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20 January 2017

Deputy D. Johnson
Chairman
Environment, Housing and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel
Scrutiny Office
States Greffe
Morier House
St. Helier
JERSEY JE1 1DD

Dear Deputy Johnson

Review of Nitrates in Jersey's Water

Thank you for allowing us to give our views on the new Water Management Plan for Jersey with particular reference to nitrates.

The Industry, both arable and dairy have been involved in work to reduce the nitrates in raw water for the past ten years. Firstly, the Cattle Industry built new slurry stores to enable there to be enough storage in the winter months so that no spreading took place during the winter. Secondly, the Potato Industry took full participation in the Diffuse Pollution Project under the management of Kate Roberts.

In 2014 a Nitrate Working Group was formed to examine nitrate pollution and make recommendations. The Group met regularly for over a year and agreed a course of action. Their recommendations form part of the new Water Plan.

A Five Year Review shows the average nitrate levels have reduced in both ground and surface water. For the past twenty years the annual average nitrate concentration in all surface water streams combined has reduced from 69 mg/l in 1994 to 46 mg/l in 2015. Indeed, the Minister's Dispensation for Nitrates has not been used in 2014 or 2015.

The question you ask – is the level going down and will the new Water Management Plan bring it down further ? I believe that with the co-operation of our Industry, the answer is yes. The vast majority of the Agricultural Industry are fully supportive of the Plan and the principal of clean water for our Island.

The next big step that we are taking as an Industry is all about new practices and new technology. Many of the new machines being bought for fertilizer distribution are very sophisticated and automatically shut off supply to avoid overlapping.

In 2017 direct placement of fertilizer is being trialled. This will bring an instant reduction of 7% - 8% simply by not sowing areas of the field that are not planted. Further saving may be made if trial work shows that direct placement in the row itself is successful. Again, this is being trialled this year.

Let me assure you, as far as artificial fertilizers are concerned, growers have a self interest in reducing the amount they use (without crop loss) because fertilizers are expensive.

As regards phosphates in water, the Industry has already moved to low or zero phosphate fertilizers so hopefully this will not be an issue.

As an Industry, we believe that the Water Catchment Management Orders in the new Plan have a place. They will regulate the small minority who might not be inclined to do things on a voluntary basis. So we support the collection of information on fertilizer imports and sales so that Nutrient Management Plans for individual growers can be properly verified.

In conclusion, the Union has enjoyed close collaboration with the Water Resources Team, the Department of the Environment, Jersey Water and the Dairy Industry with all sides appreciating the challenges and then working together to find an effective solution.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely

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PRESIDENT
JERSEY FARMERS' UNION