

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

AFRICAN SWINE FEVER EPIDEMIC – PIG BREEDERS - INCOME SUPPORT & INCENTIVES-

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*By Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the African Swine Fever epidemic in mainland Mauritius, he will state –

- (a) why fair compensation is still not paid to pig breeders;
- (b) whether monthly income support and free pig feed are available to all breeders;
- (c) what are the breeding zones from which blood samples have been sent abroad, indicating the dates;
- (d) whether the risk of permanent endemicity is very high;
- (e) whether the Pig Section at the Central Abattoir will re-open and repopulation start, and
- (f) where matters stand in Rodrigues.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me from the outset to state that the epidemic of African Swine Fever prevailing in Mauritius is a matter of national concern and, of course, should be placed above party politics.

As regards part (a) the monthly income support as well as all other incentives and facilities, have been worked out by a Technical Committee in collaboration with the Federation of Pig Breeders. These are based on the herd size of each farm. In addition, Government had on 19 October, 2007 approved the following measures –

- (i) Existing Loan

The freezing of payment by breeders of loans contracted with the DBM together with interest payable thereon.
- (ii) In respect of relaunching of activities, Government will provide the following support and guidance –
 - (a) supply of piglets free of charge;
 - (b) provision of pig feed including transport facilities;
 - (c) veterinary assistance and free drugs;
 - (d) training of breeders by AREU;

- (e) supply of day old chicks and ducklings to pig breeders willing to start another business in the meantime;
 - (f) supply of protective equipment to all pig breeders;
 - (g) facilities under the Empowerment Programme will be extended to breeders wishing to move to new economic activities;
 - (h) setting up of a special loan scheme at the DBM with a maximum ceiling of Rs200,000 per breeder at 5% interest rate repayable over a period of 7 years including one year moratorium;
 - (i) payment of a monthly direct income support to pig breeders affected as follows -
 - (a) small Breeders (those who are part-time breeders): Rs4,000
 - (b) medium Breeders: Rs5,500
 - (c) large Breeders (more than 51 heads): Rs6,500
 - (j) registered workers on pig farms affected will be entitled to social aid;
 - (k) creation of a Solidarity Fund for livestock breeders, and
 - (l) non-affected farms will be given full technical support so that they may assist in the re-population of the national pig herd through the provision of piglets.
- (iii) There will be support from the Cooperative Development Fund (CDF).

A sum of Rs1 m. will be put at the disposal of pig cooperative societies affected by the calamity to assist breeders to re-start their activities or to move to other activity on a co-operative basis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, payment of direct income support to pig breeders, provision of animal feed and the distribution of protective gear over a period of one year is estimated at Rs35 m., that is, if we consider that it will take a year before the pig breeders could relaunch the activities. In addition, the following measures have already been taken –

- (a) the Federation of Pig Breeders has been authorised to import frozen pork cuts to supply butchers. This activity will generate additional revenue to the breeders;
- (b) in respect of supply of day old chicks and ducklings to pig breeders, to date 2,000 chicks have already been distributed;

- (c) meetings have been arranged with the Empowerment Programme to see how the pig breeders can obtain further assistance to engage in existing and new activities. In this regard, the Empowerment Programme has decided to provide technical assistance in setting-up a networking company and assisting the Federation of Pig Breeders for financing of their project;
- (d) the services of an expert from the *Organisation Internationale des Épizooties*, namely Dr. Gaston Funes, have been obtained upon request by my Ministry, and
- (e) a request has been made to the FAO for the services of a laboratory expert to advise on techniques of rapid diagnosis using ELISA kit. The expert will be in Mauritius shortly.

On 16 November 2007, Government has decided to release an amount of Rs1 m. as seed capital from the Prime Minister's Solidarity Fund for the setting-up of a Solidarity Fund under the aegis of my Ministry to cater for pig breeders, victims of natural calamities and for animal disease, epidemic and pandemic.

