

WATER RESOURCES IN JERSEY

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by the Public Services Committee



STATES OF JERSEY

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PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion -

- to receive the reports of the British Geological Survey WD/91/15 and the Working Party on the Safeguarding of the Water Resources of Jersey; and -
- (a) to charge the Public Services Committee to prepare legislation for the better management of the Island's water resources in accordance with the principles outlined in Appendix II of the working party's report;
- (b) to charge the Public Services Committee to consider measures and recommend action for the further extension of water mains and main drainage;
- (c) to charge the Public Services Committee to investigate and recommend appropriate action to ensure the efficient and economical use of water.

PUBLIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

- NOTE: 1. The Policy and Resources Committee supports this proposition.
2. Copies of the British Geological Survey report and the report of the working party are available from the States' Greffe Bookshop.

Report

The decade which followed the publication of the Guthrie Report (Jersey's Water: A new approach) was one of above average annual rainfall, and saw the start of the construction of an additional large public reservoir in Queen's Valley. These no doubt were contributory factors to the States' unwillingness to implement Guthrie's key recommendations; of greater significance was the failure to provide scientific evidence of the need for control, and the means by which it would be introduced.

The 15 years since Guthrie have seen an increase in the demand for water for domestic and commercial purposes alike. Population growth, higher standards of living, the increase in leisure activities, and changing circumstances in the agricultural industry being amongst the factors which have contributed to this growth. The Committee feels that the occasion of this project is an appropriate time to bring to the attention of the States the effects of population growth. Although this is not the only factor involved in the increasing burden on the Island's water supply and infrastructure in general, it is a contributory factor of which all States' Members should be aware. Public Services makes this point as the Committee charged with the responsibility for maintaining many of the Island's services in the face of ever increasing demand.

The fact that we are now experiencing a cycle of 'dry years' is not in itself an argument for controlling the management of the water resources. It serves, however, as an example of the advantages to be derived from having the means to manage without recourse to the severe and arbitrary restrictions which are required when circumstances justify invoking the Emergency Powers and Planning (Jersey) Law 1990.

The Public Services Committee, as previously constituted, decided in 1989 that before bringing recommendations for the management of the Island's water resources to the States, there should be -

- (a) a scientific investigation of how that resource was created and the present day demands placed upon it;

- (b) if that investigation showed that the long term security of the resource was threatened, the means by which it could be managed to maintain its reliability for the future.

British Geological Survey were appointed to undertake a scientific assessment of the Island's resource and started investigative work in 1990. The first report published a year ago showed that the Island was dependent for water on its own rainfall and no other source and that with current levels of ground water abstraction, there remains an insufficient balance of water resources to sustain baseflow for springs and surface water. This report also identified the extent to which the water resource is being polluted, particularly by nitrates and the need to introduce measures to reduce pollution.

The present Committee has continued the policy of investigation of the water resource and a draft second BGS report has recently been received. Further analysis of abstraction rates has been undertaken, which have confirmed earlier estimates, and a computer modelling exercise completed. This report's findings broadly concur with the earlier report and confirm that whilst pollution levels have not significantly changed they remain at a far from satisfactory level and the Island's water resources remain at considerable risk from both over-abstraction and pollution.

The Public Services Committee will continue to monitor the extent and condition of the resource together with the levels of abstraction and recharge. A report on the third year's findings will be produced in 1993.

The first BGS report provided sufficient evidence, in the opinion of the Public Services Committee, of the need for better management. Accordingly, a working party was appointed under the chairmanship of Major J.R.C. Riley to make recommendations on the means by which better management control could be achieved.

The working party has recommended means by which the Island's resources can be managed so that a reliable supply of sufficient quantity and quality is secured for the future.

The Committee considers the working party's rejection of the need for all water to be brought under public ownership of particular significance. The Committee is in full agreement with the principles upon which legislation should be based as expressed by Dr. C. Swinerton, Technical Director of the National Rivers Authority, namely -

- (a) any protective measures must be based on reliable data; to acquire reliable data, legislation is essential;
- (b) legislation should be promoted in such a way that current users see the new legislation as a benefit;
- (c) the cost of introducing and administering new legislation should be evaluated in the context of the consequences of taking no action;
- (d) those who draft the new legislation should work closely with experienced practitioners in water management.

As a consequence of the work undertaken by BGS and the working party, information on the need for and the means by which the management of the Island's water resources can be achieved, is now available.

Amongst the key recommendations made in the working party report were that the Public Services Committee immediately commenced the drafting of a Water Law, continued with monitoring and consulted with the other Committees regarding the extension of sewers and water mains. These principles are addressed in the proposition to the States.

Failure to protect and manage the long-term security of water supply could have a catastrophic consequence on the Island's economy, ecology and environment. The Public Services Committee's objective is to protect for future generations a water supply of adequate quality and quantity.