

2025.02.04

Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity of the Minister for the Environment regarding PFAS contamination in Jersey's water (OQ.32/2025):

Will the Minister outline what specific actions, if any, are being implemented to reduce P.F.A.S. (perfluoroalkyl substances) contamination in Jersey's water and environment and provide a timeline for achieving measurable progress in addressing this pressing issue, and if no actions are being implemented, why not?

Deputy S.G. Luce of Grouville and St. Martin (The Minister for the Environment):

Can I start right off at the beginning by saying that I am committed to ensuring the safety and quality of our water supply and mitigating the effects of P.F.A.S. to protect public health and our unique Island environment. In conjunction with the Minister for Health and Social Services, I am taking action and have done so most recently by putting together and prioritising a multidepartment water quality and safety programme that consolidates various projects into a single governance structure and provides a complete and co-ordinated response to P.F.A.S. concerns. This programme involves many officers and resources and they are focused on providing information to the public and delivering the results of research on this emerging field of science. We also have the expert advice of our P.F.A.S. panel, which is an independent, scientific advisory panel who provide evidence-based advice, guide public health policy and environmental management. They ensure that our actions are grounded in the evidence and research from world-leading and emerging science. The panel have delivered 2 public health reports last year and are due to publish the findings of report 3 next month. The fourth report will be delivered in 2025 and will focus on P.F.A.S. in the environment, reviewing the latest global standard and treatment technologies. Finally, our regulatory framework under the Water (Jersey) Law 1972 ensures that water quality is monitored. Jersey Water's 2024 report has demonstrated 100 per cent compliance with current U.K. and E.U. regulatory standards for P.F.A.S. However, with the work of the panel on report 4, I will be working towards improving regulatory specific standards in Jersey.

4.15.1 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

I thank the Minister for his response and the actions that he has outlined. One hundred and five Islanders who have not lived in the Government-tested plume area have independently tested their blood for specific firefighting foam P.F.A.S. and reported levels higher than the average, in many cases by a significant margin. What is being done to verify these results and assess the full extent of the Island-wide P.F.A.S. contamination?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

As I have said, we have had 2 reports; we are having a third on public health. We are working with those people who had been tested originally on how we can help them at the hospital with advice and treatment. Of course, as the Deputy raises, certain people have had their blood tested outside of the plume area. The decision was taken by myself and the Minister for Health and Social Services that we did not see any point in asking those people to be retested under our own regime. We accepted their results and we are moving forward to see as a result of the hydrogeological survey ... which I did not have time to mention in my

original response but I will do now. We have been conducting recently a hydrogeological survey in the last 12 months. The outcomes of that will be published in the coming weeks, and that is a survey looking at the way groundwater is moving underneath the ground and how other people may have been affected. I can say to the Deputy that we are doing all we can to solve these problems and to see what we can do to make them better. But I accept that there are people outside of the plume area who have had their bloods tested themselves. Some results are showing levels above the standards we would wish to see and we want to understand better how those results may have been achieved. Certainly, the fourth report of P.F.A.S. in the environment will help us to do that as well.

4.15.2 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:

Could the Minister comment on the potential impact of P.F.A.S., if any, on agriculture, farming in particular, because of either the use of pesticides which might have P.F.A.S. in them or the spraying of crops with P.F.A.S.-contaminated water?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

If the Deputy had asked me this question 72 hours ago, I would not have had an answer for him, but it has appeared over the weekend that an information request was put in and the answer was ... is there P.F.A.S. in agricultural sprays, horticultural sprays? The answer has come back yes, there is. The work has been done and it was as much of a surprise to me as others in the industry. But yes, there are 4 products which contain small levels of P.F.A.S. and one in particular is used on the potato crop. I have spoken to farmers over the weekend and again this morning. It is a spray which is used for blight. It is used in small amounts at the end of the growing season. It is a contact spray so it does not work its way through the plants, it just sits on the leaves. But nevertheless it is a spray which contains P.F.A.S. and my initial discussion toward the industry, if focused around how we can find an alternative and take it out of use just as soon as possible.

4.15.3 Deputy J. Renouf:

On the subject of irrigation water being used on crops, or not necessarily irrigation water but the fact that water in the soil has P.F.A.S. in it, is there a concern about that in terms of root crops or other crops?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

There is not a concern as such. I am aware that the water from, for example, the St. Ouen Sandpit is not used to irrigate crops and while I say there is not a concern, that does not mean to say that I am not looking into the subject. The hydrological survey which I mentioned previously, the results of which will come out, will help inform us as to how much P.F.A.S. is moving around under the ground. The other thing I can say to the Deputy is part of the ongoing work of the P.F.A.S. group will be to look at foods grown on the Island, and certainly potatoes, to assure the public that levels of P.F.A.S. in potatoes that are exported do not exceed any acceptable limits.

