

# STATES OF JERSEY



## **COMPOSTING FACILITIES AT LA COLLETTE II: APPROVAL BY STATES ASSEMBLY (P.31/2006) – COMMENTS**

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**Presented to the States on 28th March 2006  
by the Minister for Transport and Technical Services**

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**STATES GREFFE**

## COMMENTS

### Introduction

The report supporting the proposition from the Connétable is critical of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services and suggests that the Minister is unwilling to bring the matter of composting to the States in the same way as for the proposed Energy from Waste (EfW) Plant, i.e. to debate the proposed site and technology. He also suggests that the Department and its advisers are not aware of the latest technologies for composting.

The States approved the Solid Waste Strategy (P.95/2005) in July 2005, and clause (a)(ii) of the Proposition was “that the (Environment and Public Services) Committee be charged to provide a modern facility for recycling of garden and green waste by 2007”. This was the most urgent priority, to construct a new enclosed composting facility, in order to remove the problems of odours caused by the existing open windrow composting operation at La Collette II.

Considerable discussion took place on this matter in the debate, and the Committee gave an undertaking to move forward with proposals for the new composting facility as quickly as possible, to minimise the time that the existing operation would have to continue. The Committee did not feel it necessary to have these proposals debated and approved by the States, and the States did not suggest that it should be so.

### Approval of the States Required

The Minister and the Department still believe that it is not necessary for the States to debate this matter. The Department has investigated numerous sites for this facility, and is trying to get on with providing a solution to the existing problems.

The Connétable suggests that “if the States are to debate the one part of the waste strategy (that is the proposals for the new EfW Plant) it is logical for them to debate the other”.

The States gave a very clear mandate to the Committee, in approving the Strategy, to get on with the proposals in it, including the Amendments that had been accepted, with the clear understanding that the proposals for the new EfW Plant, and only that, were to be brought back to the States. The Strategy was debated at length by the States and approved by a very large majority, and it does not seem reasonable that it should be brought back for debating again.

### Problems from Existing Composting Operation

Whilst absolutely agreeing that there are odour problems from the existing composting operation at La Collette, the Department has no actual evidence of any health problems arising from it. The Health Department has provided advice on this matter, and the Department has yet to see any actual evidence of health problems. It is quite probable that some of the smells in the Havre des Pas area are caused by rotting seaweed and algae. This was acknowledged in a report of November 1998 by the WWT Wetlands Advisory Service, which undertook an Intertidal Survey – La Collette to Le Dicq, South East Coast of Jersey. It is stated in the report at 3.1 Infaunal communities surveyed on the Havre des Pas shore:

**‘A social drawback of this phenomenon is that where buried drift or seasonal algae occurs on the shore, then the resulting decomposition involves the release of hydrogen sulphide, producing a foul smell of ‘rotten eggs’. This inevitably causes a public concern, as was the case at the Havre des Pas (Green Street) slipway during the present survey’.**

That was in 1998, long before composting started at La Collette.

Certainly, the Department will do its best to minimise odours from the existing composting at La Collette, and will continue to investigate complaints of odours.

### Selection of Site for Composting Facility

The Connétable questions whether it is right to expend millions of pounds on composting technology, and to select a site in a high-value urban area, which is already suffering extreme traffic congestion, without these proposals being brought to the States for debate.

The value of the proposed site at La Collette II, in the proposed zone for industrial development, has been taken into account in the consideration of sites for this facility. It is inevitable that, in an island the size of Jersey, we will not be able to find a site that is perfect in every respect and that does not have any disadvantages. The “pros and cons” of various sites were considered, and the two sites that emerged as front-runners were La Collette II and Warwick Farm. The choice between these sites was finely balanced, but what must be noted is that La Collette is an industrial site with the nearest residential properties over 700 metres away from the site of the proposed facility. Warwick Farm, whilst more or less in a rural area, has residential properties within 50 metres of where the proposed facility would be sited. Although it would be possible to construct and operate the facility there, it would no doubt be of more concern to the residents of that area.

