

Minutes of meeting to launch final report of PFAS panel into the health impacts of PFAS

26 November 2024, Les Ormes 5.30pm – 7pm

Attendees

Prof Peter Bradley, Director of Public Health
Grace Norman, Deputy Director of Public Health
Kelly Whitehead, Group Director for Regulation
Deputy Tom Binet, Minister for Health and Social Services
Deputy Steve Luce, Minister for the Environment
Dr Sofia Tosounidou
Support Staff from Government of Jersey

Apologies

Rowland Huelin

Introduction

Prof Peter Bradley introduced himself, Kelly and Dr Sofia. He explained that the Ministers would unavoidably be late as they are coming directly from the Government budget debate.

He introduced the second of the PFAS panel's reports and emphasised that it is only covering conditions which have been discussed in the literature and have information available.

Presentation on the health impacts of PFAS

Grace Norman presented on the health impacts of PFAS. She summarised the PFAS Panel's findings.

Grace described the historic situation regarding PFAS including how PFAS foam was historically used at the airport in Jersey. Public Health conducted blood testing in 2022 for Islanders who had drunk water from private supplies around the airport, and discovered higher than expected levels of PFAS in blood in Islanders living in this area (in comparison to a representative sample of residents from America). The Jersey PFAS panel was formed, comprising of Dr Steve Hajioff, Dr Tony Fletcher and Prof Ian Cousins. The panel was commissioned to prepare 4-5 reports, and the current meeting was focusing on Report 2, containing information on health conditions in hotspot areas.

Grace summarised the panel's process to prepare the report, including inputs from experts by experience, subject matter experts and literature searches. The focus is on worldwide hotspots. Grace explained the panel have used the best quality data there is, but it is not perfect data. The data sources include places around the world including Ronneby and Australia which have also experienced AFFF contamination at high levels, and manufacturing contamination from America and Italy.

Grace reiterated that the report summarises what is known currently in the scientific literature but this has limitations. Just because there is no data on a health condition in the scientific literature does not mean that it is not associated with PFAS, just that the data are not available. If a condition is rare, it is difficult to prove the association. Animal studies often find extreme results which are not necessarily applicable to humans, but are a guide for areas to look for effects in humans.

Grace spoke about consistency of evidence, explaining that some conditions have consistent findings across studies, but not all of them. There are several reasons for this. Studies based on exposure from manufacturing (rather than fire fighting foam) such as Australia and United States may not be as relevant, due to the different mixes of PFAS and quantities of exposure. It is difficult to compare areas, which is why some health conditions are not replicated across areas. Ronneby in Sweden is the area most similar to Jersey due to similar use of AFFF foam at an airport training ground, exposure from drinking water and similar levels of exposure. The time gap was much shorter in Ronneby between exposure and human exposure testing, however the Panel have conducted an analysis to compare the exposures. The population is much larger in Ronneby than in Jersey, so it is easier to pick up conditions which may be related to PFAS exposure rather than chance findings.

Grace summarised the Panel's findings. The scientific literature confirms that there are health conditions which are associated with PFAS exposure at hotspot levels, such as at the airport. The report now enables the Government of Jersey to move forward.

Grace summarised the conditions in their groups of likelihood, as detailed in the report. Grace went on to explain the cancer elements in more detail to help Islanders understand the additional risk in context. She confirmed that IARC (International Agency for Research on Cancer) had concluded that PFOA has 'sufficient evidence' to be considered a carcinogen, and PFOS is 'possibly' a carcinogen. In Ronneby, there was a 20% increase in risk of developing kidney or testicular cancer. Grace explained that it is important to understand not just the *increase* in the disease risk, but also the 'absolute' risk of developing the disease. She demonstrated that a rare condition with a 20% increase in risk leads to a small number of extra cases of the condition in a given population. Kidney and testicular cancers are both rare cancers.

Grace moved on to discuss the healthcare services mentioned in the report. Islanders reported needing their healthcare professionals to understand PFAS more, and GPs also requested more information.

