

3.9 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity of the Chair of the Comité des Connétables regarding the Animal Welfare and Control Scrutiny Review (OQ.19/2026):

In relation to the Animal Welfare and Control Scrutiny Review and the presentation to the Comité des Connétables of options regarding seasonal restrictions on dogs on beaches by the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development in 2024, will the Chair advise what consideration was given to the options presented whether any public or Parish consultation took place and detail what evidence or views informed the Comité's position?

Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade (Chair, Comité des Connétables):

The Deputy asks an oft-repeated question in this Chamber. But I am pleased to answer the specific question she asks at this stage. The Comité initiated the exchange of correspondence with the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development about the Policing of Beaches Regulations 1959 following its meeting in May 2024. We had noted the petition on the States Assembly website to create dedicated dog-friendly beaches throughout the summer months and invited the Minister to a meeting in June or July 2024 to discuss the issues. The Minister was unable to attend at that point but following the petition, having reached 1,000 signatures, he wrote to us on 3rd September setting out some options for taking proposed legislative changes forward. He also responded to the petition on 10th September saying he had written to seek the Comité's views. We considered the proposals at our meeting on 16th September and replied that it was unable to support any of the options as proposed. We did not receive a Children's Rights Impact Assessment from the Minister and so we did not undertake any public or Parish consultation at that time. But I would be happy to expand if required.

3.9.1 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

How does the Comité evaluate whether the current restrictions continue to reflect the needs and expectations of Island residents?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

There were 3 elements of the proposals, as put by the Minister, and one was to designate a specific beach to allow for dogs to be walked off the lead at any time. This is one element, I think, where the public have views. The Constables have a pretty good feel of what goes on in their Parishes. Some Parishes have more beaches than others and I am probably one of those. Some Parishes have very limited beaches and I refer to the Constable of St. Saviour. But we know what goes on on the beaches, we get all the feedback from the public; whether it is a requirement to extend the hours or open all the beaches, whether it is to do with hours or whether it is to do with the policing of the beaches. In terms of our situation, as the Deputy mentions, we were consultees to the Minister's inquiry and our response to the first question, to designate a specific beach to allow for dogs to be walked off the lead, was not supported. That was dictated by a number of factors, which we are well aware of. It is not only about other users of the beach, it is about the tourism season, it is about the weather, it is about signage and it is about policing; there are lots of factors. In terms of the change of start time for dog-walking restrictions from 10.30 a.m. to 11.30 a.m., there was among the 12 Constables who were present at that meeting limited support for altering the start times, though if this was considered the view was that it should be to 11.00 a.m. and not 11.30 a.m. However, such a change would incur considerable cost to change all signage, and so that must not be underestimated. I am sure the Constable of St. Ouen will confirm that the change in speed-limit signage can end up costing £30,000 quite easily. This has to come from somewhere. The third point the Minister made was to remove the current restrictions on weekdays during May, leaving restrictions for weekdays and public holidays. This was considered to be too confusing, as there are several public holidays in May and the school ½ term, so it was not supported. I say for my part, as a regular dog-walker at La Pulente, I think the risk more is to public barbeques and sausages on barbeques, which certainly would not be safe with a lot of dogs that are walking on the beach, and that is something some dogs who have limited recall will struggle to contend with.

3.9.2 Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central:

The chair of the Comité mentioned an issue of cost. I note that there are 10,050 dogs at the last count on the Island, each paying £10 for a licence, which raises £100,500. Is that not a source of money that could be put towards something specifically for dog owners?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I think that that could well be the case. One of the concerns about signage, and I think the Minister for Transport will say that there is such a thing as sign-blindness. However many signs we put up, will they be adhered to? I suspect not, and even that is the case now from a policing point of view. While there is signage out there, it is really difficult to police, that the public do not tend to look at these things. I think it is an issue of education to dog owners; 10,420 was the latest calculation, to be accurate. But of course there are far more numbers than that with people who use the beaches without a dog. It is a question of getting a balance. I would say from the Comité point of view, we continue to receive any views from anyone and whether there should be any changes, which I say personally I would support some but not all.

3.9.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

I thank the chair of the Comité for the answer. Are we not pointing, therefore, towards perhaps that money, that the time has come to employ dog wardens who have an educational role, who have an enforcement role and have a role to ensure that good owners are supported? Those who are not perhaps complying could be directed in the right way so that they can. Is that considered by the Comité, to use that money to employ dog wardens across the Island?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I know that the Deputy has brought up this point before and it has been considered. The result is not easy to achieve in practical terms. In each Parish is our Honorary Police service and the police are very good at picking up miscreants. To police, miscreants involves very often some sort of identification. If we get an identification, say a black Labrador, we can go on our Parish systems and investigate that and a fair chance who can identify a series of owners who may own that dog. The easiest identification comes from the identification of a J number on a car and that can be tracked back, and I have to say this does happen. The biggest issue, I think probably which aligns almost to the Deputy's question, is dog attacks, dog on dog; sometimes a difficult thing to apply. Going back to the point of dog wardens, how do we do that? A dog warden is going to cost, I do not know, £30,000 or £40,000 a year; that could be provided for within the dog licence fees. I would not argue that. It is something that we can take to the Comité and consider and report back how to do that.

3.9.4 Deputy T.C. Coles of St. Helier South:

The chairman of the Comité mentions obviously that people use the beaches and other things but there is also the factor of migratory birds and nesting birds. These are also things that need to be considered when making any policy about dogs being off lead. As the chair has also mentioned, that not all dogs have excellent recall. Would he commit that the Comité will keep this in mind when making any decisions?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Yes, in fact we have taken advice from the States Vet in terms of the point the Deputy makes. Many Jersey beaches support shore birds and migratory waders that use the intertidal zones for feeding and resting. Off-lead dogs can disturb these species causing them to flee repeatedly, expending extra energy or abandoning young. This risk increases if dogs are allowed off lead year-round or with further relaxed off-lead walking during spring and summer months and nesting season.

3.9.5 Deputy T.A. Coles:

The recently published Marine Spatial Plan has an Article in there that does require a review of dogs on beaches as part of that. Will the Comité be committing to a full contribution to this before it gets published?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Yes, I believe we should, to hear from all parties who use the beaches. I suspect the view will come back fairly well balanced.

3.9.6 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

From the chair's answer earlier, I believe that no consultation was done specifically to support the response to the Minister in 2024. Could the chair clarify how the Comité was able to reach its position without seeking the public's input, and will the Comité in the future do a consultation especially related to the Marine Spatial Plan and the request to look at the beaches law more in depth in the future?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I think it is fair to say that the Comité were consultees to the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development's questions. As I repeat what I said before, the Constables are well-versed in what goes on in their Parishes.

[10:45]

Notwithstanding that, I think a way forward is to initiate feedback from the public in whatever form works best. I am sure the Comité would be happy to do that.