

2.10 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding measures taken to reduce the amount of packaging imported by the Island:

While the Minister is to be commended on having taken steps to reduce the Island's use of plastic carrier bags, would he explain what additional measures, if any, he is taking to reduce the amount of packaging we import?

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

I am grateful for the Connétable's recognition of my involvement and that of the Assistant Minister - the Deputy of Trinity - in this ground-breaking initiative to reduce the approximately 30 million plastic bags and 450 tonnes of plastic waste generated annually in Jersey and Guernsey. The initiative as part of the ongoing ECO-ACTIVE campaign is further notable as a joint initiative with the Guernsey Environment Minister. Last week's announcement was, however, only the first step, and we have agreed to meet with the supermarket groups, probably in June, to review the effectiveness of the bag charge, and to consider additional measures to reduce plastic waste in the form of unnecessary packaging. The Women's Institute, Durrell and the One World Group will be represented at this meeting together with the Minister for Transport and Technical Services, who of course has responsibility for waste and is equally enthusiastic to reduce plastic waste. I will certainly be encouraging local supermarkets to consider the commitment to reduce packaging over time.

2.10.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Would the Minister not agree that reducing the amount of waste we have in the first place is at the top of the waste hierarchy, and perhaps the Island should be spending a little bit more of its attention on this matter given our unique position of being able to control how much packaging is being imported into the Island? Perhaps we should be addressing this as a high priority as well as pursuing recycling schemes.

Senator F.E. Cohen:

Yes, Sir, a jolly good idea. But we should also bear in mind that we are dealing here primarily with plastic waste and plastic waste is extremely expensive to dispose of appropriately. A lot of the plastic waste that is recycled in the U.K. (United Kingdom) has to be shipped out to the Far East and it is very expensive to do. We need to be aware of that so the more that we can reduce plastic importation the better.

2.10.2 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I would like to applaud and congratulate the Minister and his handling of the introduction of this measure on behalf of the supermarkets and plastic bags. Can I ask him - because this is an important issue to reduce and return and recycle these kinds of plastics and oil products - what measures does he think would be possible in terms of, for example, applying a purchase tax based upon an environmental tax on products such as tyres, which are also difficult to deal with and export? In France, for example, they add the environmental tax at the time of purchase so that the cost of dealing with those tyres is taken into account when the item is purchased. Is the Minister looking into these types of environmental taxes and these types of measures?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

Comprehensive work is being carried out on proposals to introduce environmental taxes and the Council of Ministers will be discussing that shortly. I am not aware of whether or not a specific tax on tyres has been considered. I certainly will check and it sounds like a good concept that is worth exploring. Thank you, Sir.

2.10.3 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

I wonder if the Minister has considered that his decision may be counter-productive, because as we all know plastic carrier bags quite often have more than one use during their life span? I fear that

may not be the same for the alternatives that are used. We are all familiar with collecting a polythene bag from the supermarket but it is rarely its final journey. It can be used to store rubbish afterwards before it goes into a black plastic bag so here may be a case where more black plastic bin bags are going to be used rather than fewer as a result of this. Has the Minister considered that?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

Such a measure has recently been introduced, effectively voluntarily, with the local supermarkets and is, of course, dependent on Islanders making environmentally conscious decisions. I believe that Islanders want to make environmentally conscious decisions and want to have the opportunity. Simply to say that by introducing this charge we are going to affect the secondary uses of plastic bags; I do not really think is valid. The objective of this is to make people aware of their decisions and the consequences and to reduce overall, the consumption of plastic bags in the Island.

2.10.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Is the Minister aware that the calculations have been redone as to fishing marine fatalities resulting from the ingestion of plastic bags and that this situation, although dire, may well have been considerably overestimated? And secondly, Sir, will he be using his formidable energies to reduce the consumption of plastic bottles?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

Plastic bottles is certainly on the list. I was not aware that the calculations have been recalculated; however, that is not really the point. We are all aware that using excessive plastic is environmentally detrimental and therefore anything we can do to reduce the 450 tonnes of plastic bag waste produced in the Islands per year I think is well worth pursuing. I intend to do as much as I can generally to reduce plastics in supermarkets, whether it be bottles or bags. Thank you.

2.10.5 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Deputy Le Claire referred to levies which were applied to the purchase of most large products, particularly white goods to offset the cost of their disposal; does the Minister not fear that the States decision to impose a 3 per cent G.S.T. has narrowed the range of options open to him for applying such environmental taxes in Jersey?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

Clearly, the introduction of another tax on top of another tax is something that this House will have to consider very carefully. But environmental taxation is a different principle. Environmental taxation, providing it is accompanied by hypothecation, is a system of taxation where the measure of success is how little you collect because you change behavioural patterns. So, I think that they are 2 entirely different forms of taxation. Thank you.