



PRESS RELEASE

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Budget Address 2021-2022 – The Hon Vijay Daryanani MP

Mr Speaker, this is my first Budget address as Minister for Business, Tourism and the Port. I feel immensely proud to deliver my maiden Budget address today and in particular, it is a huge honour and privilege to be able to represent our fellow Gibraltarians in the affairs of Government.

Mr Speaker, the Hon the Chief Minister appointed me as Minister for Business, Tourism and Transport after the October 2019 General Election. In August 2020, the Hon the Chief Minister entrusted me with additional responsibilities for the Port and Commercial Aviation.

On 21st June this year, the Hon Chief Minister asked me to relinquish my responsibility as Minister for Transport and devote more time to Marketing Gibraltar in both business and tourism as the world emerges from the shadow of the pandemic, at the same time attracting business and helping Gibraltarian business to grow.

Mr Speaker, I intend to set out the Government's various achievements since the General Election, as well as highlighting the projects which we intend to undertake during this financial year.



Tourism

Mr Speaker starting with tourism, I am very excited to be delivering my first speech on a subject about which I have always been passionate.

As I took over as Minister for Tourism in 2019, Gibraltar was enjoying an excellent year and looking forward to an even better year in 2020.

In 2019, the published figure for the total number of visitor arrivals, excluding non-Gibraltarian frontier workers, increased year on year by 3.1%.

The number of visitor arrivals by land, excluding non-Gibraltarian frontier workers, grew by 4.1%.

Visitor arrivals crossing by motor vehicle were up by 3.8% on 2019 and the number of pedestrians increased over the year by 4.0%.

This was partially offset by a decrease in the number of visitors arriving in coaches, falling by 3.2%.

Arrivals by sea decreased by 18.6%. This was mainly due to a drop in the number of cruise ship passengers by 19.4%.

Although the number of yachts fell by 10.3%, there was growth in the number of yacht crew arrivals by 5.3%. The reason for this increase is the growth in mega yacht and super yacht crew arrivals in 2019, up by 30.3% and 15.1% respectively over the year.

Tourist expenditure for 2019 has been estimated at a record £307.57 million, a year on year increase of 12.4% (£33.99 million). The largest contribution to the increase came from Excursionists



from Spain, growing by £31.06 million (+16.0%) over the year from £193.86 million to £224.92 million.

The numbers staying in supplementary accommodation grew by 21.5% according to the Tourist Survey data collected. Expenditure by this visitor grew by 33.6% up £4.65 million, from £13.82 million to £18.47 million in 2019. The Small Island Games and other sporting events will have contributed to this increase.

Spending by Cruise Excursionists fell by 9.9% (£1.65 million) over the period to £15.05 million due to the drop in arrivals. The average expenditure by this visitor actually increased by 11.8% in 2019, from £41.03 to £45.88 per person. 2019 was a year where cruise companies were repositioning their ships. Some had been moved to the Caribbean from Europe. Also, the uncertainty of Brexit was another reason for their approach in Europe and Gibraltar suffered because of this uncertainty.

Hotel arrivals hit a record high for the fourth year in a row in 2019. The overall number of arrivals increased year on year by 8.9% (+7,607) from 85,050 to 92,657 in 2019.

Tourist arrivals at hotels increased in 2019 by 8.5% compared to the previous year.

Room Nights Offered increased by 6.7% compared with the previous year. This growth was mainly due to the opening of additional rooms offered at the Holiday Inn Express and Elliott Hotel following an extensive refurbishment.



Room Occupancy increased to 69.4% in 2019 from 68.7% the previous year (+0.7 percentage points). Room Occupancy rates varied throughout the year with the highest rate recorded in June at 81.7% and the lowest in the month in December at 46.0%.

Average length of stay decreased marginally over the year from 3.1 to 3.0 days.

Therefore, you can see Mr Speaker that the tourism policies of the GSLP/Liberal Government have produced results for all to see. Indeed our results would have been even better had it not been for the global pandemic. At the start of 2020, we were forecasting more visitors by air and by sea than in the previous year. Our marketing campaigns in the UK would no doubt have also driven more overnight leisure visitors than ever before.

Having said that Mr Speaker, I most certainly did not stop the momentum because of the pandemic of trying to keep as much interest in the destination going and doing as much preparation for the future.

The Tourist Board has been tireless in its efforts to ensure that virtual assets have been enhanced and that the travel industry has been kept abreast of the great product Gibraltar has to offer.

The Tourist Board is also very active on social media, posting several times daily to keep Gibraltar at the forefront of people's minds with high positive engagement, so that we are at the top of the agenda as travel restrictions ease.

Gibraltar's safety has always been an important attraction for our visitors. Now more than ever it is important that visitors feel secure with us, when they visit this magnificent destination.

As a result of this energy and drive, we are seeing all our hotels full. I am delighted to report that we have had many days when every single hotel room has been full. I am extremely proud of this



achievement as I do not recall Gibraltar being in this situation before, resulting in having to turn business away.

Mr Speaker, there must be no doubt in anybody's mind now that this Government has done more to attract new airlines with new destinations to Gibraltar than ever before.

Visitor arrivals by air in 2019 increased by 13.4% year on year.

Visitors by air staying in Gibraltar grew by 16.1%.

Visitor's in-transit by air increased by 11.3%.

The percentage of total visitors by air staying in Gibraltar, however, continues to rise where it stood at 45% in 2019 compared to 44% in 2018.

In 2019 the number of seats used for scheduled arrivals increased by 10.1%.

The number of seats offered also grew by 15.5%.

The number of seats used for scheduled departures in 2019 increased by 11.8%.

The number of scheduled flights increased by 15.9%.

In 2019 the total passenger movements for all types was up 11% on 2018.

Passenger numbers were recovering after the collapse of Monarch Airlines in October 2017 and summer 2019 saw 43 flights per week.

For obvious reasons, in 2020 total passenger movements all types were down by 62% on 2019.



However, by way of comparison, Malaga was down 74% and Jerez 80%, according to AENA statistics.

A lifeline link to the UK was maintained during the entire pandemic, with British Airways operating services to London Heathrow. This proved essential for cargo, post, business traffic, medical needs and for students.

The number of planned summer weekly flights for 2020 was 40 per week.

easyJet's Edinburgh route was planned to start on 31 March 2020 but was unable to start because of the pandemic.

In the midst of the pandemic, this Government secured the re-start of London Luton services, but this time by a new carrier to Gibraltar, Wizz Air, the fastest growing airline in Europe.