- (i) procedures are under way for the creation of the Fund through regulations and for its eventual setting-up;
- (ii) an appeal has been made to the Private Sector, JEC and AHRIM among others, to contribute to the Fund. Wide publicity will be given to invite contribution to the Fund.

2. The quantum of the money collected, of course, will be paid to breeders affected by the African Swine Fever and this will be determined after consultation with the Federation of Pig Breeders.

In respect of part (b), a monthly income support is being paid to all breeders registered with AREU. Payment for the month of October has already been effected. With regard to feed, distribution is being made free of charge through the 24 feed sale centres on a priority basis to breeders in low risk areas. Breeders in high risk areas are being supplied feed on a pro-rata basis as follows -

Categories	Quantity allocated	
1 - 20 heads	1 bag of 50 kg	Weekly basis
21 - 50 heads	2 bags of 50 kg	“
51 - 100 heads	3 bags of 50 kg	“
100 and above	4 bags of 50 kg	“

Breeders in low risk areas are being supplied with the normal feed ration. The actual production of feed at the Richelieu Feed Factory is 110 tons per month. Measures are being taken, as and when required, to increase production to meet the needs of breeders.

As regards part (c) of the question, blood samples from the following breeding zones have been sent to the Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute (OVI) of South Africa -

Date	Breeding zones
11 October 2007	St Martin, Roche Bois, Flacq
23 October 2007	St Martin, Pailles, Albion
8 November 2007	St Martin, Case Noyale, Albion, Calebasses, Roche Brunes, Rose Belle and St Hilaire
15 November 2007	St Martin, Palmar, Baie Topaze (Rodrigues), New Grove and Rose Belle

The results for the last batch are still awaited. The results of previous batches are all negative, except for one case in Roche Bois.

With regard to part (d), I am advised that it is very difficult to forecast the progression and outcome of a viral disease. Permanent endemicity will result following the spread of the disease among the population of wild pigs. At present, the population of wild pigs is around 6,000 heads. So far, 3 sites namely Wolmar, Case Noyale and Roches Brunes (Sodia) which is next to St Martin have been affected. However, it is to be noted that in these places, the animals are reared on a feedlot system and are completely isolated from real wild life. Stamping procedures and sanitary disposal are in progress. The Forestry Services of my Ministry along with the Natural Parks and Conservation Services are working in very close collaboration with the Veterinary Services with respect to implementation of strict bio-security and surveillance measures. Over the last two weeks, the number of cases reported island-wide for domestic pigs is on the decline with few sporadic cases which are quickly attended to. As at 19 November 2007, 7,787 domestic pigs have been disposed of under strict sanitary conditions. Thus, the risk of endemicity, although not high at this moment, will have to be reassessed at the end of this year.

With regard to part (e), the pig section of the Abattoir was closed on 11 October 2007 and will be re-opened as soon as it is considered safe to authorize the transportation/movement of pigs to the abattoir. Transportation/ movement of pigs will be authorized when:

- (i) the stamping out process and the disinfection of the infecting sites are completed, and
- (ii) pigs in low risk areas have been tested and found to be free from the disease.

In the meantime, arrangements are in progress to receive pigs from Rodrigues for slaughter.

Repopulation will start once all necessary measures have been taken to ensure that the disease has been eradicated. It is proposed to use pig stocks from Rodrigues, Palmar Livestock Production Unit and farms found free of the disease for the repopulation process.

In respect of Rodrigues, African Swine Fever has not affected the porcine population in Rodrigues. A visit was effected last week by a veterinary team who assessed the animal health situation in Rodrigues and reported the situation to be normal. The health of pigs housed at Baie Topaze Pig Breeding Station, including the 21 animals shipped from Mauritius to Rodrigues, are in perfect health.

The team had several meetings with the Commissioner for Agriculture, the Crisis Committee, which comprises of officials of Health, Customs, Environment, Police, Airport, Seaport and other stakeholders.

