

## **PFAS Islander meeting with Ministers - 31 July 2024**

In attendance:

- Deputy Tom Binet, Minister for Health and Social Services
- Deputy Steve Luce – Minister for the Environment
- Peter Bradley – Director of Public Health
- Grace Norman – Deputy Director of Public Health
- Support staff

Peter Bradley opened the meeting by introducing the two ministers to the meeting and explaining that the purpose of the meeting is to allow Islanders to share their experiences with the Ministers. Technical questions will not be addressed as this will happen in future meetings.

Nine Islanders shared their life experiences, potential exposure sources and health issues with the Ministers, which are summarised below. Many Islanders noted their appreciation that the Ministers were present in the room and listening to them.

Health issues raised included:

- Allergy to waterproof plasters (which contain PFAS)
- Altered liver function, raised enzymes
- Autoimmune diseases
- Bladder problems
- Cancer – lung, kidney, blood, pancreatic
- Diabetes
- Gallstones
- High blood pressure
- Kidney stones
- Liver issues
- Low immune system and new allergies due to lack of spleen
- Oesophageal
- Osteoporosis
- Pancreas problems
- Thyroid issues

Issues raised by Islanders:

- Blood testing from around the Island has identified PFAS in the blood of those who have never lived in the plume area
- GPs in Jersey do not test for PFAS
- Lack of knowledge of PFAS by medical professionals in primary care and A&E – Islanders feeling like they can't go anywhere for help and support
- Question raised about whether reducing body burden of PFAS is the right way to proceed, perhaps the damage has already been done?
- A belief that there is a lack of regulatory control of PFAS in water, and Jersey Water pick and choose the standards they comply to.
- A belief that PFAS raises cholesterol, and that it is unable to be treated in the same way as cholesterol raised by other causes
- Discussion about a settlement by Government of Jersey with the manufacturer in 2005
- A belief that the water supply is from slurry spread on agricultural land. Presence of lots of flies

- A suggestion that if this issue was made public in the international press that the tourism industry would be affected and Jersey will suffer
- A question about why it took 14 years for Government to advise Islanders around the airport to stop drinking the water from private supplies after the airport moved away from long chain PFAS due to toxicity in rodents
- Islanders noted that they believe that although some people aren't sick now, they almost certainly will be in the future due to PFAS

Actions suggested by Islanders:

- Request to test the whole Island for PFAS in blood or access for GPs to request the Government test anyone who asks
- Education of medical professionals and clinicians as soon as possible.
- Advice on how to avoid exposure to PFAS
- Plasmapheresis offered as an intervention to reduce PFAS body burden
- Health Minister requested to put PFAS at the top of his agenda
- Request to clean up PFAS from the environment
- A request to consider the future generations of Islanders, make changes so that future generations do not go through the same issues as the current Islanders.

Peter Bradley thanked the Islanders for their inputs, and briefly summarised the comments for the Ministers to aid their responses. He noted that the panel reports which are being prepared will address some of the issues raised, for example those around testing, treatments and clinician knowledge.

#### Minister's responses

Deputy Steve Luce introduced himself as the Minister for the Environment (MENV). He explained that he has lived in Jersey all his life, drunk both mains and borehole water, and has health issues within his family. He noted that he was shocked by what he heard during the meeting and assured Islanders that both him and Health Minister will be taking action very soon.

The Minister took questions and comments from the floor.

The Minister was asked to take part in a blood test for PFAS, and MENV said that he would be happy to be tested.

An Islander reported that it is important that testing is undertaken a laboratory that is independent and outside of Jersey. MENV said he would work with the Health Minister closely on this.

An Islander explained that to receive a blood test from the Government previously, you had to live in the plume area and have a health issue, and there was not a control group for comparison at this time. Peter Bradley explained that those blood tests were conducted to identify if there were a problem which needed investigating. The levels were compared with the American population. Many of the results came back acceptable. The PFAS Scientific Advisory Panel was convened to investigate further and determine who needs to be tested.

An Islander suggested testing Island-wide as it would not be expensive. They suggested criteria including parish, age category and being in Jersey more than 5 years.

An Islander requested action from politicians indicating that they would stop paying water rates and start telling others to stop drinking the water and stop paying their water rates. They mentioned that they had had two Jersey Water staff visit their property who do not drink mains water. The Islander

addressed Deputy Luce and said that he did not say what he would do about the environment. Deputy Luce said that he would start taking action immediately, including informing Council of Ministers.

An Islander asked the Ministers why they had not come to meet with this group previously, and why had they not been told before by Officers? Deputy Tom Binet replied to thank Islanders for being so open and honest about their experiences, and explained that both himself and Deputy Luce were relatively new to their roles with many competing priorities and issues. He apologised for not attending a meeting sooner.

Deputy Binet explained that the Government needs to handle this issue sensitively as actions could impact on the Jersey economy which could be detrimental, and interventions could be very costly. For example, careful consideration needs to be given about testing 100,000 people – at an estimated cost of £10 million - or whether it would be better use of resources to invest in water treatment.

An Islander requested that the Ministers review the agreement which they reported was made with the manufacturer in the past, and investigate whether there is any flexibility within this agreement. The Minister indicated that he understands the question, and that they would investigate the situation. He reassured Islanders that they would do all they can to resolve the issue.

An Islander commented that this is the minister's opportunity to make Jersey a world leader, and that Jersey should lead the way. They wish for clean drinking water and healthy lives for all Islanders. Both Ministers agreed, indicating that this ambition is shared.