With the UK, imposing a lockdown during the start of 2021, the early part of 2021 saw vital links to the UK continuing to operate. British Airways operated to London Heathrow, and easyJet continued operations to London Gatwick.

With the lifting of restrictions on travel from the UK on 17th May this year, recovery is starting to show.

London Luton services by Wizz Air re-started immediately on that date, and both easyJet and British Airways added additional flights to meet demand in May from London Heathrow, London Gatwick, Manchester and Bristol.

As I said earlier, from June, Gibraltar Airport saw more links to the UK than ever before, including its first link to Scotland.



It has also seen an additional two new airlines operating services, Eastern Airways and BA CityFlyer. Mr Speaker, more achievements by this Government.

easyJet started services to Edinburgh on Saturday 5th June, running twice weekly on Tuesdays and Saturdays until the end of October.

BA CityFlyer, a new carrier to Gibraltar, started operations to London City Airport, in the heart of London's Financial District on Friday 11th June, two weeks earlier than originally announced, to meet customer demand. Flights will operate twice a week on Mondays and Fridays until the end of September.

Another new airline, Eastern Airways, has also been welcomed to Gibraltar. Eastern is operating from not one but two UK regional airports, Southampton, the first time this airport has been served from Gibraltar, and Birmingham, bringing back this popular link to the Midlands that was last operated by Monarch Airlines in 2017.

Both routes are operating twice weekly and the initial plan is to operate all year round, also attracting tourism to Gibraltar away from the summer months and providing leisure opportunities for Gibraltar's population, as well as a vital link for Gibraltar's student population studying at or near these cities.



In summary, Gibraltar Airport will see 44 services per week to a record nine UK cities this summer. Given that we are hopefully on the back end of the pandemic, this is one additional service per week more than Summer 2019, four more than was planned for Summer 2020, and getting closer to Summer 2016 and Summer 2017 figures, which saw 48 services per week.

The opening up of new catchment areas in the UK will lead to unprecedented opportunities for our tourism, leisure, retail, and hospitality industry. Indeed the community as a whole benefit as the economic impact of this activity will benefit us all. Over the last two years, I have tirelessly engaged in one-to-one personal meetings with airline executives to achieve this. I will stop at nothing to ensure that we are better connected than ever before.

Mr Speaker, given what I have just said, the plain fact is that Gibraltar Airport will be served by more airlines to more destinations than ever before. This will bring in more air passengers to Gibraltar by air than before. This is excellent news for our hotels, our tourism industry, our economy and for everyone.

To recap, Gibraltar will be served by flights to London Heathrow, London Gatwick, London Luton, London City, Manchester, Southampton and Edinburgh, together with three new airlines – Wizz Air, Eastern Airways and BA Cityflyer.



Having said this, it is important we remain cautious and work hard on maintaining Air capacity to Gibraltar. It has been an extremely difficult year for airlines, some reporting losses of between 500 million to 1 billion Euros. All European destinations are suffering changes as airlines react to different COVID restrictions in different countries.

Gibraltar is no different and there will be a time that we will see change when an airline feels it can no longer sustain certain economic situations.

The recent cancellation of flights in August by Whizz Air is proof of this. I know the opposition was delighted to see Gibraltar suffer this loss, so typical of them, as they undermine and damage every attempt by the Government to lead Gibraltar to economic recovery.

I will keep on trying my best. Mr Speaker, it can't always be good news!

Mr Speaker, people will recognise and judge for themselves the excellent work that the Government is doing to achieve unprecedented connectivity at Gibraltar International Airport.

No amount of political posturing, negativity and desperate attempts to score cheap political points from the members opposite, will deter nor discourage me from continuing to work as hard as possible to point Gibraltar in the direction of a successful return to our former levels of tourist activity.



Mr Speaker, the members opposite cause a lot of damage and prejudice Gibraltar's position and I have, no doubt, that our people will question their intentions. My vision for Gibraltar is clear, full hotels, a buzzing airport and successful businesses. It is not easy, Mr Speaker, but I intend to meet this challenge head on.

Mr Speaker, whilst unfortunately the cruise industry is not just yet recovered, the Port of Gibraltar has been very successful during the pandemic in providing a service to ships that not many other ports have. Following very strict protocols we have ensured that crew changes and the provision of supplies has continued. As far as the cruise industry is concerned Gibraltar is now seen in excellent light and indeed these efforts were recognised by MedCruise during the second edition of the Association's awards, where Gibraltar was named as the "Western Mediterranean MedCruise port showing the greatest commitment during the pandemic."

I was pleased to announce recently that Gibraltar is now ready to welcome back cruise ships. Aside from many of the physical protocols that will remain in place, if passengers and crew have either a valid PCR or lateral flow test taken up to 72 hours before arrival, they will be able to disembark and visit Gibraltar.

Unfortunately, it is early to say whether this will be a reality. The industry as a whole has done excellent work to ensure the protocols are in place for the safe return to the cruise industry. You will have seen recently that I went on board one of Viking's new ships and saw the excellent facilities that included a PCR testing laboratory. This is something that most cruise lines are investing in and



will help us to ensure that not only are the passengers safe but also our community. The visit of the Viking included a meeting with the chairman of the cruise company, who flew in to meet with me to continue my conversation about them including Gibraltar in the future itineraries. I will carry on engaging with all the operators who visit and also those who have not in the past. This is a difficult process and it will take time.

One very important aspect of the port and cruising, which must not go unnoticed, is that we are now able to supply LNG fuel to cruise ships. Many cruise ships are now LNG powered and LNG bunkering is now in position and this shows our commitment to a cleaner and more sustainable environment. These ships would have gone to other ports in the Mediterranean but now will be able to come to Gibraltar.

We continue to be prominent within the MedCruise Association and engage in all the Seatrade events, ensuring that Gibraltar remains at the forefront of the industry. This activity has continued in a virtual environment for the last year and as always, Gibraltar retains its reputation as a very proactive destination.

Gibraltar's place on the Board of Directors of MedCruise, representing large ports in the Western Mediterranean also allows us access to the most up-to-date information for the sector.

I also personally maintain regular meetings on a virtual platform with the top cruise line executives.



Our campaigns in the United Kingdom and Spain kicked off last year. The campaign in the United Kingdom is entitled “Time to be Enlightened.” This was devised just before the Brexit scenario and continues reinforcing Gibraltar’s product to the British market and our recently coined phrase, “Your Great British Staycation in the Mediterranean.” We must not forget the attractiveness Gibraltar has for the British market, as one of the British Family of Nations. As destinations look to stimulate recovery by encouraging consumers to move locally, regionally, nationally and then internationally, Gibraltar’s British brand credentials will work well to feed a ‘home from home’ narrative which will encourage UK visitors to come to the Rock before other destinations.

