

2.14 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding the future of tidal power and renewable energy in this Island:

Does the Minister believe that the responsibility for the future of tidal power and renewable energy in this Island is best shared with the Economic Development Department? If so, will he confirm that all and any changes regarding responsibilities for energy and any future energy schemes will be lodged for States approval and not just agreed by the Minister?

Senator F.E. Cohen (The Minister for Planning and Environment):

Currently my department holds responsibility for formulating renewable energy policy. The expertise of the Economic Development Department will become increasingly important as we move towards a commercialisation strategy. Consequently, I intend to transfer the responsibility for some commercialisation elements of the energy policy to Economic Development at the appropriate time. However, a precondition of such a transfer would be that the Assistant Minister for Environment will continue to have some political responsibility in this area of work. This work will continue to be guided by the Tidal Power Commission so ably chaired by the Constable of Grouville, which I am intending to extend to incorporate other renewable technologies. While the Assistant Minister for Environment will retain some political responsibility in this area I cannot commit to bring every administrative change to the States, particularly in view of the savings and efficiencies required as part of the C.S.R., a programme by which, as Members will have recently seen, we have already made significant savings.

2.14.1 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Given that tidal power and renewable energy power is going to derive potentially a significant amount of jobs and revenue for his Island, is it not in the least democratic to ensure that those checks and balances that this Assembly brings to those institutions are first brought for the Assembly's approval before they are agreed with Ministers and their Assistant Ministers who have oversight? The Assistant Minister for Environment, as capable as he is, has no budget and no capability of stopping the powers of the Minister for Economic Development once they have them. Would he not agree that it is now time to institute an independent Energy Commission to ensure that the best interests of everybody in Jersey, and not just those of the business community and the utility companies, are for ever enshrined in this House's caretaking?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

It is a long question. In principle, if the States decided that an independent Energy Commission was their choice I would have no problem with that. In the meantime I think that the work done by the Tidal Power Commission, chaired by the Constable of Grouville, is proving excellent. The assessment is currently that up to 50 per cent of energy can in the long term - and I stress the long term - be derived from tidal power sources. I do not think that it is necessary to bring forward to the States the matter of whether elements of this are transferred to Economic Development. Economic Development logically has the expertise to deliver in this area. The Department for the Environment does not.

2.14.2 The Deputy of St. John:

Could the Minister inform us how much to date has been spent by the Tidal Power Commission through his department, and what results, if any, have been achieved within this area?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

The cost of a survey to assess the tidal potential was approximately £50,000. The achievements so far have been quite remarkable. The Tidal Energy Commission has produced a report which has been presented to me. The reason that the report has not been made public is that there is a key sensitive area within that report that is currently being finalised in relation to access to the seabed and as soon as that matter is resolved I can assure Members that the report - and I stress it is excellent - will be distributed to Members and to the public. Thank you.

2.14.3 The Deputy of St. John:

Will the Minister share the information he has with the Scrutiny Panel for the Environment?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

Of course I will. I have made it very clear to the Scrutiny Panel that no documents are to be secret from the Scrutiny Panel. It is possible in some cases that confidentiality may be required, as in this case, but all documents are available from my department.