

6. Statement by the Minister for Transport and Technical Services regarding the incinerator at Bellozanne

6.1 Deputy G.W.J. de Faye (The Minister for Transport and Technical Services):

I am grateful to you for allowing me to make this statement. I would like to apologise both to you and to the Assembly for the fact that the statement was not included on the agenda and that printed copies have only just arrived in Members' hands. This is due to an unfortunate administrative oversight at the Transport and Technical Services Department and I am sorry that happened. Nevertheless, I do think this is an important issue for Members to be aware of. I would like to update Members on the current state of the Bellozanne incinerator and the corrective action I have authorised the department to take to ensure the Island has waste disposal facilities until a replacement for the Bellozanne incinerator is commissioned. Throughout 2007 a number of major component failures within the plant have required major repair and replacement, which not only uses up the allocated budget but results in considerable downtime for the plant. The knock-on effect is to reduce the throughput of the plant to the extent that by the end of 2007 there will be a backlog of about 8,000 tonnes of material stockpiled in pits at La Collette. In the last few weeks, the level of repair and the number of outages at the plant have increased significantly and by Saturday, 17th November the entire plant was out of service. All 3 streams were incapacitated due to leaks in the boilers and the overhead crane system had suffered from a major structural failure of its supporting steelwork. Repairs on 2 boilers were completed by Saturday, 24th November, but the number one boiler suffered from a major failure and is still not operating. Given the unreliable nature of the plant, it is becoming highly unlikely that all 3 streams will be available for continuous operation to clear the backlog, as further breakdowns can be anticipated. The overhead crane system, which suffered a major structural failure of a large supporting steel I-beam, has been temporarily repaired. The evidence indicates a fatigue failure of the structure and is of a similar type to 2 others that have occurred. The department has accordingly advised the States' insurers of the failure and has also called in a structural expert to assess the condition of the steelwork and advise whether it remains fit for continued operation. Initial assessments point to further repairs being required over the coming weeks. The severity and nature of recent breakdowns show that the outage situation will continue or deteriorate over the next 3 to 4 years until the new plant is commissioned and the old one is shut down. As there is only limited space at La Collette, it will not be possible to safely store waste there for a further 3 to 4 years. To accommodate further outages at the plant, contingency plans have been drawn up that are robust and acknowledge the space limitations at La Colette. They will meet the needs of the regulatory authorities and, above all, will provide the Island with a safe and environmentally acceptable solution to cope with any surpluses. The department is working closely with the Waste Regulator and Planning Department and has devised the following emergency contingency plan; waste disposal off-Island. To consider the export of waste under international convention, the Island has to demonstrate to relevant authorities that it has considered and applied best practicable environmental options before a licence will be granted for the export of waste. While satisfactory and safe on-Island storage facilities exist, it is unlikely that such a licence would be granted unless an emergency condition applied to the Island. However the Waste Regulator has agreed to commence negotiations with U.K. authorities to establish and put in place the protocols required for the Island to be granted a licence in short order in the event of a major problem with the storage of waste. In respect of waste storage on the Island, the current system of storing crushed, bulky waste in pits at La Colette is effective, although expensive in terms of manpower, vehicles and machinery to transfer the waste from Bellozanne to La Collette. Consideration has been given to the availability of space at La Collette and continuation of all the current operations there. There is therefore limited space available for any large scale waste storage facility. In addition, given the proximity of the fuel farm, the Fire and Rescue Service is concerned about the storage of large quantities of combustible waste at La Colette. Although very difficult to quantify, by 2011 there could be a requirement to store in the order of 20,000 tonnes of baled waste. This would be

bulky, crushed waste that does not have any putrescible or rotting element in it. Apart from La Collette, the department, in conjunction with planning officers, identified a number of sites in States ownership that could be used for storage purposes. Depending on location, the site or sites might require lining. However, if only non-putrescible baled and wrapped waste is to be stored, this reduces the likelihood of requiring an expensive geotech-style liner. Recommended sites will be brought forward for approval in the next 2 weeks and will be fully evaluated with the Planning and Environment Department as well as Health Protection. It is evident that large quantities of waste might have to be baled in the next 3 to 4 years. The department has a baler that is over 30 years old and, while operational and used for baling small quantities of waste, it does not have a wrapping facility and if used to bale several thousand tonnes of waste, it is unlikely to cope. To ensure the Island has a strategic backup, I have approved the purchase of a new baler, fitted with shrink wrap facility. This cost of new equipment is approximately £600,000. Sir, in summary, I believe the actions I have sanctioned must be considered as essential if the Island is to maintain a safe and acceptable storage route for its waste until the new plant is commissioned. The total cost of the baling equipment, repairs to the cranes, site selection and preparation and managing the transport logistics to move the waste around the Island are in the order of £1.3 million. I am discussing this level of expenditure with the Treasury Minister, but in order to place the requisite orders for the baler, I have instructed my department to place a hold on the 2008 infrastructure capital vote of £4.5 million. This means that unless alternative funding routes can be found, the amount of repair work undertaken on the Island's highways, sea defences and drains will be severely cut back for 2008. I hope Members will accept that the remedial action I have authorised is essential and the requirement to replace the Bellozanne incinerator with a modern plant is now critical.

6.1.1 Deputy R.C. Duhamel of St. Saviour:

I have a number of questions but I will ask them individually as the time arises. The first one, Sir, to the Minister is how come, in preparing his department's capital expenditure requirements, or indeed revenue expenditure requirements for the coming year, that no strategic looking ahead monies were put into the budget in order to pay for this capital sum?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

The amounts of money devoted to the Bellozanne incinerator have, in fact, been increased in the future budgets. Up to now we have been getting by on the maintenance budget of roughly £300,000 a year and that had been put up to £500,000. However, what was not anticipated at all, was the fact that is emerging that it appears that not only do we have problems with the boilers, but the building itself is undergoing some form of structural failure. Clearly, in the case of the crane support beams, this appears to be metal fatigue. This is something that largely came out of the blue and therefore it was not foreseen, which is why I have had to bring the matter to the States as a matter of urgency.