The campaign is once again being supported by an extensive online and offline media campaign in the UK.

Clearly, this year has posed many challenges in terms of attending trade fairs and promotional activities, particularly in our home market in the UK. However, this has not stopped us from taking part in many of these events online. It is unlikely that we will physically attend any major trade fairs this year, until global fluidity in terms of travel resumes.

Before the start of the pandemic, we held very successful roadshows in Edinburgh, Bristol, Manchester and the London area and we attended FITUR in Madrid. The GTB also participated in the meetings and Incentives Forum Europe in Tenerife.

At the start of 2020, I also held meetings in the UK with the main cruise operators.



I attended World Travel Market in 2019, where the Chief Minister made a much welcome visit to the event. I look forward to him visiting again, providing his energetic approach to tourism in Gibraltar. I thank him for his continued support.

The GTB was, at the start of this year, committed to attend a number of exhibitions in the UK across different sectors. Some of these are transferred to future dates and some will continue in an online format.

One of the highlights of our events calendar here has been the Gibunco Gibraltar International Literary Festival and whilst we may not have a fully-fledged event this year, I will try that next year we will be able to hold the event to the level of professionalism and prestige that it has now reached. We continue to thank Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal for her role as Patron of the Festival.

These types of events offer great potential to increase social media reach and thereby increasing our consumer following for updated travel offers.

Mr Speaker, as we look forward to the future, you will know that the new Chief Executive of the Gibraltar Tourist Board is to be based in London. The short sighted concerns raised by the Opposition to gain political points, will no doubt fade into memory as the relocation of this task shows its advantages. The Government will take its time in making this appointment. I



will continue giving it my all as Minister for Tourism both here and in London when required. The GTB has an extremely well established and experienced team that looks after operations on the ground and will continue to do so in a very professional manner.

I have received extremely encouraging support from the industry for the relocation of the CEO to London and for our future vision. I communicated this recently in meetings held with the GFSB, the Chamber of Commerce and the hoteliers. We will no doubt be able to reach a larger tourism market for the trade and the consumer by having the CEO based in London rather than in Gibraltar. In these very complicated times, we need to be more ambitious and forward thinking in trying our best to deliver for Gibraltar PLC in this extremely challenging industry.

May I remind all once again that it is the GSLP/Liberal Government that has taken steps to market Gibraltar, sell the destination and invest in the product in unprecedented manner. As I have said before, we look forward to a recovery in the tourism industry following this pandemic and there will be no doubt in the minds of the industry and in our community that the Government has done everything possible to ensure future prosperity.

In addition to our campaigns in the UK, last year the Gibraltar Tourist Board launched a marketing campaign in Spain. This consisted of regional advertising in southern Spain on Cadena SER and Talk Radio Europe along with targeted Facebook campaigns. As a continuation of this, a dedicated radio programme on Cadena SER radio featuring Gibraltar will air soon. Television adverts also went out



on regional television along with a dedicated television programme in Spain last August. We also saw the return of some very proactive bloggers from Spain.

Not only has the Government continued to promote the destination to ensure future business but we also supported the industry through the BEAT COVID-19 support packages. In addition, we have remained in constant contact with the industry and have worked on future strategies in consultation with all stakeholders. The Government has done everything possible under the circumstances to support the industry and will continue to do so as it goes down the path to recovery and growth.

To compete in the busy, challenging and competitive global marketplace we are invigorating confidence in Gibraltar as one of the safest places in Europe. This has been done by raising destination awareness and being ready for an anticipated high level of demand.

Gibraltar's swift reaction to the crisis has kept its population safe and Government economic packages have kept us stable.

Thanks to the excellent support from the UK Government, our population is fully vaccinated, making Gibraltar one of the safest places to visit in Europe today. Proof of this was that we were one of the first countries to be placed on the UK's green list and this has no doubt given us advantage, not only in the short term but for the medium and in long term too.



I have engaged with the industry to remind all of the responsibility that we have as a destination to make true that wonderful Gibraltarian hospitality, for which we are known.

The Gibraltar Tourist Board has continued to keep all lines of communication open with all its trade partners, overseas and Gibraltar based, with frequent updating.

It continues to regularly communicate with UK homeworking travel agents and the travel agency network through its online Travel Training portal, www.gibraltarttraining.com, through which the GTB is able to release updates about Gibraltar's current position.

The GTB takes part constantly in industry forums for weekly crisis updates on how the UK and wider industry are reacting.

Over the past year, the GTB has participated in webinars and virtual events through MedCruise and other entities.

As part of our efforts with the UK travel sector the GTB is running online educational webinars thorough AITO, the Association of Independent Tour Operators and ANTOR, the Association of National Tourist Offices and Representatives.

Last year the GTB launched a virtual destination platform to highlight Gibraltar's attractions in a 360-degree format and a docu-series where Gibraltar experts are able to talk about the services they promote. These virtual assets were marketed through online tools and social media and used



to drive viewers to sign up for regular newsletters, which in time will be able to promote specific offers to Gibraltar.

Clearly, the pandemic has changed the world and in many ways, how we do business. Those in the tourism, leisure and hospitality sector will have to rethink how they provide their products and services and whether or not the target market has changed. I am confident that, as is always in the case in Gibraltar, businesses will adapt and respond proactively and innovatively to move forward.

Recently we have added even further guides to the visit Gibraltar website, giving suggestions as to what to do in Gibraltar from between one and seven days. This has been done to reflect the expected demand for longer stays on the rock this year due to our position as a green list country.

Mr Speaker, the media attention that I have personally worked so hard on to bring Gibraltar to the forefront of the industry has been unprecedented. Over the last year my teams and I have hosted prestigious journalists, particularly from the UK, that have been attracted by Gibraltar's marvellous handling of the Covid pandemic, our vaccination program but above all the excellent product that Gibraltar has in the tourism industry. We have been able to display our beautiful Rock with its unique attractions to a wider audience than ever before.



We were particularly honoured last year and once again this year to welcome Simon Calder, amongst other prestigious journalists, to the Rock. I intend to hold press events in London over the coming months, as I look to cement Gibraltar's position as a leading destination from the UK.

Mr Speaker, I must also thank all those in the local tourism industry that have weathered the storm and have worked so hard under difficult conditions and who are now are prepared to face a future with optimism.

