

2025.04.22

3.6 Deputy S.M. Ahier of St. Helier North of the Minister for the Environment regarding connecting all island properties to mains water (OQ.101/2025):

Will the Minister advise what actions, if any, are being undertaken to ensure all Island properties are connected to mains water; and will he further advise whether any funding requests for such work have been made to the Council of Ministers?"

Deputy S.G. Luce (The Minister for the Environment):

Jersey Water is the private company that are charged with providing mains water to households and they are committed to reaching as many households as possible. They undertake annually a review and prioritise their capital investment to do that work, taking into account also of course things like water quality and customer demand. I can tell the Deputy that I, personally, and I am not aware of other Ministers either, who have taken any funding requests to the Council of Ministers in the last 18 months but I remain committed to working and continuing to have conversations with Jersey Water to enable more Island properties to become connected to the mains network.

3.6.1 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

I believe the Jersey Water Law 1972 falls within the Minister's remit. Article 7 of the law states: "The owner or occupier of any premises may require the company to provide a supply of water sufficient for the domestic purposes of those premises and the company shall, within a reasonable time, comply with that requirement." Some properties in St Helier have been waiting 20 years to be connected to the water supply. Does the Minister believe that that is a reasonable length of time?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

St. Helier is, as we know, our central Parish, the most populated Parish, and is well-served with mains water supply. It does sound like 20 years is a very long time for any property in St. Helier to have mains water, but I would need to have more specifics to answer that question. I do know that there is a large number of properties in Jersey that are within 50 metres of a mains service, and they are still to be connected. That is going to be £36 million worth of work according to Jersey Water. But I appreciate in this case, in St. Helier, it does sound like this property should have reasonable access to mains water and I would need to know more specifics as to where that was.

[10:15]

3.6.2 Deputy J. Renouf:

Does the Minister accept that the issue here could be that Jersey Water require the customer to pay for the connection of water and that some customers cannot afford that connection? Is he prepared to look into this requirement with Jersey Water and to see to what extent that is indeed the barrier?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

Yes, I am very happy to look into that.

3.6.3 Deputy J. Renouf:

Would the Minister consider that in some cases the requirement for the customer to pay places a prohibitive cost on the customer in that it may be tens or even hundreds of thousands of pounds in some cases? Would he be able to consider having discussions about whether that cost might be shared potentially between Jersey Water, a customer and maybe even Government in those cases where the situation would simply be uneconomic for those remote properties to gain mains water?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I am always open to discussions with anybody who needs to access mains water or, for that matter, a new electricity supply. I think both of them are not dissimilar in this effect. If you need an upgrade or an addition, there is a cost involved and some people find that prohibitive. So yes, I will say to the Deputy, I am happy to talk to both Jersey Electricity, but specifically in this case Jersey Water, about how we might do that.

3.6.4 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Is the Minister able to confirm that it is government policy to charge private individuals who may need to cross public land to connect to mains networks, a cost borne by the individual that is paid to Government? And if so, have any discussions taken place about whether the Government would reduce or waive altogether such fees.

Deputy S.G. Luce:

Can I ask the Deputy if she was referring to government-owned land being crossed or private land?

Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Yes, public land, government-owned land.

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I am not aware of the answer to that question. I do not know the situation regarding water access across government-owned land, but I will find out the answer and get back to the Deputy.

3.6.5 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf of St. Saviour:

Would the Minister not agree that there is a potentially strong case, listening to the questions, that some form of regulation, some form of checks on whether or not Jersey Water is being proportionate and fair to customers based upon their legal requirements is required without the full extent of regulation, as we have seen with the J.C.R.A. (Jersey Competition Regulatory Authority) and Jersey Telecom, that something needs to happen? There is nobody to go to apart from the Minister for Jersey Water, and that is probably not fair for individual drainage contracts, although Members are right to do it. But something needs to be done to challenge Jersey Water, which they are not being, on the questions such as being asked by my colleague Deputies, rather than doing nothing, and he is not responsible.

