

**2.4 Deputy J. Gallichan of St. Mary of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding connection of properties to tight tank and soakaway drainage systems:**

Would the Minister advise for each of the last 5 years how many new domestic developments, if any, were approved where the resultant property was to be connected to a tight tank and how many pre-existing domestic properties, if any, were disconnected from septic tanks and soakaways and connected to tight tanks as a result of planning requirements related to the development or extension of those properties?

**Senator F.E. Cohen (The Minister for Planning and Environment):**

The department does not keep a specific record of the number of applications which rely on cesspools or tight tank drainage systems and this information is not readily available from the department's systems. However, the Transport and Technical Services Department's tanker service has advised that there are 44 properties connected to tight tanks as a result of development. Up to 2003 there were 27 properties connected to tight tanks and since 2003 a further 17 properties have been connected. It is not possible to establish how many of the 44 properties are new and how many have converted from septic tank soakaway systems to a tight tank. I can, however, confirm that it is planning policy to refuse applications for new dwellings which cannot connect to the public sewer other than in exceptional circumstances. The number of new dwellings approved each year with cesspool drainage is, therefore, relatively small. With regard to applications to extend existing dwellings which rely on septic tank soakaway drainage systems, it is planning policy to seek an improvement to the drainage where the work will result in an increase in the potential occupancy of the dwelling; applications which seek permission for additional bedroom accommodation, for example. Again, the number of such applications is not recorded but is likely to be small. I must stress that this planning policy, which was reaffirmed by the former Environment and Public Services Committee last year, aims to ensure that the Island's ground water and/or public water supplies are not further contaminated by effluent from septic tank soakaway drainage systems. It recognises that the main sewage system does not cover the whole Island and that there are areas which may never be reached by mains drains. It may be unreasonable and undesirable to place a moratorium on any development in those areas and so alternative solutions are used. The department and I remain focused on the States' wider environmental objectives as well as the important health issues surrounding the safe disposal of sewage and protection of the quality of water supplies. In October 2005 supplementary planning guidance was published entitled *Disposal of Foul Sewage* and I will quote from it: "The requirement to regularly empty cesspools is not, however, particularly sustainable on an economic or an environmental perspective."