

## **STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION**

59/2010

10 May 2010

The Opposition continues to receive complaints regarding the activities of divers from Spain in Camp Bay. This problem becomes more acute when the weather improves and greater use is made of the beach by members of the public who literally at times have had to step around the divers when making their way in and out of the sea.

The Opposition has been pressing the Government for many years to tackle the free for all that exists and they have done precious little. The diving companies, many of them based in Spain, simply drive across the border in their vans, unload their equipment and sometimes their boats in full public view and proceed with the diving activity. When they have finished they simply pack up and leave.

There are a number of serious issues which arise from all this. The tragic death of a German diver last year drew attention to health and safety questions that may arise in such situations. There is also the unfair competition for local diving businesses who find that the main diving sites are taken over by outsiders who do not contribute a penny to the local economy. Indeed, there have been claims that outside operators do not have to pay the annual port license fee, they do not adhere to port regulations, they do not register their staff with the ETB nor do they pay any tax, social insurance or import duty on the equipment that they use.

In 2005 Shadow Minister for Commercial Affairs Dr Joseph Garcia drew attention to these issues of unfair competition in Parliament and asked Government whether they had any plans to regulate the industry. The Government had no such plans at the time and maintained that there were already laws in place to prevent business from being carried out in Gibraltar without registration at the Employment Service, the Income Tax Department and the Social Security Office.

When Dr Garcia pressed the matter again, in 2009, the Government advised that they were reviewing the possibility of licensing and regulating diving in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters. In February this year Dr Garcia raised the matter again only to be told that there was ongoing internal work in progress, that the Government did not think it appropriate to say what options it was considering and that they would make a policy announcement when they wished to do so.

The Government have allowed the problem to escalate over the years through their inactivity and the low priority that has been accorded to this issue. In the meantime, local companies have been put out of business, our maritime environment is being threatened and users of Camp Bay have had to put up with it year after year. The

flippant and arrogant nature of the Government's response in February shows that they simply could not care less.