The report mentions that the La Collette area already suffers extreme traffic congestion. However, the green waste currently goes there, and the compost is transported from there. Therefore, this proposal does not add to the traffic loading that already exists in the area.

The Parish of St. Helier has not been consulted directly on this proposal yet, as there were numerous sites being considered in different parishes, and, until a choice of site was made, it could have resulted in unnecessary work for all parties. However, it was clearly stated in the Strategy, and in briefings and public meetings, that La Collette was a site that was being considered for the composting facility.

### **Approval by the States of Composting Technology**

The Connétable suggests that there should be a discussion by the States of the best technology (for composting). This is a highly complex matter, and the Department is being advised by the technical specialists who have been appointed. The States can be assured that all modern technologies are being investigated. The Connétable also states that he has been to Preston to see “cutting edge ‘in-vessel’ composting operations”. The Department and its advisers are aware of this technology, and have investigated it.

The Connétable states that this technology “includes the composting of food waste, deemed impossible by the then Committee of Environment and Public Services as part of their Solid Waste Strategy in July 2005”. This allegation is totally unfounded. It can be seen very clearly in the Strategy document, in various places, but particularly in the Recommendations on page 12 that the composting facility proposed “will also be capable of expansion to accommodate kitchen waste, if this is considered appropriate and if this is permitted by Health requirements”.

The Committee has never said that composting of food waste was impossible. What was said, and this subject was debated at considerable length, was that for various reasons the Committee was not recommending it for the immediate future, but would continue to consider it as a possibility for the future.

The Connétable also seems to imply that the Minister of Transport and Technical Services intends to simply enclose the windrow composting facility rather than giving serious consideration to the alternative technologies which exist. The Department and its advisers are reviewing all technologies, and are aware of many different types, including the one that the Connétable visited. Whichever type is selected, it will be much more sophisticated than the open windrow type.

### **Revisit Decisions on Capacity of Proposed EfW Plant**

As has been mentioned earlier, it is indeed possible to include food waste in the composting process. The Connétable suggests that, if this is the case, then it means that there is no doubt that the States would have to revisit the decisions taken last year about the likely capacity of the proposed incinerator. The question of whether to include food waste in the composting process was discussed at length during the Strategy debate last July, on an Amendment to that effect from Deputy Duhamel. After a lot of discussion, including the reasons why the

Committee did not recommend it, the House voted 36 to 12 against the Amendment, and the Connétable of St. Helier was one of those who voted against it.

The main reasons why the Department and its advisers do not recommend composting food waste are as follows:

- Problems in achieving thorough segregation of “compostable” materials in the home to prevent contamination by plastic wrappings and unsuitable items (problems experienced).
- Problems of smells and rats, cats and birds tampering with separated kitchen waste sitting outside homes prior to collection, which could be weekly or fortnightly.
- The complexity of the collection arrangements, the provision of suitable leak-proof vehicles and the frequency of collections.
- The efficiency of the composting process to prevent contamination from cooked and uncooked meat scraps in kitchen waste.
- Managing the fine balance of the current disposal route for compost, sewage sludge, farm slurry, and agricultural waste to land.
- The risk of compromising the public’s confidence in our current high quality compost product, which is selling well, should there be a disease outbreak, such as Avian Influenza.
- The increased costs involved in the necessity of having a larger composting facility and in the provision of specialist collection vehicles for segregated kitchen waste.
- Jeopardising the support currently enjoyed by the more environmentally sound options of home composting or home kitchen waste digesters.
- Increased risk profile for the collection and processing staff.

One of the most significant points that should be noted is that the removal of food waste from the EfW Plant would only reduce the capacity required by about 3%, and the capital cost by about 2%, or £1.1 million. Whereas, the size of the composting facility would increase considerably and the capital cost by about 50%, or £2 million, with an increase of about 70% in annual operating costs. Therefore, proceeding with food waste composting not only attracts a degree of risk but current indications are that it will be more expensive to operate.