Preventive measures are already in place on farms, and at the airport and seaport.

In the course of special meetings held with pig farmers, emphasis was laid on the importance of prevention against the disease.

In a dedicated session, staff of the airport and seaport were again briefed about the importance of exercising extreme care at both points of entry.

The Commission for Agriculture has also offered to ship to Mauritius about 500 pigs for December 2007/January 2008 when demand for pork meat is high.

We are already working on this possibility, in consultation with the Federation of Breeders Ltd and Mauritius Meat Authority.

Mr Bérenger: As regards part (a) of the question “why fair compensation is still not paid to pig breeders”, the Minister answered not in terms of a compensation to be paid per animal loss, but in terms of the monthly income support already being granted. I am sure that the hon. Minister is aware that Dr. Gaston Funes, the expert from the World Organisation for Animal Health, in his report which he produced at the end of his stay here on the 25 of October 2007, insisted in three different paragraphs of his report that it was urgently required that such compensation be paid, to bring the breeders forward and to stop the spread of the epidemic. Can I be allowed to quote, at page 8, what the expert said -

‘A fair compensation mechanism between the Government of Mauritius and pig breeders should be immediately achieved in order to speed up the stamping out process to encourage prompt reporting of new cases and to avoid illegal

movements/slaughter of infected animals. This will also ensure effectiveness of emergency measures being applied'

And at page 4, Mr Speaker, Sir, if I can quote again –

'A deal on a fair compensation mechanism should be urgently reached between farmers and Government in order to speed up the process in problematic areas, and to encourage farmers to promptly report any suspicion of the disease in non affected areas'

Finally, Mr Speaker, Sir, at page 3, again the expert said -

“Stamping out actions are currently stopped/delayed due to the lack of agreement between breeders and the Government on the compensation mechanism. Once such an agreement is reached, actions should be accelerated in order to eliminate all potential source of virus.”

The expert urgently recommended that immediate compensation to animal loss should be agreed with the breeders. Can I know from the hon. Minister why this advice has not been followed?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me make it quite clear that Dr. Gaston Finess submitted his report on 05 November. At that time, discussions were ongoing and, in the light of recommendations, Government had not yet decided on the quantum of money to be disbursed to the pig breeders.

(Interruptions)

No, it's not! The hon. Leader of the Opposition has to take stock of what was said and what I am reiterating to him. In the light of which Government agreed to a host of incentives and facilities which we have worked out together with the representatives of the Pig Breeders Federation. It is true that what I consider fair may not be fair for the Leader of the Opposition. But when we compute the amount of incentives and facilities which we are giving to those who are vulnerable, the pig breeders, it amounts to Rs35 m. The choice was: either we give a one-off or the facilities are extended till they are relaunched. Government has chosen to dispense incentives and facilities to them till the time that they are able to relaunch their activities. The choice was between a one-off or stagger the payment till the activities are re-launched.

Mr Bérenger: The words “fair compensation for animal loss” are in the report and I am going to table copy thereof. Not only did he say that “fair compensation should be paid immediately, urgently,” but, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sure the hon. Minister is aware that he even went further and, at page 6, he recommended that -

“The principle of a fair compensation scheme to livestock breeders should be enshrined in the law as this would strongly encourage prompt reporting of diseases.”

Not only has he recommended that immediately compensation per animal loss should be paid, but that this should be enshrined in the law. Last time, the hon. Minister said that there was a survey being carried out and that the idea of compensation per animal loss would be reconsidered. This is exactly what he said last time. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether Government, after having lost all this time, is now prepared to consider compensation as recommended by the expert and whether the European Union and the World Bank have been approached?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me impress upon the hon. Leader of the Opposition that no time has been lost. In fact, we had been in constant contact with the pig breeders almost on a daily basis. Over and above what is being dispensed, we are setting up a Solidarity Fund and we are appealing to the nation to contribute to this Fund. Already, Rs1 m. has been credited to that account from the Prime Minister's Fund, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let me impress upon them that they wanted to do away with pig rearing in this country, Mr Speaker, Sir!

