

4.9 The Connétable of St. Helier of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the introduction of solid and liquid waste charges on the commercial sector: [1(485)]

Will the Minister advise what steps he is taking to ensure that the introduction of solid and liquid waste charges on the commercial sector alone is fair, practical, the best environmental option and good for tourism?

Deputy E.J. Noel (The Minister for Infrastructure):

The States, in adopting amendment 5 to the M.T.F.P. (Medium Term Financial Plan) 2017-2019 Addition, limited the charges and indeed all work on considering charges to be limited impacting the commercial sector alone. As a user-pays charge, D.f.I. (Department for Infrastructure), on behalf of the Council of Ministers, have looked at the total cost and the total usage of the waste systems and evaluated the elements relating to non-household use. The Council of Ministers are not proposing that businesses cross-subsidise household use and this will continue to be paid by the taxpayer. However, currently large commercial users are being subsidised by the taxpaying public. The most significant barrier to changing behaviour towards waste in Jersey is the absence of fiscal measures that make it economically effective to reduce waste and encourage recycling. Charges such as we are proposing are seen to be effective elsewhere. Keeping Jersey beautiful is one of our top priorities. We have invested heavily over the years, ensuring that we have the appropriate facilities and take responsibility for our waste. There is an expectation of good environmental practices and Jersey's recycling rate is, unfortunately, currently behind the U.K. and the rest of Europe. Not charging for waste means that recycling is just not seen as a cost-effective option. Tourists, for example, visitors to the Island must wonder why there is little or no segregation of waste in our hotels. But I am pleased that the Constable has assured that the recycling is giving prominence in the public areas of the town.

4.9.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

As the Minister indicated recently at the meeting of the Retail Development Group, it is inevitable that charges for domestic waste will be introduced, would it not be more fair for the Minister to come up with a scheme that is a holistic approach for charging for waste right across the piece, rather than singling out businesses who do feel that the current proposal is unfair?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

If States Members would have allowed my department to do that, then it is something that we would have considered.

4.9.2 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Will the Minister agree to abandon liquid waste charges, given that water metering, if no other reason, means most of us and most businesses are loathe to waste water? Does not liquid waste charges, which he seized on as an early win, unfairly penalise the hospitality sector, particularly restaurants and hotels? Is there not a real risk that he will be sending out the message that hotels should use less water and restaurants should use less water, which seems to me to be likely to have severe repercussions on the customer?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

That is a very long question and I will give it a very short answer. In terms of that, to do as the Constable would ask me to do would be going against a decision of this Assembly.

4.9.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister consider altering his proposals in order to introduce an ability to pay into his waste charge measures?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Again, this Assembly has agreed in principle user-pays charges based on use and the amount of waste produced. It is very difficult to introduce an element of ability to pay. However, myself and my Council of Ministers' colleagues are looking at the waste charges going forward and we will be coming back with a revised plan in the course of the next few months.

4.9.4 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Indeed, I think not only States Members but many businesses welcome the recent news that the Minister is withdrawing his immediate plans and is going to take it back, so the Council of Ministers comes forward with a further proposition. However, could I urge him... will the Minister agree to engage fully with particularly the hospitality industry and the retailers if he is indeed going to press ahead with this idea that he will only go for the commercial sector and not the domestic sector?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Unfortunately, the Constable tries to put words in my mouth. I did not say that we were withdrawing the current proposals, I said that we were revisiting them; that is not the same as withdrawing them. To do it again, as the Constable would wish me to do, which is to look at domestic waste charges, is against a decision of this Assembly and I am, therefore, not able to do so. What I am able to do is indeed consult more with stakeholders and to broaden that and to consult with the public to see if they think that it is fair that businesses start paying for their waste that they produce.