest. In these negotiations it is the last 0.1% that is the hardest. Preparations for technical discussions, which will soon be convened, continue on a daily basis and I look forward soon to a further meeting of principals, at which I am sure that we will resolve the thorniest of issues which separate us from getting to the destination we all clearly want to get to.

At every stage I have been clear about the state of progress of negotiations and have always made clear to Gibraltar and our people where we are on this, despite being faced with untrue, ungenerous and unfair statements from the Leader of the Opposition about the state of progress of negotiations. What I have told the public, what I am telling the House today and what I said at the Election is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and it ill behoves the only politician in our history to have been determined by a motion of this House to have misled it, to suggest that I have failed in my sacred duty of candour to our people. The only lie in this debate is the suggestion that this negotiation could be done quicker if the result was to be safe, secure and beneficial for our people, which is the only result I am prepared to return with, however long it takes to get the final 0.1% left to agree.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, the Chief Minister knows he has our support in trying to land a safe and beneficial agreement if one can be delivered. We will make the judgement as to whether it is safe and beneficial if and when an agreement is reached. We will also, however, continue robustly to remind people that in our view, when he mentioned that he was 0.01% away from doing a deal 16 months ago, it cannot have been true, whatever he says outside or in this House.

On the substantive negotiations and the original question, which is about the update, can he say whether the issue of the current obstacles that may remain, the issues that need to be resolved now, are they all within a particular bag of issues – for example, mobility of persons – or are they also about goods?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, if that is his view, it is myopic and it is wrong because it was true and it is true and it involves things in various bags.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** He mentioned that there are regular technical meetings between officials and that he looked forward to a meeting of principals soon. Is there a meeting of principals in the diary?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** There is not, Madam Speaker, but they are announced when they happen, not before, for reasons related to security etc.

**Madam Speaker:** I understand that that is the end of the questions.

## Questions for Written Answer

**Clerk:** Answers to Written Questions.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I have the honour to lay the answers to Written Questions W1/2025 to W27/2025.

**Procedural –  
Questions to Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change  
to be answered in writing**

985     **Madam Speaker:** I am aware that there were some questions on the Order Paper directed to the Hon. Minister Cortes. I remind the Hon. Opposition Members that those questions will automatically be converted to written questions unless Members request otherwise.

**Adjournment**

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I now have the honour to move that the House should adjourn *sine die*.

990     **Madam Speaker:** I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn *sine die*.

         I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn *sine die*. Those in favour? **(Members: Aye.)** Those against? Passed.

         This House will now adjourn *sine die*.

*The House adjourned at 1.10 p.m.*