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PRESS RELEASE

No: 536/2012

Date: 23rd August 2012

Government policy on fishing is based precisely on respect for the law

It is beyond belief that the Leader of the Opposition should claim that the jurisdiction of our courts and the authority of the RGP are being brought into disrepute by the policy of the Government in relation to commercial fishing in Gibraltar waters, when this policy is based precisely on upholding the law and the independence of the police.

The irony is that the agreement that Mr Caruana struck with the Spanish fishermen in 1999 purported to allow fishing with nets in Gibraltar waters even though this was against the law.

It was clearly, therefore, Mr Caruana and his Government who brought the jurisdiction of the courts and the authority of the police into disrepute by making provision for an illegal practice to continue, provided that it happened in a certain way prescribed by him.

A private agreement between a Chief Minister of Gibraltar and a group of Spanish fishermen to allow them to break the law cannot and should not ever have overridden the law of Gibraltar or determine how that law should be enforced by the Royal Gibraltar Police.

This is what the GSD Government did in 1999.

The crux of the problem that Gibraltar faces today is therefore a direct consequence of the legacy that was inherited from the mistaken and illegal policy of the previous Government.

The Spanish fishermen have become used to flouting the law for so long, that they have come to consider the policy of the GSLP/Liberal Government to allow the RGP to police the Nature Protection Act as they see fit as a breach of their "right" to continue breaking that law with impunity.

It is therefore complete nonsense for Mr Caruana to claim that these incursions did not occur under the previous Government because they got the Spanish fishermen to recognise that they were fishing under the terms of an agreement with the Gibraltar Government.

What happened is that the GSD gave a collective from a foreign country the right to break the law with impunity by making provision for fishing with nets when this remained illegal.

Mr Caruana has also conveniently forgotten that the heightened incursions by the Spanish Civil Guard since 2009 happened at a time when the fishing agreement was still in force and when the GSD were still in Government.

These became so serious that Mr Caruana made Ministerial Statements, himself called on local boat owners to shoot a flare gun if they were accosted by the Guardia Civil at sea and in effect "froze" the Trilateral Process. At the time there were often 5 and 6 hour queues at the frontier. At one point Spanish military and environmental protection vessels even interefered with vessels that were at Anchorage on the Eastside. The incursions also resulted in four armed Civil Guards entering the Port of Gibraltar and landing on our soil. These officers were set free soon afterwards after a series of telephone calls between the Spanish Government, Mr Caruana and the Commissioner of Police.

The electorate may very well wonder whether it was not actually actions of this type by the GSD that undermined the jurisdiction of the courts and the authority of the RGP.

This Government was elected on a manifesto which pledged to immediately stop illegal fishing in Gibraltar waters. This is what has happened through the independent policing of the RGP. The truth is that the Government is investing a considerable amount of time and energy in clawing back the respect for the jurisdiction of the courts and the authority of the RGP at sea which had been lost under the previous GSD administration. This includes the provision of two additional maritime assets, with more to come, in order to ensure that the RGP and other law enforcement agencies will be properly resourced to do their job.