An Islander shared their belief that the Government have done very little over the past 30 years and that awareness is very limited. There was some measurement of PFAS in the water, but no urgency in the Environment department. The Islander believes it is important that there is an independent regulator.

Deputy Luce reassured the Islander that he is aware of the airport and boreholes, and that he instigated the nitrate action groups and cleaner water groups with the farmers which have been very successful. His team are also working on a water strategy to safeguard the water supply.

An Islander asked whether the ministers had had full briefings on PFAS. Ministers responded that they had been briefed about the private blood testing, what PFAS are and the fact the science is still developing. They are aware there are hotspots globally.

An Islander spoke regarding the report on health, explaining that they believe that there is no new information in it, and that there is a lot of information which is not in the report such as indications of double the risk of getting skin, blood, testicular, breast and ovarian cancers, autoimmune diseases, multiple myeloma. Peter Bradley responded to inform the Islanders that the draft report which was being referred to was a technical report and not the full report. He reassured Islanders that the Panel are following the science.

An Islander mentioned that in a previous meeting they asked about reimbursement for the cost of GP visits, and indicated that previous Health Minister Karen Wilson had committed to looking into it. They requested that the current Ministers follow up on that commitment. Deputy Binet responded by saying that this would require consideration with regards to balance within the health system.

An Islander mentioned that they have studied PFAS for the last 11 years and in their opinion, Jersey only has one option regarding clean water and that is the construction of a completely new water plantation. They have looked at the construction costs, and compared to Australia because of the similar contamination exposure picture. A new water plant cost AUS \$26 million to service 100,000 people. They believe no work done to existing plants will make a difference to reducing the levels.

Another Islander asked the Ministers which budget a new water treatment plant would be funded from, as they believe it is the only appropriate course of action. The Ministers indicated they would need to understand the plans more to comment.

Both Ministers stressed that they are in Government to serve the population and are working to make things better for Islanders. They indicated that they cannot make policy commitments in the meeting without further information and committed to investigating further.

An Islander commented that they believe the Government is handling the issue very well, as they can't deliver without evidence and support. They believe that the Islanders and the government need ongoing dialogue and regular meetings. The Ministers agreed and indicated they are happy to speak regularly with the Islanders.

An Islander commented and recognised that there has been a call for blood testing of all Islanders, but questioned what they would do with the information. They cautioned that all it will do is worry people, and potentially cause problems for them with getting travel insurance or health insurance, because there is no accepted means of doing anything with the information. The Islander asked why a previous Government signed a contract with the manufacturer, and why they did not remove all PFAS from the airport at the time in 2004. It was believed at this time that PFAS was not harmful as it was highly stable, didn't break down and doesn't react with anything, which is why it is good for fighting fires. It was also thought that it does not accumulate in humans based on animal studies. It is now known that there is a dramatic difference in half lives between animals and humans. The Islander reported that it is only since the contract was signed that evidence has come to light that PFAS are harmful to health.

An Islander reported that they have always used a filter since the 1990s. They asked whether it would be possible for Jersey Water to provide households with carbon water filters. Deputy Luce indicated that he believes Jersey Water use carbon filtration at the moment. Islanders said that it is not enough, because PFAS is still in mains water at high levels.

An Islander asked the Ministers to consider the environmental impact on wildlife, fields and produce and the economy. Has any research been done on that? Other Islanders answered yes, there had. The water cycle was described, including the spreading of product from water and sewage treatment on land, so if this product contains PFAS then it will be on the land and moving around the Island. An islander expressed concern about a lack of insects in their garden and wondered whether PFAS affects insects as well.

An Islander directed their question at the Minister for Environment. They explained that they had a Government blood test even though they had never lived inside the plume area, and shared their blood and mains water results to the previous Minister for Environment (Jonathon Renouf). The Islander reported that the previous Minister had said that this was not an issue based on his officer's advice and are concerned that officers advising the current Minister that this is not an issue. They explained that the Islanders are not in agreement with the officers that this is not an issue. The Action for Cleaner Water group brought in a Government soil scientist to discuss PFAS who reported that the levels that we have got were not substantial. Deputy Luce reported that he had been in attendance at that meeting and disagreed with the statement and that he does not recollect this assertion, and that he doesn't think there is a safe level of PFAS and so would have challenged that statement. He said that meeting minutes have not yet been circulated. The Islander continued explaining that Jersey Water are telling residents, in writing, that the levels are safe levels. They quote the UK safety levels and say that they are in line with UK standards.

An Islander asked the Ministers to confirm whether they were in a meeting with the AG recently, which they did. The Islander asked whether he said the same thing as he did to the Islanders, which was that he was in place to protect the Government of Jersey and not the Islander. Ministers reported that this was not said.

An Islander said that in 1976, the Island ran out of water, apart from St Ouen's bay. That's when they started pumping into the reservoir. Deputy Luce asked when the airport started using AFFF and the Islanders replied that they haven't been given an answer when they have asked. An Islander thought they were still using it in 2020.

In closing comments, Deputy Luce said he was grateful for the Islanders' openness and honesty and that he was sorry to hear the stories they have heard this evening, and he will do his best to get some answers and make progress. Both Ministers feel as though they are affected by the island-wide issues as much as anyone else as they are Islanders too. Deputy Binet agreed, and said it had been a difficult evening, but that they will work on it and come back to speak to the Islanders.

Islanders showed their appreciation and thanked the Ministers for their attendance at the meeting.

Meeting closed at 7:10pm.