

3. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Transport and Technical Services

The Deputy Bailiff:

Very well, that concludes questions on notice, so we come now to questions to Ministers without notice and the first period involves questions to the Minister for Transport and Technical Services. Does any Member have any question?

3.1 Deputy R.C. Duhamel of St. Saviour:

In relation to the recently lodged P.45 proposition 'Solid Waste Strategy: locations for proposed facilities', does the Minister intend to supply Members in good time before the debate with the findings of the suggested environmental impact assessment?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye of St. Helier (The Minister for Transport and Technical Services):

Yes, Sir.

3.2 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

In relation to the composting site, in the written answers that have been provided today to the Constable of St. Helier, I commend the Minister's answers. They are quite comprehensive. They do allude to the fact that a health impact assessment was asked to be done by the Health Protection Team. It has been brought out in the answers that this was not done before the composting site was moved, although the Minister's Department is intending to do this in the next few months. Would the Minister now accept that, while it is acknowledged in the report that the U.K. Environmental Agency requires a background level at 250 metres for residences, DEFRA (Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) also requires that equivalent background level for workplaces. Why has this not been taken into account?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

As far as I am aware, regulations that fall under DEFRA do not apply in this Island as we are a separate jurisdiction. However, I can assure the Deputy that we closely monitor the health of our employees and none of those who work at the composting facility have shown any ill effects whatsoever.

3.2.1 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I was referring to other people that work in the area that are involved in working down at that industrial site. There are many different work places that are not under States control. I wonder if the Minister would not undertake to examine whether, or not, it is wise and prudent to monitor the areas to the same levels as the U.K. Standards for Residences and Workplaces?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Where there is no perceived problem - and I have to remind the Deputy it is Transport and Technical Services workers and employees who effectively work in the front line here, within the composting windrows themselves - I find it slightly alarmist to want to insist that where no problem exists we should somehow, by force of monitoring actions, imply that there is a problem. There is no health problem. The Department of Transport and Technical Services is in constant and ongoing discussions with our colleagues in Health. We await any serious input from local general practitioners; evidence from any health organisation that a problem exists. To all intents and purposes there is no problem relating to health. I think it would be alarmist to start monitoring a situation on the basis that there is a problem when there is not one.

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I will give way to Deputy Le Claire if, indeed, it is a supplementary.

3.2.2 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

It is a supplementary. On visiting with businesses down there only this week I have been informed that their windows are closed and remain closed on the occasions that the composting affects their workers. Those businesses were surprised to find out that the U.K. do monitor within 250 metres. I would argue it is not alarmist to monitor. That is the question I have been putting to the Minister. Would the Minister not agree to undertake to monitor workplaces, the same as he is monitoring residences? If he suggests it is alarmist to monitor businesses, is it not also alarmist to acknowledge that you are monitoring residences?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am not aware that my Department is monitoring residences, as the Deputy puts it. But, I have to say that I think an enormous amount of alarm has been created for the bulk of the residents at Havre des Pas by a very small group of people who, quite frankly, are making a mountain out of a molehill. There is an odour. The Department accepts there is a smell. The Department intends to address the problem of the smell by enclosing the composting facility. It is not a smell that causes illness. That is simply the situation. At this stage, until I am presented with serious and confirmed evidence from our colleagues who work in health protection, I have no intention of installing monitoring facilities.

3.3 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I do not think the Minister fully answered Deputy Duhamel's question. Mine leads on from who is carrying out the full independent environmental impact assessment and traffic flows? When will the report be produced to this House? How much will it cost? Will it be fully costed to include the example given by the Chief Officer of Transport and Technical Services, that if all the waste goes down to La Collette we will probably have to compulsorily purchase the whole of the Norman's site and along by the harbour there? Will this be included in time for the debate for the 2 sites in the Waste Strategy?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am not currently aware of any plans, certainly, on behalf of Transport and Technical Services to compulsorily purchase the whole of the Norman's site. I wait, with interest, to hear where information on those plans may emanate from but it certainly does not come within my remit as things currently stand. I regret to inform the Deputy, that I am not in a position to give her a detailed account of who precisely the personnel will be conducting the environmental impact assessment. I can assure her they will be relevant experts in the relevant fields and, in due course, I shall attempt to supply the Deputy with a breakdown, should she wish to cast her eye over the talents available when we know who the assessment team will be. Consequently, I am also not currently in a position to give her a detailed breakdown on how much it will cost but no expense will be spared in order to ensure that a proper full evaluation is carried out. I can assure Members on that score.