(Interruptions)

This is a fact! And let me tell them what we have done, Mr Speaker, Sir!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have stated ...

(Interruptions)

Yes, we have! We have not only approached the World Bank, but the FAO. In fact, I had a phone conversation with the Financial Secretary, Mr Speaker, Sir. But then we have to realise that Mauritius is considered as a middle-income country as compared to a country like Ghana where there had been a pandemic of African swine fever. This is a fact. In respect of the legislation, let me remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition that we are coming with a new Animal Health Bill because the Bill dates as far back as year 1925. It is long overdue. The Bill is being prepared which should have been done way back and we are going to introduce it into the House.

Mr Bérenger: My point is that the expert, called in by the Government, recommended immediate action for payment of compensation because, otherwise, cases would not be reported and it would spread. Now, we understand that the World Bank has been approached - so says the hon. Minister. Therefore, it seems that this question of a compensation is still valid. Can I ask the hon. Minister when have the World Bank and the European Union been approached for that purpose?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I had already arranged a meeting between the pig breeders and Mrs Wiedey. I had raised the issue with Mrs Wiedey and we have also

talked with the UNDP. The World Bank has been approached, but I have stated that because we are considered as a middle-income country, I don't know whether the World Bank will release fund as it did in respect of Ghana.

Coming to this issue of the legislation, of course, the legislation is being prepared; and I have stated that it was a question of either a one-off payment or payment being given till the activities are relaunched. When we compute the incentives and facilities, it amounts to Rs35 m. Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: The expert pointed out that compensation to animal loss is required for them to come forward. What Government has set up, that is, monthly income support, is good. In the meantime, the abattoir is closed, they are not selling anything. They have to survive, their family has to eat. We are for this monthly income support, but it does not solve the issue. They have to be motivated to come forward whereas what has been put forward does the exact opposite.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am glad that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is saying that the direct income support is a good thing. We are setting up a Solidarity Fund. We have brought together the processors and the pig breeders because during the time that there is a shortfall in respect of production ...

(Interruptions)

No! That is not a fact! They will be given import permits which they are going to trade off with the pig processors. All these are being done. I can't understand where the fuss is.

Mr Bérenger: The fact is that immediate compensation was recommended as far back as the beginning of November. The hon. Minister himself has confirmed and I am tabling copy of the report. Under part (b) of the question, I am asked whether income support and free pig feed with transport is being supplied to all pig breeders. Therefore, can I ask the hon. Minister ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Lesjongard, if you have any question to put, you will put it later on.

Mr Bérenger: My information is that pig feed is being supplied only in infected areas, but not sufficiently; and in the areas not affected, none is being supplied in spite of the figures which the hon. Minister put forward. Can the hon. Minister double-check on that? Because, of course, those in non-infected areas, they also cannot sell their pigs to the Central Abattoir which is closed. They cannot purchase food for their animals even if not yet or not infected. Therefore, they need free pig feed and transport.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, we held a meeting with the breeders on Saturday. This issue was raised and the matter is being addressed in a very forceful manner. There had been no problem. In fact, what we are doing in areas which are high risk, where the animals are going to be disposed of, they are being given feed on a *pro rata* basis whereas in areas which we consider to be low risk, they are having the full ration. There is no problem on that.

Mr Bérenger: As regards part (c), the Minister did give a number of breeding zones additionally to Roche Bois, St. Martin and Bassin Requin, but I am sure he is aware that in his report again, the expert pointed to other areas - Camp Carol, Baie du Cap, Fond du Sac, St. Julien and other areas. Have blood samples been picked up from those breeding areas and sent overseas?