I must also acknowledge the extremely hard work that the team at the Gibraltar Tourist board has undertaken during these difficult times. Not only have they been able to continue undertaking some of these very important tasks but also they have, in the main, been redeployed to help the Gibraltar Health Authority and other bodies during both lockdowns. They have worked tirelessly for the benefit of our community. I applaud their efforts and I am very thankful for this. I must also thank our team in London for having worked remotely during these difficult times and kept the UK trade and consumers aware of all our activities.

Mr Speaker, I would like to give a special mention to Nicky Guerrero who retired on the 30th June 2021 as the CEO of the Gibraltar Tourist Board. I wish him a long and happy retirement. Nicky has worked for 24 years at the GTB, his passion for tourism is evident and we will miss him.

I now move on to the Air Terminal.



Air Terminal

Mr Speaker, the Air Terminal played an important part in the response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and continues to do so now as part of the efforts by HMGoG to bring about the economic recovery of Gibraltar.

From providing lifeline flights to the United Kingdom, to assisting in the repatriation of our own residents back to Gibraltar and the many seafarers back to their countries of origin, the Air Terminal remained open and operational during the lockdown. We did not fare badly in aircraft movements compared to other airports, who unfortunately were forced to run down their operations considerably.

There were a total of 2290 civilian aircraft movements in 2020 compared to 4382 in 2019 which although showing a drop in approximately 50% in traffic is still a respectable amount in comparison with what other airports in the United Kingdom dropped in capacity.

Of the 2290 movements, 391 were Private aircraft and Charter traffic movements in comparison to 401 in 2019, which only shows a very slight drop.

The work done in ensuring that we had an air corridor open also assisted greatly with logistical concerns varying from the original testing of swabs and samples to the delivery of essential supplies, personnel and mail and ensured that Gibraltar always had a means of physically connecting with the outside world.



This was achieved in partnership with RAF Gibraltar, who ensured that the airfield stayed open for both military and civilian flights throughout the whole of the pandemic and brought about many instances of mutual assistance and support.

The safety of passengers and staff has always and will always be the top priority of travelling through Gibraltar Airport, and a whole series of measures were implemented aimed at mitigating the risks of exposure to the virus and these continue in selected areas.

Careful planning, an extensive cleaning and disinfection programme, modification of work practices and the absolute cooperation and commitment of all the members of staff from the different organisations that work together in the Air Terminal ensured that at no time were there any interruptions to operations or service delivery.

With Gibraltar being listed as a Green Country by the United Kingdom, a substantial amount of work has been done to get ready for the expected increase in flights and passengers, which will keep the Air Terminal at the forefront of the economic recovery process.

Testing facilities were also provided for passengers and these serve to add a layer of protection in order to further protect our population.

Mr Speaker, HMGoG and the MOD work closely on a daily basis to ensure that Gibraltar Airport operates in a safe and secure environment for all of its users.



The Air Terminal was also able to provide assistance to the MOD at short notice with the provision of optional parking for their transport aircraft during the pandemic when the North Dispersal, the aircraft parking area to the East of the Civilian Stands, was out of commission due to essential works.

Cooperation continues on all fronts with the common aim of achieving efficient service delivery and remaining compliant as we progress in a post COVID-19 environment towards the restoration of normality.

Mr Speaker, with regard to works at the Air Terminal, works on the relocation of the Handling Agent mechanics and the Airside Storage and Mess Room Unit were finalised during 2020.

The Workshops were finalised in February and the Airside Storage and Mess Room Unit in July, both providing facilities which were very much in demand.

Mr Speaker, may I take this opportunity to thank the staff at the Air Terminal, led by Terence Lopez.

I now move on to The Port.

The Port

Mr Speaker, before reporting on all matters relating to the Port during the last period, it must be noted that the COVID19 pandemic, whilst having a dramatic impact on all aspects of life, has not



stopped the Port from being operational 24/7 since the pandemic started. I must commend all parties involved for their commitment and hard work during this difficult period.

Bunkering activities and other marine services have been able to continue during the pandemic, but with additional strict measures being implemented to avoid transmission of the virus to the local population. Cruise ships have only been allowed to carry out technical calls and yachts have had to adhere to Public Health guidelines regarding crew movements while visiting Gibraltar, in the same way as all other vessels calling into our port.

Mr Speaker, despite the pandemic, I am pleased to report the Port Authority has continued on its mission in promoting Gibraltar Port as a centre of maritime excellence, along with its partners and key stakeholders and has received recognition for its proactive stance in offering the maritime industry options during the pandemic.

Whilst positive growth trends seen in previous years were starting to flatten somewhat due to changing global trends, overall port activity has remained reasonably stable over the last couple of years and we actually saw a small increase of 3.62% in the total number of vessels calling into Gibraltar for 2020 against the previous year.

Bunkering volumes have reduced very slightly over the last period due to continuing downward global trends, as well as the effects that the pandemic has had on global shipping. However, I am pleased to report that Shell are now fully licensed to deliver LNG bunkering in Gibraltar and we are already seeing encouraging activity in this market. Gibraltar's position is one of leading the way in



supporting the change-over to this fuel, which will significantly improve the environmental performance of shipping and is of paramount importance, and the Government is delighted with the progress and the keen interest that this is generating for our Port.

Mr Speaker, we also continue to receive approaches from other external entities who are interested in setting up operations in Gibraltar and I believe this is an indication of the strong reputation and continuing solid fundamental strength that underpins the bunkering industry in our Port.

Mr Speaker, the cruise industry has been particularly badly affected by the pandemic – 2020 saw five passenger calls before cruises were stopped from visiting Gibraltar. No passenger cruise calls have been recorded since the beginning of the pandemic but we have seen a sharp increase in technical calls for cruise ships, something which was very much welcomed by the Cruise industry. As the cruise industry starts to find its feet again, it is expected that some cruise liners will start operating shortly. The Government will continue to talk with all the leaders in the cruise industry in its efforts to resume services to Gibraltar.

Mr Speaker, unfortunately the Port's marketing strategy to engage directly with its partners and prospective clients has been curtailed by the pandemic but the Port Authority has participated in various webinars and virtual events with key organisations such as the International Association of Ports and Harbours, the International Bunkering Industry Association and Medcruise in its efforts to maintain Gibraltar's profile, albeit virtually. As with many industries, exhibitions and events have also been cancelled or postponed to later dates, but the Authority is ready to re-engage with those events as soon as they restart.



