

3.14 The Connétable of St. Helier of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services regarding cessation of operations at the temporary La Collette composting site:

Would the Minister inform Members whether he will cease operations at the temporary La Collette composting site, in view of the public complaints made from the residents and workers in the vicinity over their concerns of ill health, for a further 2 years until an odour free facility can be provided and if not the reasons why?

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

While I understand the concerns of the residents of Le Havre des Pas, unless I receive clear proof of health problems being caused by the temporary La Collette composting site, I do not propose to cease the composting operation until the new composting facility is in operation. I have said in responses to other questions that I accept that there are complaints regarding odours emanating from the site. Regarding the concerns of ill health being caused, I am guided by the advice of the Health and Social Services Department, which is that there is no proof of a link between the ill health claims and the composting operation. Ceasing the present composting at La Collette would require an alternative disposal route for 12,000 tons of green waste per year. If left to the individual people who produce it to dispose of it, I believe that this would be an unsatisfactory solution where it could result in piles of unsightly, smelly, decomposing green waste around the Island. This would create eyesores and nuisances and probably leachate problems. Some people already use home composting successfully but they would still have material that could not be readily dealt with by home composting systems. For example, branches of trees and shrubs, hedge cuttings and other large items. The option of putting the green waste in the Bellozanne incinerator would also be a totally unsatisfactory solution. The incinerator is already struggling to cope with the quantities of waste that it presently receives due to the frequent breakdowns of the aging plant. There are already large stockpiles of shredded bulky waste at Bellozanne, which the incinerator has been unable to keep up with. Priority is always given in the incinerator to receiving putrescible waste - that is waste containing food - so that any stockpiles do not contain smelly, biodegradable waste, which would be a hygiene and health hazard. Therefore although it might seem that simply stopping composting at La Collette would be a solution to the smell problem, it would just result in moving the problem somewhere else. On that basis, I regret that I cannot agree to cease the composting operation at La Collette.

3.14.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Could the Minister account for the delay in the Department of Vehicle Standards (DVS) returning a Health and Nuisance questionnaire sent out by the Parish to all business in La Collette last week? Could he confirm what distance his department is situated from the composting site, and confirm whether it is within the safe operating limit as recommended by the environment agency?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I cannot confirm the details of the progress of the survey and I have not personally measured the distance from the composting operations to the DVS Department, but I understand it is in the order of 300 metres. My understanding is that even under the

latest reports the safety limit under U.K. guidelines for anyone working nearby - or at least the recommended safety limit, because it is quite safe to work there - is 250 metres. That is based on calculations of the micrograms of aerosol spongiforms per cubic metre. All the evidence suggests that distances down to 200 or 150 metres are quite safe and, as I have been publicly quoted previously, I again direct Members' attention to Transport and Technical Services staff who work on the site without any significant protection of any description. They appear to suffer no ill effects. Their sickness rate is exactly the same on average as all our other outdoor workers and I have no foundation whatsoever for suggestions that there is any form of health hazard associated with the composting of green waste.

3.14.2 Deputy J. A. Martin:

Could the Minister inform the House - sorry, I cannot remember the exact tonnage that is down at the composting site now - but could he tell us what there was when it first opened down at La Collette and the difference of what there is now? Secondly, the Minister states there he has no conclusive proof that there is a health problem, but he also must admit he has no conclusive proof that this is not causing people a health problem.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I have no conclusive proof that there is a man on the moon or that there is not a man on the moon. That is one of the reasons why conclusive proof is so important in determining an issue. Currently, there appears to be no proof whatsoever of a linkage between personal health problems of certain residents who live in a nearby location and the composting operation itself. Indeed, all the indications that have been provided so far by the Health and Safety experts - who, incidentally are professional people whose careers are dedicated to finding out where health problems may or may not exist, people who often culminate careers over discoveries of this nature: those experts have found no linkage whatsoever. I reiterate something that I have said previously, that is the nearest residence to the composting operation is 750 metres away. That is 3 times more than the current recommended limits for a composting site of this nature. As to the tonnages, well, clearly, when the site was first operated there was no green waste on it at all. It was simply a large concrete slab. I cannot give the Deputy an accurate breakdown as to the precise amount of tonnage on the site at any one time but I am sure if she takes, say, 12,000 tons a year as a round figure, and divides by 12, she will get a rough estimate that we probably in any one month have about 1,000 tons on the site.

3.14.3 The Connétable of St. Helier:

It was unclear from the Minister's answer about the status of the questionnaire which, as I said, has been sent to all businesses at La Collette. Has he seen the questionnaire? Could he say when the questionnaire will be returned by his staff working in DVS?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I have not seen the questionnaire and I am unable to respond to the Constable's question because I do not know what datelines or deadlines have been set for its return.

3.14.4 Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

The Minister told the House at a previous question time that he had not read the Herr *et al* Report which outlined the health hazards of bio-aerosols produced on open windrowing composting sites. Has he taken the opportunity in the intervening 2 weeks to read that report?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Again, I may have slightly misled the House when I responded to the Deputy's previous question. When he asked me had I read the report, I had the assumption that he meant had I read the report all the way through, which I have not. However, I had read the relevant elements of the report that relate to this issue. In response to his latest question, no, I still have not read the whole of the report but I am aware of the relevant sections of it that relate to composting issues.

