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PRESS RELEASE

No: 134/2013

Date: 4th March 2013

Opposition trying to re-write history on fishing

The GSD Opposition seem to be embarked on a crusade to re-write the history of Gibraltar, in the mistaken belief that Gibraltarians have a very short memory. Their latest statement on the 1999 fishing agreement is a complete travesty of the truth.

The 1999 fishing agreement was an agreement with fishing cofradias which, despite what the GSD try to assert, de facto allowed the breaking of Gibraltar laws.

The agreement allowed a set number of fishing boats to fish within Gibraltar waters using their methods, which are forbidden by Gibraltar law. Therefore, a priori, despite the claims, it did NOT respect the Nature Protection Act.

It gave them a de facto right to fish, which they did not have and had not done between 1991 and 1997.

The Opposition know this, so is clearly deliberately trying to mislead the public.

Following the 1999 fishing agreement there was a tremendous amount of fishing in Gibraltar waters by the fishermen, both within and outside the terms of the agreement. This was conveniently never quantified by the GSD Government, so that, helpfully for the Opposition, statistics are not available. There was no Facebook in those days and so that community will have been much less aware than it is now. Government therefore rejects the allegation that there is more fishing now. It is simply that the GSD has a conveniently very short memory.

Clearly, the Opposition, which is so lacking in expertise in so many areas, is not aware of that fact that advocating 'EU-compliant nets' is over simplistic, and it is more likely that what they mean is 'Spanish compliant nets'. Such statements, in typical GSD manner, are mischievous as they send signals to Spain, similar to what they did when they bent to pressure back in 1999 and when they failed to spot the Spanish EU site designation nearly a decade later, the biggest faux pas in recent Gibraltar political history. The incursions by agencies of the Spanish state increased after this designation was recognised by the EU Commission under the watch of the then GSD Government.

It is important to recall that it was the then GSD Government, not the GSLP/Liberals, that identified in 2009 that the maritime assets of the RGP needed to be upgraded in order to allow them to enforce the law. Having identified this problem, they then did precious little to ensure that those assets were in place as a matter of urgency. It was only after the change of Government that three new larger and faster vessels have been provided to the RGP with one more to follow.

Moreover, it is also worth recalling that in the context of the fishing dispute, the previous Chief Minister Peter Caruana once told Sky News in 1998 that “all local laws must be respected”. He added: “Laws are laws. The Cornish fisherman don’t take the view that Spanish fishermen should be allowed to plunder their waters in the interest of good relations between Spain and the UK”.

It is a pity that the current Leader of the Opposition, who when Minister for Justice and took an oath as such to uphold the rule of law, does not agree with the views expressed to Sky by Peter Caruana that “all local laws must be respected”. It is also regrettable that the Leader of the Opposition should express the contrary view in 2013 to the Spanish media.

As usual, the GSD has left the GSLP/Liberal Government the problem of mopping up their mistakes and then move Gibraltar forward. Fortunately, unlike the Opposition, the present Government of Gibraltar has the knowledge, expertise and the commitment to do precisely this.