Mr Speaker, earlier this week I announced that the Maritime Week Gibraltar event will take place between the 8th and 12th November. This event is designed to showcase and promote Gibraltar's thriving maritime sector to a wider international audience with the aim of driving more maritime-related business into Gibraltar for the benefit of every stakeholder in Gibraltar and will follow on from the very successful inaugural event in 2019.

Mr Speaker, I now turn to the Port's finances and report that for the financial year 2019/2021 revenue received was £15,306,066.59 against the original budgeted figure of £15,144,000 – the financial year was extended to include 2020/21 but the revenue figure remained unchanged.

I am pleased to report that expenditure for the same period amounted to £13,465,031 allocated against a budget of £14,564,000 for the full period.

As for Capital Expenditure the Authority spent a total of £353,695 against an allocated figure of £380,000 – it should be noted that some of the projects planned were not realised due to the pandemic. However, we were able to improve some of the port's infrastructure with spending on new security posts, cladding of the harbour office, improved CCTV capabilities, new Bay lighting and general refurbishment at the North Mole.

Mr Speaker, both the senior management team and the Ministry for the Port continue to look at ways of increasing revenue streams further with a variety of proposals under consideration. There are also a number of projects which the Authority and Government are engaged with in its efforts to improve and enhance existing infrastructure.



Mr Speaker, this year the UK will be audited by the IMO under the IMO Member State Audit scheme (VIMSAS) for compliance of the IMO Instruments Implementation Code (IIC Code). Gibraltar being part of the UK flag, had a mock audit of all three areas of responsibility which are Flag State, Port State GMA (Gibraltar Maritime Administration) and Coastal State GPA (Gibraltar Port Authority). Minor issues were identified and both the GPA and the GMA are now working to correct those.

Mr Speaker, in mid-February this year, we experienced the first oil spill in Gibraltar in many years.

I had the opportunity to go out to the Bay with the Captain of the Port to witness at first hand the clean-up operation being undertaken by the Port Authority and other agencies, and I was very impressed by the scale of the operation.

My Speaker, thankfully this sort of incident does not occur often, but when it does, it is reassuring to see that we have all the protocols and procedures in place to ensure a rapid response.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved with the clean-up.

Mr Speaker, a week after the oil spill, a Hong Kong registered bulk carrier suffered an explosion aboard as the vessel entered British Gibraltar Territorial Waters in the Bay of Gibraltar. The explosion on board resulted in a total of four crew members being injured. Two crew members were treated aboard by paramedics from the GHA and the other two crew members were evacuated for urgent treatment at St Bernard's Hospital and subsequently transferred to Seville.



I would also once again like to extend my gratitude to all agencies, authorities and individuals who assisted in dealing with this incident.

Mr Speaker, the Port of Gibraltar has been and will continue to be one of the key pillars of the local economy and this is down to the hard work, dedication and willingness to do whatever it takes of the whole port community in Gibraltar. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my team at the Port Authority led by Captain of the Port, Manolo Tirado and Deputy Captain of the Port, John Ghio for their determination to deliver, which makes my role as Minister for the Port a lot easier.

Gibraltar Maritime Administration

Mr. Speaker, I will now turn to the Gibraltar Maritime Administration.

Once again, the Gibraltar Ship Register has retained its 'White List' status worldwide. This is reflected in the annual International Chamber of Shipping's (ICS's) 'Flag State Performance Table' for 2021.

The Gibraltar Ship Registry, administered by the Gibraltar Maritime Administration (GMA), is rated in the table with positive performance indicators in every aspect reviewed by the ICS. Gibraltar ranks highly in its overall technical performance levels by the 'Paris MOU' and 'Tokyo MoU' ports and is recognised as a quality register by the United States Coastguard in their 'USCG Qualship 21' system.

Being inherently global in nature, the shipping industry and all those entities who operate within it, have been impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic in some way. The GMA is no exception. The closing of borders and travel restrictions, have meant as like the rest of the industry, the GMA has had to adapt to ensure the continued facilitation of trade for those vessels registered in Gibraltar. Despite the challenges, the GMA has continued to support the managers and seafarers serving onboard the



Gibraltar registered fleet. Throughout the pandemic, the GMA has been liaising with all of the relevant organisations, agencies and governments and has remained unwavering in its support to its customers and the wider maritime community both in Gibraltar and abroad in tackling the effects of the virus. The GMA has continued to provide up to date information, guidance and recommendations to our operators during these most challenging of times and importantly have for the most, continued to provide the full range of registration services throughout the pandemic.

Mr Speaker, the GMA was subject to an IMO Instruments Implementation Code (III Code) audit by the United Kingdom Maritime Coastguard Agency (MCA). Internal preparations for the audit took place over 5 days in February 2021. The preparatory work began in October 2019 and involved a significant process that encapsulated the implementation of the main international maritime conventions and their secondary frameworks. The work also included the enactment of legislation, internal systems and process to ensure compliance with Gibraltar's obligations as a flag and port state. The work undertaken by the GMA together with other stake holders culminated in a successful audit.

The GMA also successfully completed several ISO (International Organization for Standardisation) 9001:2015 Quality Management System audits since October 2019. The latest was a re-certification audit in February 2021.

The loss of access to EU tax benefits and EU cabotage trade, as a result of BREXIT and the ongoing uncertainties of the situation, has had an impact on new ship registrations. However, the Yacht Registers have remained unaffected by BREXIT, whilst the Small Ship Registers has continued to grow.

The current ship fleet size remains at 206 ships, 897 yachts and 281 Small Ships being registered in Gibraltar. The current combined ship and yacht fleet at the end of May 2021 stood at 1103 and a total tonnage of over 1.6 million gross tons.

Gibraltar remains a Category 1 Red Ensign Group register and continues to offer other advantages. These benefits are now accessible to a wider pool of owners from around the world following recent



changes in legislation expanding the ownership eligibility criteria. In addition, the number of nationalities accepted by the GMA for seafarers serving on Gibraltar registered vessels has been expanded considerably, allowing greater flexibility to owners to recruit shipboard personnel.

In addition, the Department has undertaken a series of detailed studies focused on a post BREXIT and COVID scenario. As a result of the work done, the Administration has identified enhancements to the standard of service it provides and new incentives. The majority of the groundwork has been undertaken and the aforementioned enhancements and new incentives are expected to be rolled out throughout the year. These include enhanced online services, digital certification for ship and seafarer documentation, new incentives for yachts, a new website and simplified registration processes, all of which will make our registers more competitive.

The GMA is continually exploring new avenues to diversify its fleet by targeting ship owners in other regions, in close cooperation with local ship representatives. The GMA will be attending the London International Shipping Week in September and will also be attending the Monaco Yacht Show in September 2021 with other stake holders, all this COVID permitting.

