

2.11 Senator B.E. Shenton of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding possible health impacts arising from the proximity of residences to mobile telephone masts:

Despite his statement on 25th April 2006 that he believed that there was: “no risk or no significantly quantifiable risk” from mobile phone masts, has the Minister studied recent international research concerning the possible health impacts on persons living near to such masts, and will he undertake to work with ministerial colleagues to ensure that all masts in Jersey are moved at least 300 metres away from residential accommodation?

Senator S. Syvret (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

I have read some of the recent literature on the possibility of health risks to those living near mobile phones masts. However, as a brief examination of the material on the internet shows, the amount of available information is vast. Therefore, I could not claim to have read even a small part of the totality. Of course, I am willing to work with other Ministers in any detailed examination of the issues. I could not say at this time whether a distance of 300 metres is practicably achievable in Jersey, nor that if it is, such a stricture should apply only to residential accommodation. I believe the proposed 6-month moratorium which has been suggested would enable the issues to be investigated thoroughly. While I am not in a position to state that we will necessarily find health grounds for limiting the location of masts, I agree with the view that perhaps 200 masts in a small place like Jersey is excessive and undesirable. I am strongly of the view that the J.C.R.A. must intervene robustly to require and enforce equipment sharing.

2.11.1 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Given the complexity of the issues at hand, I wonder if the Minister would outline how he is going to determine where he will seek information to give him comfort in his analysis of the situation. Where will he go, who will he ask the questions of, given the broad breadth of information that is available?

Senator S. Syvret:

I like to do some research of my own on issues generally, but of course the major source of my advice will be the professionals that we employ to advise us on this issue. I imagine that they will look at the respectable literature. Some reports have been passed to me recently; one in particular, which visually appears to be a scientific report and purports to be a scientific report, but upon examination, it is little more than a collection of New Age mysticism and snake oil quackery. **[Laughter]**

2.11.2 Senator B.E. Shenton:

Will the Minister confirm that a precautionary approach is advisable and that he will be recommending a 6-month moratorium to his colleagues on the Council of Ministers?

Senator S. Syvret:

My inclination is to support the proposition that has been brought forward by Deputy Ryan to have a 6-month moratorium. Sorry, what was the second part of your question: that the precautionary principle is important? Yes, I do support in principle the precautionary principle. It is an important means of trying to limit public exposure to risks from a variety of activities, but there has to of course be a commonsense balance when taking these things into consideration. It is entirely possible that one might try and endeavour to eliminate every single risk we run in society from our day-to-day lives. Of course, that is not possible. Even if it were, the price for eliminating those risks can be severe to society.

2.11.3 Deputy P.J.D. Ryan of St. Helier:

Given that the J.C.R.A. is unable to intervene on issues to do with mast sharing unless a licensee requests it to become involved, does the Minister have any views or any suggestions as to how indeed the J.C.R.A. might be able to intervene?

Senator S. Syvret:

My understanding, Sir - and I will be corrected if I am wrong - is that the Minister for Economic Development does have the power to make certain requests of the J.C.R.A. on a public interest basis. I would have thought that that was the starting point.

2.11.4 The Connétable of Grouville:

Would the Minister agree with me that however hard he has searched and however hard I have searched on the internet and on various sources, nowhere have I found anybody who is willing to unequivocally say there is no harm in these emissions?

Senator S. Syvret:

That may well be the case, Sir, but the broad consensus of respectable scientific opinion - scientific research carried out using recognised methodologies - is that there is no demonstrable or quantifiable risk from these omissions.

2.11.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Minister not agree that the sum total of what has happened over these masts is that the Council of Ministers has demonstrated a remarkable lack of joined-up thinking?

Senator S. Syvret:

I think it is probably fair to say that a number of Members of this Assembly perhaps ought to have given a little more thought and used a little more foresight at the outset of this whole issue in respect of licensing, other telecoms applicators and so on. I do not know really that that is a problem that can be blamed upon the Council of Ministers, because I think you will find that the roots of this decision go back before the introduction of Ministerial government.

2.11.6 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Will the Minister acknowledge and agree with me that it is not possible, no matter which network you are in, in an Island with the topography that Jersey has, to obtain a signal in the Island's totality? Is it not prudent therefore to accept the fact it is not always going to be possible to receive a signal everywhere in the Island, and therefore the Island should settle for receiving signals in general areas, rather than putting up masts everywhere, for it would be cheaper to put masts on top of everybody's heads?

Senator S. Syvret:

As a matter of general principle, I believe it is the case that not everywhere in Jersey can detect a signal for the use of mobile phones. I do not necessarily believe that we should try and change that by making sure that they can reach everywhere. I do not believe though that the driving force at the moment is the absence of coverage in certain isolated areas. It is the competitive drive of the other potential telecom services providers. It is worth reminding people and pointing out to people that the exposure to these effects is likely to be far greater from using a mobile phone and having it held to your head than any exposure from the masts.