3.14.5 Deputy J. A. Hilton:

Does the Minister think it is ironic? The Constable of St. Helier makes much of the odour beginning experienced by the residents of Le Havre des Pas when under the terms of his zero-waste trial in St. Helier he proposes dumping thousands of tons of black bin rubbish at Westmount to be hand-sorted by employees yet to be identified, supported by a £5,000 donation from the Environment Scrutiny Panel?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Most of what the Constable of St. Helier achieves has an ironic element to it. I am grateful to the Deputy for the information she has provided because I have to say that I know absolutely nothing about what the Constable has been planning until I received a notification in the post only yesterday, indicating this so-called zero waste scheme of which still I am aware of very little detail. I am somewhat surprised and taken aback that it appears that no-one in my department has been involved in this in any way. I to some extent welcome the initiatives that the Constable appears to be making in terms of progressing the recycling and re-use, but I really would hope that he simply would not do this as a frolic of his own. I do not know to what extent this comes within the ambit of the Environment Scrutiny Panel, who themselves are struggling with composting, and I find the current situation somewhat confusing and to some extent a little alarming. Because, quite frankly, having unqualified workers delving around in household waste bags that could be full of anything from putrescible waste to used needles has all sorts of potential health hazards. The Minister for Health has already indicated his very serious concerns about adopting what, I am afraid to say, to all intents and purposes is a rather foolhardy approach to recycling.

The Connétable of St. Helier:

Can I make a point of order, please?

The Bailiff:

Yes.

The Connétable of St. Helier:

Deputy Hilton has alluded to a paper that was sent out to Deputies yesterday. Further to Deputy Fox's phone call to me, that has been withdrawn. There are no detailed plans before the Parish Assembly or before the Deputies and I think Deputy Hilton's allegations are misleading.

3.14.6 Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Could the Minister say whether he has been consulted about the setting-up of a working party to deal with composting issues at La Collette? Is he also disappointed that the suggestion has been made to set up this working party at the 11th hour, 6 months after Deputy Le Claire's proposition was lodged before this Assembly?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I find the sudden emergence of a so-called working party quite extraordinary, not only because of the amount of time that has been in place for such a working party to have been set-up previously, but also it appears that the subject matter of that working party is an issue of disposal of green waste to be dealt with by the agricultural industry that was tried and tested many years ago and proved to be an absolute disaster when the whole project just turned, literally, to compost and pollution and leachate problems in water courses. Why it has emerged now, I do not know. Why it has not been considered as part of the ongoing scrutiny process that started many, many weeks ago - and I am looking forward to a conclusion shortly from the Scrutiny Panel that are investigating composting - why suddenly we have this brand new departure, I do not understand and I think all those involved can only look at their position and whether it may even be or not be in the interest of good government.

3.14.7 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Would the Minister agree that after the elections in October/November this year a lot of new Members were elected to this House and are able to bring with them expertise, most of it in his case he has chosen to ignore with regard to the agricultural community and the opportunity for composting in a rural environment despite his claim last week, Sir, that it was news to him? There is an opportunity. Will the Minister recognise that his belligerence over the siting of a composting plant at La Collette is becoming ridiculous and it is now time to look at the serious alternative of locating state-of-the-art, modern composting facilities well disguised in the countryside operated by partnership - public sector or private sector, I am not worried. But the opportunity to turn back from La Collette is a real one, and will he not recognise it?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I will be happy to discuss all of those issues with the Senator at such time as this meeting comes to a close. But, clearly, he covers such an all-encompassing wide-

ranging series of questions there, it would be entirely inappropriate to deal with it at this time.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Point of Order. Is a Senator not required to declare in an interest in a matter which he may have, and would this Senator not confirm that in fact it is a company of which he is a director **[approbation]** which is a potential composting recipient? Indeed, I understand that it is the company in which he is a shareholder which was the subject of a meeting on Saturday morning. Does he not believe, or would you not rule, Sir, that there is a requirement to declare such an interest?

The Bailiff:

I do not think I am willing to give a ruling on the hoof, Senator, but I shall give Senator Perchard the opportunity to reply to that if he wishes to do so.

Senator J.L. Perchard:

Yes, Sir, it is quite typical of the level this debate has gone to. It is no longer about the rights or wrongs of this issue. It is no longer about the rights of this issue; it is about point-scoring and it is very unfortunate that Senator Ozouf should want to score points over me. There are alternatives. I have an interest in the countryside. Members can see that I have interests in the countryside by going to the bookshop. I am a director of 3 farms. It is inevitable. I have no interest personally in targeting my business to make compost. It is the fact that the rural community is able, contrary to what Deputy de Faye says, well able to undertake a composting operation on behalf of the States very simply and very economically. Just one further point, Sir, if I may? Because I do find that we are losing our way here, in the sense that it is no longer about what is right or wrong. The Department of Transport and Technical Services - formerly Public Services - have not got a terribly good record when it comes to composting themselves.

The Bailiff:

Senator, I am sorry, I cannot allow you to go further into that. You were asked on the question of declaration of interest and I said earlier that I was not willing to make a ruling on this, but I will draw your attention and the attention of Members to Standing Order 106(2), which says that a Member of the States asking an oral question who has a financial interest in the subject matter of the question must declare the interest. I do not know whether there is a financial interest or not; I do not know, but I draw that to the attention of the Members.

Senator S. Syvret:

On a further point of order, can I ask that the PPC Committee consider this issue? The Senator is a shareholder in Jersey Royal and one of the prime likely beneficiaries of any move to composting to the countryside. The Senator is shaking his head, but I am afraid it is an absolutely cast-iron conflict of interest. It simply is not acceptable conduct and I really think he can see the need to look at it.

The Bailiff:

Senator, may I repeat that Standing Order 106(2) does not prevent a Member from asking an oral question if he has a financial interest. What it requires is that the financial interest must be declared. Well, that completes the oral questions which have been set down for answer.