

2.9 Deputy S. Power of St. Brelade of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services regarding the use of a hopper barge to remove sea-lettuce from St. Aubin's Bay:

Can the Minister advise whether a study was carried out some years ago into the prospect of purchasing a 30 metre, 200 cubic metre hopper barge, for shared use with the Harbours Department, in order to remove sea lettuce from St. Aubin's Bay?

Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour (The Minister for Transport and Technical Services):

Transport and Technical Services have not previously been involved in a study to look at the prospect of purchasing a barge for shared use with the Harbours Department to remove sea lettuce from St. Aubin's Bay. However, a report was commissioned by W.E.B. (Waterfront Enterprise Board) in 2006 from PML Applications Limited, which reported in 2008 an investigation into the causes of the odour at West Park Beach, St. Aubin's Bay, Jersey. This report made mention of the possibility of carrying out trials with the new barge for offshore disposal. In discussions with the Ports of Jersey, it appears that at that time they were considering purchasing a barge for harbour dredging, but this was not proceeded with.

2.9.1 Deputy S. Power:

The Minister will be aware that there is a dredging scheme about to commence in St. Aubin. Has his department had any discussions with Harbours in the recent past to discuss possibly using the barge to be used in St. Aubin when St. Aubin will be inaccessible at neap tides?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

It is all a question of timing. As previously stated, I expect this report to include a feasibility study on the removal of sea lettuce by barge and disposal at sea. If this is believed to be feasible, the options of whether to charter a barge or to have shared use of such an asset, if purchased by the Ports of Jersey for dredging, will be considered. I am able to confirm that the preliminary discussions at officer level have commenced between my department and the Ports of Jersey.

2.9.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

With regard to sea lettuce, does the Minister accept that sea lettuce is simply a symptom and that it is a symptom of an underlying cause, which is the fact that we have too high nitrate levels in St. Aubin's Bay? Will the Minister state whether he agrees with that and what discussions and work he wishes to undertake, perhaps with his colleagues at the Department of the Environment, in order to reduce nitrate levels in St. Aubin's Bay so that there will be, among other things, less sea lettuce?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, I can confirm that nitrate level in St. Aubin's Bay is a problem to which the Bellozanne Treatment Plant is responsible for approximately 50 per cent. The other 50 per cent is run-off, but this is not confined to Jersey. It is a major problem in France, New Zealand, the United States of America and many other countries with a high population.

2.9.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister accept that ordinary tap water in Jersey contains unacceptable high levels of nitrate, which also contributes to high levels of nitrate in St. Aubin's Bay? Does the Minister have a joined up plan to do something about the levels of nitrate?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I can confirm that the levels of nitrate in drinking water are high. My colleague, the Minister for Planning and Environment, and his officers are in fact in consultation with farmers and the agricultural community generally to reduce the amount of nitrates that are put on the land and hopefully this will start to reduce over time.

2.9.4 The Connétable of St. John:

In any discussions between the T.T.S. (Transport and Technical Services) and the E.D.D. (Economic Development Department) in relation to a barge, would the Minister give serious thought to raising the barge we had sitting in the corner of St. Aubin's harbour for year after year and it was scuttled off Bonne Nuit a few years ago? Given that, I believe, only the taps were opened and it was allowed to sink, it may be sensible just to raise that and you have a barge already in ownership within the Island.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I do remember the barge that the Constable is referring to. I am not sure if it is salvageable. I doubt it, after this many years, but it is possible to purchase or lease or even share a barge with the Port Authority. That is something that my officers are looking into.

2.9.5 Deputy J.H. Young:

The Minister kindly gave us a very helpful background report on the problem with nitrate generally but he did say that the permitted levels in drinking water are high. Could he confirm that at the present time the levels permitted of drinking water, or tap water which goes into sewerage work, is substantially higher than the levels that are allowed by the Minister for Planning and Environment to put back into discharge into the sea?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I believe that to be so.

2.9.6 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

Will the Minister agree that the Transport and Technical Services outfall in St. Aubin's Bay does not comply with environmental legislation and is part of the problem causing the weed issue and, if so, what is he going to do about it? I believe this lengthening of the outfall has been discussed since I was on the Public Services Committee in 2000 and yet nothing appears to have been done.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

As I stated previously, we are responsible for approximately 50 per cent of nitrates in the bay, but when one flushes the loo, if you are flushing it with nitrate water, then we are on to a loser to start with.

2.9.7 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

If I may be allowed a supplementary, I do not believe the Minister has dealt with the question. Is he or is he not going to lengthen the outfall so that it is below sea water level at all times?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

That is something the department has been looking into for some time and that is one option on the table. There are many other options, including denitrification plants, that we are also looking into but they are extremely expensive.

2.9.8 Deputy S. Power:

I wonder if the Minister could confirm that his department intends to use the dredged mud from St. Aubin to use as blinding in the ash pits at La Collette?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

We have no plans to do so.