

3.16 The Deputy of St. Mary of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding the provision of a fresh water supply and mains drains to all Islanders:

Does the Minister consider that the whole Island should be connected to both freshwater supply and main drains in order to eliminate the current high risk of pollution to drinking water supplied by bore wells and springs and if so, will he recommend to the Minister of Transport and Technical Services that this should happen without any further delay?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel (The Minister for Planning and Environment):

The question is somewhat misleading and alarmist as it refers to, and I quote: “bore holes and springs being under a current high risk of pollution”. The truth is that, although there are inherent risks associated with using private bore holes and wells, most of the private water supplies on our Island pose limited risk and have properly maintained treatment facilities on them to manage this risk. If the whole Island were to be connected to both freshwater supply and mains drains then households relying on private water supplies such as bore holes and wells and the environment would be best protected against pollution. However I would be hesitant to recommend Island-wide connection as there are practicalities and costs associated with such connections. The practicalities include distance, gradient and access, and by the nature of these there is a recognised high per unit cost of each connection that may well be prohibitive. In the meantime, however, it is important that officers from my department provide full protection for households and private water supplies such as bore holes and wells. This is achieved by regulation under the Water Pollution (Jersey) Law 2000 and provision of incentives and education in order to reduce the risks of such water pollution occurring. The department also uses the Planning and Building Law to secure environmental gain such as extending networks in cases of new developments and in cases where private waste treatment is the only option, ensuring that these are fit for purpose and do not cause a risk to the environment.

3.16.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:

In that case would the Minister also consider bringing legislation in order for properties to connect up to the main services by accessing adjoining fields without having to pay very often a ransom price that is currently being charged by landowners if there is no alternative route or obviously no intention to fund main services?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

The issue of legislation or charge to make water connections is something that is due to be considered with the Water Strategy that my colleague the Minister for Transport and Technical Services is bringing to this House very soon.

3.16.2 Connétable S.A. Rennard of St. Saviour:

As a farmer who spreads slurry I would like it to be noted that when you apply to spread slurry the Department of Agriculture gives you areas where you can go and where you cannot go. These are monitored by the Department of Agriculture. Would the Minister not consider it would be more advantageous to make sure that everybody was on main drains as these, I believe, if one has an outside privy, which a lot of old places now do have, these are not monitored, where farmers who spread slurry it is monitored? Would the Minister not consider that main drains would be much more important?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

No, the Minister does not share that opinion.

3.16.3 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

Many older properties make use of rainwater systems and use neither mains water nor wells or bore holes. Does the Minister believe we are currently doing enough in regard to rainwater harvesting?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I do not and that, indeed, is one of the alternative directions I would wish to encourage. In the old days that perhaps the Constable of St. Saviour was referring to, that still exist in some far flung places of St. Saviour and the Parishes, people were known to drink their rainwater. That obviously does not run the risk of contamination by septic tanks or soakaways because it comes on to the roof structures and then is collected in barrels. It is about wise use of resources and considering each time we use water we are obtaining the best value and not just extending mains services for the pure joy of it.

3.16.4 The Connétable of St. John:

I do not think there is any joy in having to spend hundreds of thousands of pounds or millions of pounds by the department having to extend services. That said, would the Minister, when he is sitting around the table of the Council of Ministers, support the Minister of Transport and Technical Services in moving forward in putting wayleaves in place so that we are not putting money into landowners' pockets where there is a ransom strip when people require to cross somebody's field, *et cetera*, or even their garden or a private road, so that this can happen at a modest cost by the person who requires this service? I am not talking about developers. I am talking about the ordinary householders within the Island who do not have the ability to find the funding that some of these ransom strips are demanded.

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I agree with the Constable and with the general sentiment that it must be fundamentally wrong for landowners to hold out for ransom strips in order for pay for connection of services to the mains services. But that being said, if there are other alternatives that can provide suitable treatment of waste materials or, indeed, possible supplies of water then those alternatives must have proper representation as well.

3.16.5 Deputy J.H. Young:

According to written answer number 22 of the Minister of Transport and Technical Services today, there are 2,250 premises in the Island that are currently relying on septic tank or soakaways for their own waste disposal. That is 2,250 situated in the water pollution safeguard areas of the Island. What help is he giving to the owners of those properties to ensure they can identify if their systems are working well and are properly maintained? What is he doing about that?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

My department runs a farm risk map that has been developed and is online and the map is for farmers and other property owners to assess the risk of spreading agricultural slurry on specific fields. The slurry application, as we all know, is permitted on certain fields as long it is not spread within 50 metres of a bore hole or well and that other conditions as to it being reasonable to spread these materials on a field apply. That is why the department runs a closed season, if you like, between 14th October and 13th January most years when we have high rainfall and the higher potential for contamination of bore holes to occur. That said, there is a body of work that is being undertaken. Members will know that the Water Pollution (Jersey) Law was agreed by the House in 2000. Within that Water Pollution Law it did give the Minister power to set up water catchment management areas. There are inherent problems on a wider scale with the quantity of nitrates in our drinking water, as has been

suggested most years by the Jersey Waterworks Company, and this Minister has firm intentions to move the debate on in terms of providing proper water services to Islanders under the powers the Water Pollution Law gives me. The timetable for delivering this is by 2015.

3.16.6 Deputy J.H. Young:

If I could ask the Minister to clarify his answer because I think he missed the main point. My point was what is he doing to help those 2,250 owners of septic tanks maintain them so they do not pollute their own bore holes and their own water supply?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

The Department for Planning and Environment, as Members know, does not have extensive monies to pay for the servicing of people's independent bore holes or sewage systems. If, indeed, that is something that Members would wish my department to involve themselves with then answers or questions and suggestions on a postcard would be welcome.

3.16.7 The Deputy of St. Mary:

This again appears to be a question of funding. Perhaps everything should be channelled once again into Treasury's lap. Could I ask the Minister to support that idea of gaining extra funding for this?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I have indicated in my answers to the questions earlier that, indeed, having general taxation being applied to solving these problems is just one way of solving the problems and there are a number of Islanders who would wish not to have the State, if you like, intrude in their affairs and I think those wishes have to be respected while at the same time looking at what is in the Island public good.