

3.15 The Connétable of St. Mary of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding the treatment of injurious weeds in accordance with the Weeds (Jersey) Law 1961:

Is the Minister aware of areas of public land where injurious weeds, and specifically ragwort, are endemic and if so, is he satisfied that there are sufficient resources available to ensure that these are dealt with in accordance with the Weeds (Jersey) Law 1961?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel (The Minister for Planning and Environment):

The department controls the spread of injurious weeds, and that includes ragwort, in accordance with the Weeds (Jersey) Law 1961. Complaints are received from the public and officers and we monitor known hotspots. This provides the department with an understanding of the problem areas. The department does not have the resources to prevent the spread of all ragwort occurring in all areas in the Island and it is not the intention of the injurious weeds law to do that. In order to target resources and control measures, the department revised its weeds policy in 2009. The new policy means that areas are actioned in situations when landowners are concerned about neighbouring infestations, seeding and spreading on to their land, particularly those infestations that may spread on to agricultural, horticultural or grazing lands. As such, marginal lands and/or scrub areas with ragwort are separately assessed according to the risk of spread and the ecological value of the surrounding land. The department however has insufficient resources to control ragwort according to this revised policy. This year, the department has spent more than 100 man days controlling ragwort. The problem this year is that the weather has been ideal for ragwort growth and this therefore might require more control next year with a corresponding increase in resources. If the Connétable is aware of any problems in her Parish, I will be happy to forward that information to my officers.

3.15.1 The Connétable of St. Mary:

A supplementary, Sir? Thank you. If public land is not being kept clear of ragwort, as the Minister has said he has not sufficient resource, how can the department really expect to be able to enforce the Weeds (Jersey) Law on private land if they are themselves at fault? I have got instances - and I am not talking about St. Mary here - where areas have been cut by the department up to 3 times, and they are being cut when ragwort is in seed and that is causing the spread to neighbouring properties, the policy itself. Does the Minister think this is appropriate?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

The department are researching alternative ways of dealing with ragwort control. The methods so far involve, as the Constable suggests, cutting the plant or pulling it out, including the roots, or indeed the use of herbicides in specific ways to try and reduce the problem. There is also a suggestion that perhaps there might be an opportunity on States-owned land to introduce a sheep grazing policy or goat grazing policy in order to allow the ragwort plants to appear more distinct so that more mechanised methods of uprooting these plants could be undertaken. As I said, the plant is not perhaps as dangerous as people think. It certainly can be harmful to animals if they do ingest it, but on the other side, I was recently in a conference with the British Irish Council, where we were discussing the importance of non-native invasive species and people should record that the ragwort supports some 60 species of invertebrate, not including pollinators or nectar feeders, and this represents a significant plant and animal biodiversity. So perhaps it is not a case of just exterminating the ragwort but indeed allowing it to flourish in places that do not have an overriding human or animal use.

3.15.2 Connétable S.W. Rennard of St. Saviour:

I do not believe I have just heard that.

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Would the Constable like me to repeat it?

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

If that is not parliamentary language, I again apologise. As a farmer, I have to deal with ragwort. It can only be dealt with correctly by pulling it out to get rid of the weed and get rid of the root. You do not cut it, because you spread it, and it is dangerous; it is very dangerous to horses. If I am going to pull out the ragwort and kill a few little other bits of life, they will just have to find somewhere else to survive. Do you know this whole thing is just stupid. Ragwort is dangerous. I have been fined for having it in my field, so I pulled it out and paid the fine. Now I am being told by the gentleman in charge of the environment that it is okay to have it and he is going to have areas put aside for it so these little creatures can live on it. I am sorry; I would like to know if you are going to be allowing this, can I allow it to grow on my farm without being fined so I can help these little animals as well? **[Approbation]**

The Deputy Bailiff:

Minister, I do not think you have responsibility for that last part of the question, but Connétable of St. Mary, have you got a final supplementary?

3.15.3 The Connétable of St. Mary:

Yes, Sir, I do; just that does the Minister not agree that the law is the law that has been passed by this Assembly and adopted, and if the law says that injurious weeds must not be allowed to spread the department must lead by example and not allow these weeds to spread from public land? Thank you.

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

No, I would wholly agree and it is the spreading that is the important thing and not the total eradication of the plant within those fields that contain it. Indeed, it is open to members of the public under the law to make complaints to the department and the department will then action the law. That clearly is not changing and that is how we deploy our officers.

3.15.4 The Connétable of St. Mary:

May I have one last little supplementary, Sir? Quickly. When the department is responding by cutting the ragwort in seed, does the Minister not agree that that is leading to spreading, which is the specific thing the law seeks to prohibit?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

No, I do not, because it is not just cutting that is the method for eliminating the plant in a particular field. It is uprooting the whole plant and disposing of it in a sensible fashion and this is one of the controlled measures that we operate, right? It is not just cutting.