4.15.4 Deputy K.L. Moore of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:

The Minister mentioned in his first answer that he intends to bring forward regulatory standards for P.F.A.S., our own for the Island. Could he tell the Assembly when he proposes to do that?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I cannot say exactly when, but I can say that the fourth report from the independent P.F.A.S. panel will include recommendations from the research they are doing around the globe. While we meet all the current standards, I think it would be fair to say that countries around the globe are looking to review standards and they certainly will be coming down. Let me say, the panel of independent ... I have had no contact with them other than the one thing I did was to impress upon them the need for timely report for I do not want to be waiting. I do not want to be held up, so I have asked them to report back to me on water as soon as they possibly can. Once I have their report and their recommendations, I will be sitting down to look at where those levels might be. In the meantime, and because I do not want to waste any time on this, I am already in discussions with Jersey Water about where those levels might be, how they might mitigate, what treatment works they would need to put in place because Members will appreciate, I am sure, that large infrastructure projects do not happen in a matter of months. They take some years to deliver but, nevertheless, I am working towards new regulatory standards as fast as I can.

[11:45]

4.15.5 Deputy K.L. Moore:

Has the Minister for Health and Social Services declared an interest on this matter given his former ownership of a company relating to the potato industry and his current continuing ownership of a company that provides water filtration systems?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

No, he has not, and I cannot think of any way that he would be conflicted in that way.

4.15.6 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:

My question follows the response that 105 samples were accepted and people were at least taking care. Would the Minister advise if any consideration was given, together with the Minister for Health and Social Services, to do a wider sample to establish concentration of P.F.A.S. across the population?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

As I said, we have had 2 rounds of blood testing, if you like. The first one from residents who live in the plume and then another private round of blood test was also taken from people who live outside of the plume. The Minister and I spoke about whether we wanted those people to be retested. We could not see any point in that. What we have done is accepted their levels. The third report from the P.F.A.S. panel will guide us in that, but I have to say to Members, it is not just drinking water that might put P.F.A.S. through water ingestion into your body. There are other things as well. The fourth report from the panel will start to look at other ways of P.F.A.S. entering your body. There are many different ways and those people who have been living outside of the plume area, there is a lot of work to understand their history and whether they have lived in Jersey all their lives, whether they

have moved around the Island, whether they are mains, borehole, maybe they have drunk bottled water or the type of food you eat. Everything can have an effect. There is a lot of work to do to understand how P.F.A.S. is ingested into your body, so all I can say to the Deputy is work is ongoing, and we hope to have those answers in the future.

4.15.7 Deputy I. Gardiner:

If I understood correctly, and I would ask the Minister to correct me, the results for the people who lived outside of the area would be categorised and according to this, other groups of the population will be offered blood testing by the Government to establish if there is a concentration of the P.F.A.S. with them as well?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

All I can say is we will continue to work with all these people. Many of them turn up to regular meetings, not only with myself and the Minister for Health and Social Services, but with officers and also independently with the panel without any politicians or civil servants present. Lots of work is going on. We want to understand these problems just as much as anybody else does but there is more science needed to understand how people who may not live anywhere near the plume area may have elevated levels of P.F.A.S. in their blood.

4.15.8 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

Following the very recent ruling by the European Court of Human Rights that failures by Governments and businesses to address pollution amounts to human rights violation, the Minister just explained that he will revisit Jersey's current legislative framework to tackle P.F.A.S. but also hopefully other pollution and contamination effectively. Could the Minister advise further what new environmental laws or regulations he is looking at to address these issues and does he have the necessary resources to do this work effectively?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

That sounds like a hugely complicated question to me, way above my paygrade potentially, but what I can say to the Deputy, outside of the P.F.A.S. work, we continually monitor a whole range of subjects within the environment in the Natural Environment Department. If she is looking for other instances, I could point her to an ongoing group of people who have been together now for over 10 years and looking to reduce nitrates. It started off as a nitrate reduction group, worked very, very closely between Government and the agricultural industry, has been hugely successful in reducing nitrates in our water and that group continues, and I am happy to be back sitting on it and we continue to look at ways that we can work with Jersey Water to deliver better water. The P.F.A.S. issue is in addition to that, if you like, and one which is vastly more important, but I think they all come under the same remit. Certainly, working with Jersey Water into the future, which I want to continue to do, the treatment works which we will have to put in place to reduce P.F.A.S. will also help us to address many of the other issues that may or may not be present as some sort of contaminants in our drinking water.

Deputy H.L. Jeune:

Sorry, and just for the Minister about the resources; does he have the resources to effectively address these issues?

The Bailiff:

That was part of the question, yes.

Deputy S.G. Luce:

Resource is always a challenge, certainly in an environment where Government is trying to reduce the amount it spends but I can assure the Deputy that priorities like this one that affect not only our environment for the Island but more importantly the public health of the Island, we will always find a way to fund those.