The GMA will once again provide assistance with training to external entities with surveyors from Bermuda intending to visit Gibraltar this month to undertake Port State Control training.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the GMA's Seafarers' Division continues to issue a significant number of provisional and full-term certificates. Since January 2019 until the 25 May 2021, the GMA has issued a total of 3495 endorsements and 3501 provisional certificates.

In relation to domestic operations, the GMA continues to provide technical support to the Gibraltar Port Authority, Gibraltar enforcement authorities via a framework in way of survey and certification.

The Government's strategy for the GMA for the next few years is to continue maintaining its high level of quality service, increase the fleet size by bringing in business from new geographic areas



and further develop its position as a training hub for Port State Control training for the Red Ensign Group.

The GMA can be the international maritime gateway for businesses into the Gibraltar market and Gibraltar offers the full spectrum of maritime services, from finance to insurance, crew certification to ship suppliers.

Mr Speaker, I would like to express my gratitude to the team at the GMA.

Mr Speaker, I now intend to briefly go over all of the work that I led on over the last 20 months whilst I was Minister for Transport.

I am going to list items that my colleague Minister Balban included in his speech and give details of others.

Driver & Vehicle Licensing Department:

1. Online DVLD services and applications via the new e-Government portal. 13 new services were introduced Mr Speaker.

- Apply for compulsory basic training
- Apply for an International Driving Permit
- Apply for a driving licence
- Apply for a learner's licence
- Book a driving test
- Book a driving theory test
- Book a roadworthiness test (MOT)
- Buy or transfer a personalised registration number



- Change of address
- Change of vehicle ownership
- Disposal of a Motor Vehicle
- Duplicate logbook or road worthiness certificate
- Register a motor vehicle

I pushed for this during a difficult time at DVLD and I am delighted to see the results that I have achieved with our people now using these services with ease. I would like to thank my friend, the Minister for Digital Services, for assisting me on this.

2. The introduction of the motor cycle compulsory basic training course for riders.
3. The introduction of the latest equipment to test vehicle emissions.
4. Stricter emissions check on the road for diesel vehicles.
5. the introduction of training on the carriage of dangerous goods which is now carried out by DVLD rather than outsourcing this function as was the case in the past. My intention was to keep on training our people on this so that we can keep our roads safe.
6. Our transport inspectors who always do a brilliant job, have in this instance excelled in ensuring that COVID measures were being respected on our public service vehicles.

Mr Speaker, even during lockdown, the DVLD was operating a temporary counter at the Royal Gibraltar Post Office at 104 Main Street to serve members of the public that required personal assistance.



As minister for postal services I was able to coordinate this with the staff at the post office. I am grateful to them for assisting. I am also happy to report that I commenced the works on providing four new counters at the test centre at eastern beach. I look forward to these opening soon so those who prefer not to, or cannot use our e-services can attend in person.

One of my main areas when I was Minister for Transport was my commitment on increasing safety on our roads and to this end I have worked to introduce the point system on driving / licences. I had consulted with the COP (Commissioner of Police) who is very much in favour of this.

The legislation is now ready and I am sure it will be brought to Parliament by my successor. The same goes for the legislation on E-scooters.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the entire DVLD team for their hard work. A special mention to Mr Pepe Moreno, the acting Chief Examiner. Mr Moreno retired in April. He could have done so last year but stayed on at my request, I thank him for that and wish him an enjoyable retirement.

I now move on to the;

Sustainable Traffic, Transport and Parking Plan

During the past 20 months I have launched several projects as part of the STTPP. I will list those that my colleague Minister Balban has gone over in his speech and give more detail of others.



1. New Pay and Display at South Pavilion Car park.
2. New School Bus Service (S2) and Extended Route 7 Service Hours.
3. Old Street Signs – Phase 2.
4. New Pay & Display at Harbour Views Road.
5. Pay & Display - Ex-Queens Cinema.
6. Pay & Display - Coaling Island.
7. Changes to RPS Zone 1 - Additional parking in Grand Parade.
8. New Automatic Security Bollards at Casemates Gates.

9. New Transport Advisory Committee

This Committee was launched by me on 25th June 2020. I have always thought it is important to involve as many people as possible in the decision making of Government. The working group was chaired by me and its aim was to include representatives from different sectors of the community, relevant associations and the general public.

10. New Parking for Sandy Bay Users, Revised Timings on Sir Herbert Miles Road and New Speed Limit.

Civil works at Brian Navarro Way were completed on the 24th June 2021 to allow for the demarcation of 22 new parking bays and a new demarcated motorcycle bay, on the site previously intended for unloading oil tankers.

Beach users of Sandy Bay, which has been superbly restored by this Government, are now enjoying these new parking spaces, and are available to use between the months of April and September (inclusive) between the hours of 8am and 2am daily. Between the months of October and March (inclusive), these parking bays will be for the use of Both Worlds resident permit holders only, where



demand for beach parking in this area is low. With this, we can efficiently use the available parking stock in the immediate area for all types of users of the area. More importantly, the residents can now utilise this parking area, which was previously demarcated for the bathing season only.

In addition to this, the timing of the summer season temporary parking arrangements along Sir Herbert Miles Road has now been extended to allow for parking between the hours of 7am and 2am daily. This allows beach users to enjoy Sandy Bay for longer periods during the day and evening, and aid to reduce the speed of traffic in this area as the one-way traffic light system is operational up to 2am every day.

Further new speed calming measures have been implemented by way of introducing a 30 km/h zone between Blackstrap Cove (southbound) and as from the exit of Dudley Ward Tunnel (northbound).

I am extremely happy to have announced the reduction of the speed limit in this section of Sir Herbert Miles Road, which will go a long way to ensure the safety of pedestrians, cyclists and traffic alike, especially during the summer months where this area is frequently used by many families.

11. Additional Trial Bus Routes A, B & C (to mid Sept

The launch of a trial of new bus routes in Gibraltar, commenced on Monday 6th July and ran through up to mid-September. The key features of this trial were to provide an addition to the full existing schedule of bus routes. At a time that we were operating at 50% capacity due to COVID, this was great help for the community who wanted to use public transport.

New Route A – ran from the Trafalgar Cemetery via Line Wall Road to the Sun Dial roundabout and return in a continuous loop. This service saw 2 buses running from 8am till 1.15pm Monday to Friday providing further capacity for those seeking access to or wishing to cross the city centre via Line Wall Road. This service did not operate on weekends.