3.4 Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

In the light of the previous answers to the last question, can the Minister assure this House that any environment impact assessment undertaken in relation to the location of waste facilities with respect to La Collette, or other areas, will indeed be a full strategic environment assessment in its wider sense?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

If I knew what the Deputy was talking about I might be able to give a more helpful response. I do not exactly know what a full strategic environmental assessment may be but I am sure that if there are implications that they will be covered.

3.5 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Going back to my previous question. It is a shame the Minister has a very selective memory because there were about 12 to 15 of us Deputies, and other people, who went down to La Collette and we had a meeting with himself and his Chief Officer prior to visiting the composting site. Even if he cannot remember, I would ask him then to have a second conversation with his Chief Officer and find out if this is a possibility that we will need to compulsorily purchase many buildings and, secondly, the much looked forward to Weighbridge area that will lose the buses, will become a gyratory system for heavy traffic around that area; this was told to many Deputies by the Chief Officer of Transport and Technical Services. It is a shame the Minister does not remember this. It is also a shame when the Minister absolutely refuses to take officer advice because he is not siting the green waste where his Department has decided it would be the first choice, which is Warwick Farm. [Aside] [Laughter] So, my question is: will he please check and speak to his own Chief Officer and find out exactly what the impact and the cost to this House will be to site all the waste at La Collette.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am very grateful for the Deputy's wide-ranging question. I think I can firstly assure both the Deputy, and the House, that I am in regular discussions with my Chief Officer whose advice I value very highly. I am aware of all of it. My earlier response to the previous question of the Deputy, I said I had no idea of any plans to compulsorily purchase the Norman buildings. Of course I do have some idea about the long-term traffic implications that pertain to the La Collette 1 and 2 industrial sites. I am aware, because I think it happens to be not a bad idea, that there are suggestions that the La Collette industrial site may be extended to La Collette 3, a new and additional reclamation site for the Island, which currently, as it happens, would not be allowed under the Island Plan which may account for a forthcoming review of the Island Plan but Members would have to direct questioning on that score to my fellow Minister, Senator Cohen, the Minister for Environment and Planning. However, what I can say on the subject is that, quite clearly, if usage of the La Collette reclamation site was to be expanded, then we would have to have another look at the road system that runs between La Collette and the rest of the Island and the town. It may well be that new forms of traffic works would have to be looked at which may include a form of gyratory system at one end of the Fort Regent tunnel or the other. I am simply not in a position to give much further detail at this stage.

3.6 Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Members will have read, no doubt, the comments attached to P.258/2005 from the Minister of Health and Social Services. In those comments there was reference to a health study written by Herr *et al*, dated 2003. The question is: has the Minister of Transport and Technical Services read that report?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

No, I have not.

3.6.1 Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

In that case, could I suggest that perhaps it would be a sensible thing for the Minister to read that report because it does state within the body of the comments that this health study was actually done and it says: "A study of health in the general public around composting sites, Herr *et al* - 2003, has found a connection between colony forming units of bio-aerosols and respiratory problems" that have been denied during an earlier question made by Deputy Le Claire. There

are health issues that should be looked at. Does the Minister not think that he should really be up to scratch on this issue?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I may not have read that particular report but I certainly am up to scratch on this particular issue. The fact that various bio forms, or aerial borne fungi may float around a composting facility is no different to what may float around a cowshed; what may float around a Jersey farm; what may float around a Jersey field. It is part of life. It is organic matter. We live with it every day. It gets up our noses, we breath it into our lungs and it does not really do us any harm. It is just part of the world we live in. It is not a health risk.

[Aside]

3.6.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister answer the question? Will he read the appropriate report relating to health dangers around such facilities?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Yes, I will.

3.7 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

In his written answers this morning, which I wonder if the Minister has read, he indicates that the ongoing health effects, which have been identified by the Health Ministry, need to be thoroughly investigated. He also concurs that his Department and his own health protection staff are currently engaged in setting up a health impact assessment for the proposed composting regime and it will include key stakeholders and residents representatives. I go back to my earlier question: those key stakeholders should include those people that are working in that area. Will the Minister, having acknowledged in his written answers - that he may not recall or may not have read this morning - that there are issues in relation to health and the need to thoroughly investigate those matters, that they should also include the key stakeholders of the businesses surrounding that facility?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I have to admit to being slightly amused by the Deputy claiming that it was a written question that I may not have read because it is a written question that was not written by me, it was written by the Minister for Health and Social Services. [Laughter] So, I am rather surprised that the Deputy is directing his questioning to me. However, I do want to make one comment on the opening sentence the Deputy made: there is no ongoing health problem. There is no health problem. It would really make people, I think, generally an awful lot happier if we moved away from this atmosphere of alarm and concern about what the risks are. There are none. As far as we know, we have been unable to determine any risk to health, whatsoever, from the composting facility.

The Deputy Bailiff:

That concludes questioning of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services.