6.1.2 Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Is it not the case that for most departments who do have expenditure on capital equipment to take into account, the normal practice for the shrewd operator is to allow yourself or the department to have contingency sums to cover all eventualities, should they arise? There is an element of risk, the risk is insured and these things can be worked out ahead of the time.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

That would appear, on the face of it, to be an entirely reasonable practice, but that simply is not how the States budgets and funding work. What has happened here is that something completely unexpected has happened, and that is that we are facing structural failure of the Bellozanne incinerator building. It is something that will have to be addressed.

6.1.3 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Could I ask 2 questions please in relation to this development? The first is in relation to the Environment Scrutiny Panel public hearing that was held on Monday, 17th September, the Chief Officer said, and I quote: "I will take you for a guided tour of Bellozanne and La Collette. One, I will show you at Bellozanne the plant is falling apart, but 2, I will take you to La Collette and I will show you 3,000 tonnes of waste for storing in pits." How is it then that on 17th September 2007 a projected storage capacity of 3,000 tonnes being held at La Collette can amplify to 8,000 tonnes in this statement and yet, within the same statement there is by 2011 a prediction of 20,000 tonnes. How can the department go from 3 to 8 in 3 months, reaching 11 and only go to 9,000 tonnes from the end of this year to 2011? That is the first question. The second question is, given the space that is at a premium at Bellozanne Valley, why have residents been written to suggesting this week that a meeting will take place, or can he confirm that a meeting will take place on Monday to discuss moving the green waste that is being held at La Collette to Bellozanne Valley?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I will deal with those issues separately. In respect of the tonnage, I have no reason to question the estimate of my Chief Officer given to the Scrutiny Panel last week and I am sure that there currently are 3,000 tonnes, or thereabouts, of waste stockpiled at La Collette. If the Deputy would care to read the second paragraph of the statement a little more closely, he will see that it says that the backlog refers to the end of 2007. That is, the 8,000 tonne figure is a projected figure and the reason it will simply jump from 3,000 potentially to 8,000 tonnes is because the plant has broken down and we cannot process the waste at a speed that we normally would. Therefore, the backlog is building up at a much greater speed. The 8,000 tonnes refers to what we expect and anticipate roughly by the end of this year. The 20,000 tonne figure, of course, is a figure that has grown up over an extended period of time. With regard to the green waste composting, as I am sure the Deputy is well aware, as he is the Deputy who brought forward the original concerns over the Buncefield situation in the United Kingdom, a new set of priorities is having to be applied to the whole of La Collette due to our precautionary approach over the likely reallocation of hazard zones around the depot. This has not happened yet, as a matter of fixed law, but we are anticipating what we believe is likely to happen, and that simply means that we can no longer encourage large numbers of the public to go down and deposit their green waste at the existing green waste composting site. It has to be said, that is a major blow. Relocation of that public facility will cost a substantial amount of money. We simply do not have the funds available at the moment and we have to make the best of the sites available, and that is why we are considering a yard at the top end of the existing sewerage works in the Bellozanne Valley and I think, quite rightly, we will be holding a public meeting so appropriate consultation can take place on that matter.

6.1.4 Deputy P.N. Troy of St. Brelade:

In the section headed number one, Waste Disposal Off-Island, it states that we will begin negotiations with the U.K. authorities in the event that we need to dispose of waste off-Island. Can I just confirm that those negotiations would cover any possible disposal of waste to France because, with our proximity to the French coast, it might be easier to export waste to France rather than the U.K. and I would ask the Minister's thoughts on that issue.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am grateful to the Deputy for that question because it may indicate that we might have another possible route, should the Island find itself in severe difficulty. My understanding of the situation though is that, under the Basel convention, Jersey and the Channel Islands are effectively classified as being within the U.K. allowance, as it were, for international disposals of waste, therefore it is extremely important that we satisfy ourselves and the U.K. authorities on a mutually agreed position before we start transferring waste, because my understanding is that whenever we do it counts against, as it were, for every tonne that the Island may wish to export

elsewhere, albeit to the U.K. or not, it may well count against the U.K.'s ability to export waste from the U.K., should the U.K. wish to. Therefore, it is important that we get the position right and that the protocol is established with the United Kingdom authorities before we go any further.

6.1.5 Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

The operation of the Bellozanne yard has changed somewhat in the last few months by the swapping out of what used to be a storage capacity for crushed, bulky waste in favour of an Island-wide reception centre for the public to bring recyclables. Bearing in mind that there now appear only to be some 500 tonnes, we were told by the Chief Officer at the last inspection that the Scrutiny Panel made of the site, of crushed, bulky material at the site, does the move of the storage facilities of crushed, bulky waste to La Collette in exchange for the Island-wide reception centre for recyclables, represent good long term planning when perhaps better sites might be available which would not have required materials to be double handled?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I have to say that in the face of the current fallout from the hazards review being carried out with reference to the fuel depot, long-term planning in regards to our operations is becoming increasingly difficult. With respect to the brand new recycling facility, this is of immense importance to the waste disposal system and has proved extremely popular and useful with the public. I have no wish to interfere with that at the current state of play. The amount of recycling taking place down there is of immense benefit and it relieves from the load that we have to place on the incinerator itself. The fact of the matter is that we are having to adopt and react to situations as we find them and not everything would be ideally as I would have it, but one has to make do with the situation as it stands.