New Route B (B for Beaches) – ran from Trafalgar Cemetery via Queensway and the Europort area, on to the beaches and then returned via the same route. This service was operated by 4 buses that ran from 1pm to 7pm daily, with weekend services covered by 6 buses running from 11am to 8pm.

New Route C (C for Circular) – A circular route that serviced town and the West side/Europort area on a loop from Trafalgar Cemetery via Line Wall Road, Corral Road, Waterport, returning via Bishop Caruana Road and Queensway back to the Trafalgar Cemetery. This route operated by 2 buses from 8am till 1.15pm Monday to Friday, and from 8am till 2pm on Saturday and Sunday.

12.New Bicycle racks at ten locations in Gibraltar

The roll out of new bicycle racks at ten locations throughout Gibraltar, providing an increase of 70 cycle spaces complementing the existing bicycle parking facilities at key locations within the City Centre and other leisure areas.

The new locations are British War Memorial, St. Anne's School, Referendum Gates, Rosia Ramp (by Dolphin Youth Club), Casemates, John Mackintosh Hall, Glacis Road (by Royal Ocean Plaza), Laguna Youth Club (Glacis Estate), Plater Youth Club (Moorish Castle Estate) and John Mackintosh Square. These locations coincide with existing bicycle parking at Europort Road, Little Bay, Waterport Road and North Mole Road to name a few.

Gibraltar Bus Company

Mr Speaker, I now move on to the Gibraltar Bus Company which I dealt with during my time in the Transport Ministry. In early 2020 the Ministry of Business, Tourism and Transport in conjunction



with GibSams announced the rollout of an awareness campaign by way of informational posters throughout bus shelters, bus stop signposts as well as on the Gibraltar Bus Company fleet buses.

Mr Speaker, as Hon. Members will recall during the height of COVID-19 pandemic normal route bus services were temporarily suspended and only operated a dedicated school service for children.

Towards the end of 2020 various fully electric buses were tested on our roads to ascertain their performance given the technical and geographical constraints in Gibraltar's road network.

Mr Speaker, in line with Public Health Guidance, capacity on Gibraltar's buses reverted to 100% in the 24th May 2021. The night bus service resumed on the 4th June 2021 and will be offered for the summer months. This service was resumed despite a very limited use when it was last offered. An additional stop on Reclamation Road exit of Chatham Counterguard was introduced to attempt to increase uptake of the service.

Mr Speaker, finally I am grateful to all those at the Bus Company and in particular, the manner in which we were able to maintain a reduced service during the pandemic.

Mr Speaker the transport portfolio is a difficult one. Every decision I took over the 20 months was taken with good intentions for our community. With the health of our people in mind, with the environment of our country in mind and with the long term future of our children in mind.

The opposition are experts at bandwagoning, that is their style of politics Mr Speaker but we will continue doing our best for our people as always.



Office of Fair Trading

Mr Speaker, I turn now to the Office of Fair Trading.

During these past two years the OFT's role as a business regulator has continued to develop while adapting to the challenges that Covid-19 has presented. I am happy to report that despite lockdown, social distancing measures and the redeployment of staff for extended periods to other Government Departments, the OFT has remained fully operational throughout. It is also worth noting Mr Speaker, that the OFT was also the first Government Office to reopen its counters to the public after the second lockdown.

Business Licensing

The office has continued to receive business licence applications throughout these past two years despite the disruption the business community has faced. Since June 2019 the OFT received approximately 1,400 business licence applications. Incredibly, these figures cover both lockdowns and show that business licence applications were received every single week. This, Mr Speaker, demonstrates Gibraltar business's resilience in adversity. In fact, a whopping 32 applications were commenced in a single week at the height of the second wave. The figures therefore show that there have been approximately three applications received by the Business Licensing team every single day. This is a great indicator that the business community in Gibraltar is flourishing despite the adversity created by the pandemic.

Mr Speaker, the OFT's Consumer Protection team has during this period also had to adapt to the numerous consumer complaints which are directly related to Covid-19, particularly in relation to



cancelled travel arrangements in the immediate wake of the outbreak. Additionally, at the height of the first lockdown when Personal Protective Equipment was in short supply the OFT team also proactively assisted the GHA with the identification of fit for purpose PPE & testing thereof abroad. Furthermore, it also monitored excessive pricing of essential high demand supplies such as hand sanitiser and masks to avoid abusive profiteering by local businesses.

In 2021 the OFT launched its consumer awareness programme which seeks to educate local consumers about their consumer rights in various transactions. To date the programme has raised awareness on multiple subjects including Cancelled Travel Arrangements, Travelling in the 'New normal' and distance contracts which have increased significantly in Gibraltar as Covid-19 forced many of us to purchase goods and services online during lockdowns. The OFT has also reached out to relevant business sectors, so that they too may understand their rights and responsibilities.

Mr Speaker, in relation to the OFT's third major responsibility, the office has continued to develop its anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing role by implementing new procedures to adequately supervise the real estate agent and high value good dealer sectors. It has also issued 12 new or updated guidance and forms since January 2019 to support businesses to achieve compliance. The office has in particular dedicated significant effort to the follow up to MoneyVal's follow up assessment and report on Gibraltar's AML/CFT effectiveness which is to be discussed in MoneyVal's upcoming plenary at the Council of Europe in December 2021.

Mr Speaker, I am happy to have continued the excellent work of my Ministerial colleague and friend Albert Isola, to create a more appropriate and mature framework within which the OFT can operate. I have therefore worked with the OFT on the Fair Trading Bill (2020) to create a revised version



of this significant new piece of legislation, which is now practically in final form. This has been done in consultation with the Gibraltar Federation of Small Businesses and the Chamber of Commerce to ensure that it will support the business community in Gibraltar.

The Bill will make the establishment of new businesses easier and quicker by simplifying the business licensing process. This will include the introduction of a new database for the OFT and a new online application process which shall drastically improve the manner in which the OFT can provide its services to the public. At the same time the new Bill will protect consumers in Gibraltar as the new legislative framework shall allow the OFT to set trading standards for businesses operating in Gibraltar and encourage a level playing field.

Finally, Mr Speaker, the OFT has proactively made the most of the closure of public counters during lockdown to make small but effective changes to its offices in Europort with no disruption to the public. As a result, the office has doubled its counter space while creating a more usable office space for OFT staff.