Deputy S.G. Luce:

In the extensive discussions I have with Jersey Water on a whole number of issues, I am not aware that they are not doing anything. It certainly is not the case, as far as I am aware. I could say to the Deputy, since 2020 they have connected over 105 units, laying 3 kilometres of new mains water pipes at a cost of £750,000. Adding to the mains network has a cost - not inconsiderable cost - and as I am sure we will appreciate, every time we get to the next one it is slightly more expensive than the previous, low-hanging fruit and all that sort of thing. But

yes, I am happy to talk about that with Jersey Water, but it is not as straightforward as it might sound.

3.6.6 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am grateful for the Minister's response, because he is quite right ... does he agree that individual customers, whether that be in Vallée Des Vaux or wherever, that seem obvious to be connected, simply ought not to be taking this Assembly's time up, and that somebody somewhere needs to be able ... the customer needs to be able to go somewhere to see whether the response from Jersey Water is proportionate because it does not clear ... we are not criticising Jersey Water. I am not trying to. But just saying 105 properties are being connected, what does that mean? It does not mean anything. Does he agree that we could work on a hybrid, a light form of regulation, in helpful discussions with Scrutiny?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I would be happy to discuss with Scrutiny how we might make the situation better. We are always trying to make things better. I am aware of individual instances where it can be quite challenging, especially with private land-owning surrounding properties that need to access mains. Sometimes neighbours need to work closer together where they can. It is regrettable that sometimes they are not able to do that. But the Deputy can be assured that I work with Jersey Water to do my best and their best to see what we can do in every circumstance.

3.6.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Minister confirm as a general policy position that where people can afford to pay to connect themselves to a water supply, where they are not already, that they should pay for it and it would not be right for either the taxpayer or indeed existing water subscribers to see a hike in their bills simply to pay for others who may actually have the means and may seek an increase in their property value go up by connection to mains water?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

The Deputy is absolutely right. If we are going to increase the number of houses on the Island which have access to mains water somebody has to bear that cost. It is not inconsiderable and it most likely will be done through water bills. Every individual who is connected to the mains would have to contribute to that extension of the mains network. But the Deputy asks about should people who can afford pay, and the obvious answer, of course, is yes. At the moment, that is what happens. What I have committed to this morning is having some discussions with Jersey Water and others about how we might help those who are financially less well able to pay, but the current situation is exactly as the Deputy described.

3.6.8 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Jersey Water charges have increased by 6 per cent in 2023, 10.9 per cent in 2024, 5.7 per cent in 2025, which leads to a turnover figure now of £21 million per year, yet only £150,000 of that has been allocated to connecting properties to mains water. What actions can the Minister take under the Water Law to try to increase that percentage of Jersey Water's turnover?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

As I have said a number of times already this morning, I do have discussions with Jersey Water on a regular basis. Some of these issues may well be shareholder issues, in which case the Minister for Treasury and Resources would be better advised. But I am aware that Jersey Water on a regular basis deal with leakage. They have fantastic leakage results but they still want to make sure that the system does not leak water. They want to continue to provide the best treatment they can using their current treatment works when we know there is a lot of money,

tens of millions of pounds, to be spent on treatment works in the next 5 or 6 years. We know P.F.A.S. (per- and polyfluoroalkyl) is going to be an issue along with other chemicals. We have got to do that. Finally, Jersey Water are committed to identifying the new water strategy and water resources for the coming 15, 20, 30 years. They have a number of financial commitments which they have to look at on an annual basis. I believe they put what money they have available into extending the mains network and maybe there is a discussion with them to do more, and they will have to reprioritise and do less of something else.

The Bailiff:

We come now to Question 7 that Deputy Miles will ask of the Minister for Sustainable and Economic Development. The Minister is absent. Deputy Scott, are you briefed to answer that question?

Deputy M.R. Scott of St. Brelade:

No Sir, sorry. I do not have the delegated authority nor the information to answer the question.

The Bailiff:

Connétable of St. John, are you briefed to answer that question? I am afraid the question will inevitably be deferred in that case, given the absence from the Minister on compassionate grounds. Thank you very much.