Dr. Boolell: I have stated in the reply that blood samples have been collected in areas where there are infections and where the animals have come in contact, we have no choice but to dispose of those animals.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, under part (d) “whether the risk of permanent endemicity is very high”, I again pick that expression “very high” from the expert’s report. I did not make it up. Let me quote the report which contradicts what the Minister has said. At page 7, he says the following –

“Entry of the infection amongst wild pig population is more than likely with the resultant possibility of a permanent endemicity. The current situation of the disease can thus be defined as WORRYING AND UN-CLEAR ...”

But, more precisely, still at page 2, he said the following, I quote –

“(...) presence of infection in the wild pig population would complicate matters for this small island of about 2000 square kilometres and the risk of endemicity would indeed be very high.”

We know that, unfortunately, this disease has spread to the wild pig population. Can we know what the Minister considers the risk of permanent endemicity to be whereas the expert estimated that risk to be very high?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the risk is very high if pigs in the wild are infected because it would be difficult to exercise proper control. But those pigs that have been infected, the wild pigs are in feedlots and it is easy to dispose of them. However, I do consider that the risk of endemicity is high. This is why all the necessary precautions have to be taken but, under the circumstances, in view of the decline of the disease, though it is very virulent, it seems that we may eradicate the problem. But it depends on us to fill all the gaps, to act in a very vigilant manner and take all the corrective measures, which are being taken. The findings of the report are there. The Leader of the Opposition cited those reports and they are being implemented *in toto*.

Mr Bérenger: Under part (e), Mr Speaker, Sir, “whether the Pig Section at the Central Abattoir will re-open and repopulation start” I heard the Minister say certain things. Last time, when we discussed that on 06 November, the Minister said that it would take around 9 months whereas the expert, for his part, at page 5, he recommended a thorough depopulation with compensation per animal loss. He said the following and I quote -

“After a thorough depopulation followed by the disinfection of premises, plant and equipment, and absence of any new case, repopulation may start but this may take not less than 60 days. In the meantime, affected farms should remain free of pigs.”

Can I know whether this is the case and whether he has revised his estimates of how long it could take, which he expressed last time, for the Pig Section at the Central Abattoir to re-open?

Dr. Boolell: As far as I can recall I have said that the activities would start in 9 months. I have said that the relaunching of activities by the pig breeders may take nine months to a year and this is a fact. What Dr. Gaston Funes has stated in his report is that, in respect of repopulation, that may take 60 days. There is a need to have small piglets up to 5% of the total herd in one pig sty and then they will act as sentinels once they are free of diseases and the place is clean, then repopulation can start. All the measures are being taken care of. I am glad that we have enlisted the support of all pig breeders except for two; one in Bassin Requin where we are trying to convince him that he has to dispose his herd and another one in St. Martin. But everything is being done to ensure that the place is clean, that we eradicate this problem to encourage pig breeders to relaunch their activities.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will quote what the Minister said, as per the verbatim, on 06 November,—

“It will take around nine months to one year for pig breeders, whose farms have been infected, to relaunch their business.”

Under part (f) “where matters stand in Rodrigues”, may I remind the hon. Minister that he was absolutely categorical and he even asked our colleague to go and recheck his information because no pig has been sent to Rodrigues. Today, he admits, Mr Speaker, Sir, that 21 pigs were sent to Rodrigues. I would have expected him to apologise towards our colleague from Rodrigues and acknowledge the fact that he was both wrong and arrogant in his attitude.

(Interruptions)

It is a good thing that so far there has been no disease in those 21 pigs sent to Rodrigues. But we are playing with fire. Is the Minister aware that last time he told us that it is on 17 October that we received confirmation that it was indeed African swine fever? Yet, those pigs landed in Port Mathurin on 06 October, that is, 11 days before the results were obtained. When those pigs were sent, the Ministry were not even aware what we were dealing with. Can I request the Minister to be more careful in the future, especially as far as Rodrigues is concerned?