Mr Speaker I now turn to:

Other Business Related Matters

Mr Speaker, in November 2019, I launched the Small Business Board the aim of which is to assist and foster positive development of businesses locally. The board consists of representatives of the Gibraltar Chamber of Commerce, the Gibraltar Federation of Small Businesses in addition to a cross section of local business men and women. The board has met on several occasions.



Mr Speaker, the Government fully supported the launch of the Business Improvement District (BID) for Main Street and surrounding streets. Honourable Members will recall that Parliament recently approved the Business Improvement Districts Act and the preparations are underway for the first ballot to take place. I am really looking forward to this project as it will inject some much needed sparkle to our town centre and its businesses.

Also Mr Speaker, I announced early on this year the launch of the Business Liaison Unit at the Ministry of Business, as a one stop shop for business start-ups.

The primary aim of the one stop shop is to assist members of the public with the formalities of setting up a new business in Gibraltar thus ensuring that the process is hassle free for the individual. The Business Liaison Team assist with all the required documentation which needs to be submitted and liaise with the relevant Government Departments to ensure everything is processed in a timely manner.

Post Office

Mr Speaker, I now turn to my responsibilities as Minister for Postal Services. I would like to commence by saying how proud I am that the replacement of all Royal Gibraltar Post Office vehicles to brand new electric vehicles in line with the Manifesto commitment for a Green Gibraltar was completed. This makes the Royal Gibraltar Post Office the first public Postal Service in the world to have a fully electric fleet of delivery vehicles. The all-electric postal vans were rolled out in December last year and now deliver mail across all areas of Gibraltar. The electric vehicles will allow the Postal Service to deliver letters and parcels safely and efficiently in the most environmentally friendly way



possible and help preserve the beauty of Gibraltar, both in terms of carbon emission and noise. Although the top motivation to go electric is the environment, the second biggest driver is the lower total cost of ownership when you factor in both direct and indirect costs and the savings over the life of the vehicle. The electricity charge is around one fifth as much per kilometre as buying petrol. The saving on fuel on the average usage of the RGPO fleet will therefore partly pay for the leasing cost. At the same time financially, the Government has not had to pay for the vehicles upfront and this leasing arrangement will allow us to continue having the most up-to-date vehicles and to have them properly maintained and serviced. I am delighted to have delivered on this manifesto commitment.

Most importantly, despite all the flight and transport disruptions worldwide and the many logistical problems faced during Covid 19 by Postal Operators, the Royal Gibraltar Post Office was able to provide a continuous non-interrupted service to the community throughout the pandemic connecting Gibraltar to 192 countries worldwide. Not only did they deliver our mail and parcels, they also worked closely with other HMGOG departments, for example, with the delivery of pensions, medical items and food to the over 70s and people with underlying medical conditions. This really was a team effort.

Mr Speaker, there is no question that technology reduces the use of letter mail and that online purchasing has significantly increased the volumes of parcels. We have worked hard to adapt and made changes on how we operate and serve the public's needs with the use of new technology. Throughout the last year, there have been improvements made to the online services provided by the RGPO. A new website was launched with improved tracking options, postage stamps can now be ordered online and PO Box renters can pay their annual rental fees online thus avoiding to visit the Main



Street Post Office counters. Over 600 PO Box (just under 50%) renters paid online this last financial year. The EPOST system now has 4500 registered customers who receive all their parcel notifications electronically. This reduces the amount of notification cards printed and speeds up the delivery process as the email is sent automatically within 2 hours of the parcel being registered in the system instead of the recipient having to wait for a notification card to arrive home.

However, the Post Office is not only about new technology and is part of our heritage and British identity. Seven new red pillar-boxes were introduced in various key locations around Gibraltar to make the postal service more accessible to the community. Furthermore, all thirty-four red historic Pillar-boxes in Gibraltar were refurbished and these are now being maintained, as they are also a key part of our tourist product. In my capacity as Minister for Tourism, I am looking forward to seeing tourists take photos beside our iconic red post box situated outside our Main Street Post Office which is probably one of our most photographed locations.

Mr Speaker, since 2013, the RGPO has coordinated a local Letter Writing Competition with the Department of Education. Each year, the winning letter is forwarded to the UN UPU International Letter Writing Competition. In 2020, Local pupil Alana Sacarello aged 10 at the time was the winner of the Gibraltar competition finished second worldwide in the United Nations Universal Postal Union Letter Writing Competition Alana, became the first Gibraltarian to reach the top 3 out of 980,000 applicants, for which I presented her with various prizes donated by the UPU. A remarkable achievement!



During 2021 and 2022, the RGPO will have the opportunity to focus in the future as we return to a new normal. A number of new express and insured mail services are planned plus the installation of electronic parcel lockers in key locations around Gibraltar is under consideration.

Finally, I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank the RGPO staff for the sterling job they did during these very challenging times”

Mr Speaker, it has been a baptism of fire for me. The last 21 months have taught me a lot of different things. I have given it my all, and tried my best always to have time for our people, because politicians are nothing without the people.

Every single morning since I became a Minister I have looked forward to going to work, so that I can improve things and to help our community. We all have petty differences, but what unites us is the love for our Gibraltar.

Since I was 17 years of age I used to sit in the public gallery and hope that one day I would be given the opportunity to do my little bit. It has been an absolute honour to discharge my responsibilities for our people. We are a close knit community, we are a family and we should all work together more often to improve our beloved Gibraltar. Unfortunately, all I have seen this week during my first budget debate is a venomous and destructive opposition. Mr Speaker, I was not expecting anything different.



Mr Speaker, I would like to end by thanking the people who have helped me during the last 21 months.

Firstly, my friends the Hon the Chief Minister and the Hon Deputy Chief Minister. From day one, 25th September 2019, when I signed up to contest the elections, during times when they have been tied down with Brexit negotiations and at the height of COVID they have always been there for me. I will never forget their support.

My cabinet colleagues, who have welcomed me with open arms, there are some who I have more dealings with and with some I have less, but we all work together as a team for the good of our Gibraltar.

My excellent Ministry staff, led by Gerard Teuma and John Reyes. From the first day that I walked into my offices at Europort, they have stood by me and supported me. Replying to my WhatsApps and emails at odd hours and weekends. During some difficult times their words of encouragement have made the difference, I will always remain grateful to them, they all know what they mean to me. Also the Civil Service as a whole, I have met many good people, all who have welcomed me, as the new Minister, with a smile and an eagerness to assist.

And of course, I would like to thank Mr Speaker and all the Parliament staff for the sterling job that they do for us. A special mention for the clerk, Mr Paul Martinez, I would like to wish him an enjoyable retirement.



Thank you, Mr Speaker.