

SUPPLY OF BOTTLED WATER (P.177/99): REPORT

**Presented to the States on 18th January 2000
by the Health and Social Services Committee**



STATES OF JERSEY

STATES GREFFE

175

1999

P.177Rpt.

Price code: A

REPORT

1. Background

On 2nd November 1999 the Deputy of St. John presented to the States a report and proposition (P.177/99) regarding the Supply of Bottled Water which was in the following terms -

The States are asked to decide whether they are of opinion -

- (1) to agree to investigate the feasibility of providing a potable bottled water supply at reduced cost for mothers of very young children and other people at risk, until such time as the Medical Officer of Health declares that the Island's water supply is fit for this section of the community to drink;
- (2) to charge the Health and Social Services Committee, in conjunction with any other Committee involved, to report to the States Assembly within three months with fully costed recommendations.

The proposition was lodged "au Greffe" and referred to the Health and Social Services Committee for the preparation of a report.

2. Issues

The letter quoted in the Proposition, written in September 1999 by the Medical Officer of Health, was intended solely as a private, professional communication to General Practitioners, reminding them of the variable quality of water for those who use private supplies, and advising of an increased level of nitrates in the water supplied by the Jersey New Waterworks Company Ltd (JNWC).

This could be of relevance to very young children and a small number of others who might be vulnerable to developing methaemoglobinaemia (a condition involving an altered protein in the blood cells with reduced oxygen-carrying capacity). It was considered that GPs should be made aware of the possibility, albeit unlikely, of this condition occurring. The significance of the advice and any action arising would depend on the clinical opinion of the doctor concerned.

The Medical Officer of Health has advised that, although there is less safety margin for some groups due to a raised nitrate level, the public water supply provided by the JNWC is fit to drink. There is therefore no health reason to provide a supply of bottled water at the present time.

By virtue of the Water (Jersey) Law 1972, the responsibility for provision of a 'wholesome' public water supply is vested in the JNWC, under the supervision of the Public Services Committee. A decision as to the 'wholesomeness' of the water rests with the Public Services Committee, and that Committee has not deemed it necessary to take any action in this respect.

In the unlikely event that the public water supply should (for any reason) become unsuitable for human consumption, considerably more resources would be required than just the provision of bottled water to groups at risk. It is suggested that the JNWC and the Public Services Committee are responsible for the contingency plans for such a remote possibility, but in the absence of specific proposals it would be difficult to cost the plans.

The States are aware that the JNWC is considering building a nitrate removal plant to reduce the risk of raised nitrate levels in the public water supply. However, before any decision is taken to provide a plant, the Company is awaiting information on new United Kingdom drinking water regulations to be announced this year and the results of an environmental impact assessment for the disposal of the nitrate waste stream.

In the meantime, it is proposed the desalination plant will be used when nitrate levels in natural resources are at their highest (normally during spring and early summer) with the objective of blending desalinated water with reservoir water, and thereby reducing nitrate levels in drinking water during these periods.

3. Conclusions

The States are advised that the public water supply is fit to drink and there is presently no need to consider the supply of bottled water to any sections of the community on health grounds. However, individuals who use a private water supply should be aware of the variable quality of that supply and take measures to monitor their water quality.

Whilst the JNWC has developed a proposal to reduce the level of nitrate in the public water supply, this is awaiting an environmental impact assessment before final decisions are made.

There is a need for the Public Services Committee and JNWC to ensure a contingency plan to manage the situation should the public water supply (for any reason) become unfit for consumption. However, it is considered this would involve considerably more than providing a limited supply of bottled water. It is understood that measures are currently being taken to address the contingency planning issue.