Dr. Boolell: I am always very careful. In respect of what the Leader of the Opposition has said, I do not mind apologising, but when I am wrong. What reply did I give to the question put to me?

(Interruptions)

Yes, when I am wrong and then I apologise.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: But what was the reply I gave to the question put to me by hon. Speville as to whether there had been transfer of animals during the tragic period and that is 'no' and I stick to my reply.

(Interruptions)

Let me tell the Leader of the Opposition that the incubation phase of that virus is 10 to 12 days. If any of these pigs were infected, this would have spread like wild fire. A little knowledge is dangerous and the Leader of the Opposition is trying to scare the population and this is what he is trying to do.

(Interruptions)

This is a fact, Mr Speaker, Sir!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Dr. Boolell: The Leader of the Opposition should apologise!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Bérenger: I also lay on the Table copy of the

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I have said order! Order!

Mr Bérenger: I also lay on the Table copy of the Entry Certificate.

Mr Speaker: I fail to understand what has been going on. The tragic period was not known at the time the pigs were sent to Rodrigues.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: They were sent and landed in Rodrigues on 06 October, right in the middle of the crisis, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I lay copy of the Entry Certificate sent by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly which says –

“This is to certify that the following animals landed on 06/10/2007 by MV Pride.”

There were 21 pigs, Mr Speaker, Sir. They landed even before we got the results of the blood analysis from overseas and the words used by the hon. Minister two weeks ago -

“I would invite my friend to crosscheck his information; this is not so.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, now, we know the truth.

Mr Speaker: It is a matter of interpretation.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me make it quite clear. Again the Leader of the Opposition is acting very irresponsibly. This is a fact, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Answer the question, hon. Minister!

Dr. Boolell: This is a fact, Mr Speaker. I have stated that the incubation phase of this disease is

Mr Speaker: I have said this is a matter of interpretation. I will ask the hon. Minister to be cautious in using his words. Let the Minister answer!

Dr. Boolell: The movement, Mr Speaker, Sir, was restricted on 10 October. Let me tell the hon. Leader of the Opposition that we held a ceremony at Palmar, because Government has invested into the setting-up of an Integrated Farming Unit, which should have been done years ago, and which they failed to do, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Yes, they were in Government then !

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Dr. Boolell: Over and above the Rs2 m....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! Order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: Shut up!

Dr. Boolell: Shut up! Shame!

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

(Interruptions)

I am going to suspend the sitting for ten minutes.

At 12.03 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 12.10 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: May I inform the House that when I suspended the sitting, three minutes were left for PNQ time to be over!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order ...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister, I will take the point of order after the PNQ.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister will agree that the services of his Ministry have wasted a lot of time at the beginning of the outbreak of the disease, because in a reply to this House ...

Mr Speaker: There is no need for the hon. Member to make a statement. He just has to state things that can make his question intelligible.

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. Out of the 1,406 pigs that died of the disease, can the hon. Minister inform the House how many of them died before the disease was detected? Secondly, did the Minister visit any of those farms?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, not only did I visit these farm,; but I have spent a long time with the pig breeders. I was on site at Roche Bois, St. Martin and Bassin Requin. Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a known fact.

On 24 September 2007, the reported cases of classical swine fever were made by the vets. It was very difficult to establish the diagnosis. The only way you can do so in respect of specificity of diagnosis is by sending it to a lab of international reputation. It was only on 17 October that the diagnosis was made, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr A. Jugnauth: Mr Speaker, Sir, now that we have the information that this disease has reached the wild pigs also, can I ask the hon. Minister what is being done at the level of his Ministry?

Dr. Boolell: Under the circumstances, we are grateful that it has only infected wild pigs in feedlots. We have no choice, but to dispose of all of them....

(Interruptions)

Yes, in the feedlots! This is what is being done and the feedlots are not far from St. Martin.

