

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR INFRASTRUCTURE
BY THE CONNÉTABLE OF ST. HELIER
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 8th SEPTEMBER 2020**

Question

Will the Minister advise what the cost to his department has been this year of removing and processing seaweed and what the cost was last year; and will he explain whether or not he has assessed the programme to be successful and what changes, if any, he proposes to make to the programme next year?

Answer

St Aubin's Bay sea lettuce removal and disposal costs for the 2019 season and 2020 year-to-date are as follows:

2019		
Supplies & Services	Sub-contractors / waste disposal	£ 57,120
Supplies & Services	Equipment / Vehicle leasing & purchase / fees	£ 37,983
Premises & Maintenance	Equipment maintenance	£ 7,324
Other Operating Expenses	GHE internal staff costs	£ 9,642
Total for 2019		£112,069

2020 (to 2nd September)		
Supplies & Services	Sub-contractors/waste disposal (estimated)	£69,500
Supplies & Services	Equipment / Vehicle leasing & purchase / fees	£ 20,152
Premises & Maintenance	Equipment maintenance	£ 12,411
Other Operating Expenses	GHE internal staff costs	£ 13,060
Total for 2020 year to date		£115,123

As the Connétable will know from previous answers given in reply to written and oral questions on this subject, the presence, timing and density of sea lettuce in St Aubin's Bay each summer season varies daily and is dependent on several factors. Its occurrence in the Bay affects all four Parishes that front the beach with the worst affected areas often being the St Helier frontage. As a result my Department's removal and processing programme is to a large degree reactive using a number of techniques to meet the circumstances.

This season, which still has a couple of weeks to run, has seen the 'harvesting' technique developed by the Department in 2018 and 2019 become the pro-active measure in doing what we can to remove as much of the early season growth as possible.

Up to the week commencing 10th August, these actions had coped with the presence of general light deposits of sea lettuce with the collected clean 'green' material being taken to the Green Waste site for composting. The quantity collected in the main matching the site's maximum weekly processing capacity of 80 tonnes of sea lettuce.

The presence of heavy deposits on the tide line at the end of the first week in August coinciding with a week of neap tides, resulted in calls to the Department to take action at a time when tidal conditions didn't allow the landing craft, previously used for loading from the beach, to operate.

As a result of an urgent meeting between the skipper of the 'Normandy Trader' and the GHE Assistant Manager – Highways & Beaches, a trial to load and operate the vessel from the 'old lifeboat slipway' in St Helier harbour was agreed and permission given by Ports of Jersey for this to take place. Although additional transportation costs by trucking the collected sea lettuce by road were incurred, the dumping at sea operation was more efficient as 2 – 3 trips per day were possible compared with only one from the beach.

Some additional clearance work took place at West Park during the first week of September using contractors and the landing craft with estimated costs included in the table above.

This revised method of disposal does provide the Department with more options in future years for dealing with heavy deposits not suitable for composting or the other new disposal route of taking 'clean green harvested' sea lettuce directly for spreading onto pre-arranged and suitable agricultural land for use as a top dressing organic growth stimulant if spread thinly on approved land.

At the time of this written answer, both new methods have so far been seen to be very successful. As with most things, they come with a financial cost at a time when there are calls for budget reductions as a result of essential Covid-19 actions however the Department will as always do its utmost to use its available funds and physical resources to support the Island's best interests.

In summary, the options available to my GHE Municipal Services section for 2021 are:

Sea Lettuce Problem	Collection method	Disposal method / priority	Comment
Light deposits on sand	'Harvest' by Surf Rake	Spread on suitable land 1	Needs suitable land bank, incurs contractor costs
		Take to La Collette for composting 2	Limited to 80 tonnes /week, incurs green waste tipping charges.
Heavy deposits on sand	Scrape up by machines	Disposal at sea by landing craft 1	Contractor collection, haulage and vessel charges.
		Take to LW mark on spring tides 2	Least attractive option
Any deposits on stones	Not possible to move		Contrary to FEPA* Licence conditions
Any deposits on or near sea grass beds	Not possible to move		Contrary to FEPA* Licence conditions

. * FEPA Licence = Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 (Jersey) Order 1987 – Licence to carry out work

For 2021 my Department will prepare to use any of the above as the situation dictates. They continue to look for more efficient ways, both in cost and environmental impact, to deal with this problem.

One area under development is a simple method to reduce the sea water content of 'harvested' sea lettuce before it is transported from the beach either for spreading on agricultural land or for composting. This would reduce the bulk being transported and remove a significant amount of salt water which is a major problem and hinders any process. Work on developing a prototype machine will continue over the winter with trials hopefully being undertaken early in the 2021 season.

It should be noted however that this seasonal problem will continue to exist while the Island's water courses and water supply are at the top end of the nitrate scale that flow into a perfectly formed bay for the growth

of sea lettuce. In addition the wider marine environment of the Bay of St Malo, in which Jersey is situated, has a high base level of nitrates, due in part to the French agricultural industry and, as we are in a period of climate change that sees sea temperatures likely to rise, the problem will continue for some years to come.