Mr Bhagwan: There are only a few weeks before Christmas and the end of the year. Last time, I raised the issue as to whether Government or the Minister would

consider the possibility of paying a special allowance before Christmas to the pig breeders, because everybody waits for this allowance to cover the expenses to be incurred for Christmas and the end of year.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have stated right from the outset that from day one, we have been holding the hands of the pig breeders, because we know the difficult circumstances they are facing with. We have given them incentives and facilities and when we compute all these, including the direct income support, it amounts to Rs35 m. We, in Government, are honouring our commitment and we will see to it that they relaunch all their activities, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: A last question!

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I understand that there are several other places where there are activities of pig breeding and which are not within the zones delimited for them. Can the Minister inform the House what is being done to identify these regions and what is also being done to ensure that these places where pigs are being bred are not affected by the pig disease?

Dr. Boolell: The disease is spread only between pigs and pigs, and not from pigs to cows. There has been a wide sensitization campaign to reach out all pig breeders.

Before I conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me make an appeal to members of the public to contribute to this Solidarity Fund. I expect that we'll enlist the support of all Mauritians to come to the rescue of our friends who are in a difficult situation.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I now give the floor to hon. Spéville, then to the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

(Interruptions)

I am sorry! Members must realise that at Question Time, they should not waste the time of the House. This is the consequence now!

Mr Spéville: In a document dated 04 October by the Ministry of Agriculture it is said: "Animals for Rodrigues: 23 heads". Considering that in Rodrigues they received only 21 heads on 06 October....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Spéville: Can the hon. Minister inform the House what happened to two other animals?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I cannot account for flying pigs!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: I have tabled copy of the Report of Dr. Gaston Funes, entitled “World Organisation for Animal Health”. It is spelt out in several paragraphs that he recommended urgent action for compensation per animal loss.

Now that everybody is aware of that - and the Prime Minister also -can I appeal to Government - better late than never – to do that urgently? And can I request that the World Bank and the European Union be approached by Government and not by the poor breeders themselves?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, in respect of the appeal to the World Bank, we have done so. I stated earlier that I have already got in touch with the Financial Secretary. As to the European Union, I have already talked to Mrs Wiedey.

As regards pig breeders, those who are part-timers are entitled to Rs4,000 on a monthly basis and those who are full-timers are entitled to Rs6,500, Mr Speaker, Sir. Much is being done. Of course, I am not saying that we are going to remain indifferent, but I can assure the House that we are reaching out to the pig breeders and we are doing what is humanely possible.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

Dr. Boolell: In respect of the point of order, I expect the Leader of the Opposition...

Mr Speaker: What is the point of order?

Dr. Boolell: I expect that he withdraws the word “*cochon*”, Mr Speaker, Sir....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I expect him to be decent and I expect him to withdraw it.

Mr Speaker: Does the hon. Minister mean to say that the hon. Leader of the Opposition used the word “*cochon*” vis-à-vis him? He told him “*cochon*”?

Dr. Boolell: Yes.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, of course, we have been discussing “*cochons*” - pigs - a lot. It is possible that the word flew around, like the pigs from here to Rodrigues.

Mr Speaker: Order! I would request the hon. Leader of the Opposition to withdraw the word.

Mr Bérenger: Well, I am aware that the Minister is not a “*cochon*”. If he took it for himself, it was not meant for him.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, hon. Leader of the Opposition...

(Interruptions)

I am on my feet! Hon. Leader of the Opposition, if you have used the word “*cochon*” towards the hon. Minister of Agro Industry, I would request you to withdraw it unconditionally.

Mr Bérenger: I did not address that description to the hon. Minister of Agro Industry, but to the Minister sitting next to him....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bérenger: ...and I withdraw.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition has withdrawn the word. Whether it was addressed to the Minister of Agro Industry or to the Minister of Local Government, he has withdrawn the word.

Questions addressed to hon. Prime Minister. The Table has been advised that PQ No. B/1108 has been withdrawn.