PFAS panel recommendations were grouped as follows:

1. Higher level of suspicion for GPs and healthcare professionals dealing with patients with higher risk
2. Usual care – for cholesterol, childhood vaccinations, breastfeeding, regular testicular examination
3. Access to information – knowledge base resource available to the public and health professionals in Jersey, including regarding breastfeeding to help manage
4. Access to services – health professional should be made available to clinicians to offer technical support. Those living in the plume area should have access to psychological therapies

Government's response and public health actions

Prof Peter Bradley presented the Government's response to the report, and the actions which will be taken by Public Health.

Prof Bradley indicated that it was important to recognise that the Government of Jersey has accepted the findings and recommendations in the report. He explained that Public Health will make education available to GPs. He reiterated that the more serious conditions will be

focused on to make sure that GPs are aware of those conditions. Information will be made available to midwives and health visitors as well. Resources and information will also be made available to the public.

For affected Islanders in the plume area and who were tested by Government of Jersey in 2022, a clinical review will be made available. Prof Bradley recognised that Islanders have been asking for a clinician review for a while and confirmed that it will be made available to everyone who was tested in 2022, not just to those with the conditions that have been mentioned.

Prof Bradley introduced Dr Sofia Tosunidou. Dr Sofia explained she was the new Head of Rheumatology Department at Jersey General Hospital and she moved to Jersey a year ago. She has a background in immunology and rheumatology. She reiterated that she is aware that PFAS can cause health conditions, but cautioned that the science is not perfect. Dr Sofia commented that she is excited to meet with each of the Islanders.

Prof Bradley also noted that there is another clinician, not based in Jersey, whose speciality is haematology. Both clinicians have an interest in PFAS, and the second clinician has an academic interest in PFAS as well. They will both be available to Islanders for clinical consultation, and so Islanders will have a choice in clinician. The Government of Jersey will also make psychological support available to affected Islanders.

Both services will be commencing in the early part of next year, before April. Dr Sofia is working with Public Health to set up this service, and input is invited from Islanders as well. If Islanders would like to have a say in the development of this service, please get in touch with Prof Bradley at publichealth@gov.je.

Minsters joined at 6.05pm

Introducing the Water Quality and Safety Programme

Kelly Whitehead introduced herself as the group director for regulation. As Group Director for Regulation her team covers the sciences around the environment and environmental health and a range of other environmental issues. Her team make changes in regulation. The ministers have asked her to drive through a new programme called Water Quality and Safety.

Kelly confirmed that the Government of Jersey are taking this issue seriously. The Water Quality and Safety programme is a coordinated programme bringing together the work on PFAS from across Government. The team are looking at the regulation limits in the environment and will do PFAS testing in the environment. Decisions will be backed up by scientific studies and other evidence. The team will continue to work with the PFAS panel who will look at best practice globally and then we will take action.

Kelly confirmed the Water Quality and Safety programme has a team of people and will answer queries as soon as possible. There is an email address for all queries, and responses will be provided within 2 days. Answers will be published on the website, so that all islanders can see the responses.

The Water Quality and Safety programme incorporates officers from many different areas including Natural Environment, Environmental Health, and Public Health. The aim is to have one place to ensure coordinated responses to queries. Kelly committed to monitor what other governments are doing and will update the website accordingly.

Minister's communication 6.20pm

Deputy Steve Luce – Minister for the Environment.

Deputy Luce hopes that Islanders can see what has been delivered since the last meeting in July. The Water Quality and Safety programme has been formed and there is a single point of contact. Report 4 will be released next year which will inform the work of the Minister for the Environment. Discussions have been held with the Jersey Water Chief Executive (Helier Smith), and there is an ongoing discussion about how improvements can be made. Deputy Luce has had discussions about the best treatments to remove PFAS from the water including granulated activated carbon and reverse osmosis. He has requested indicative costs, and where this will be treated, either at a single point or filters in each household. He fed back that Jersey Water would require a period of time to adjust and to build the required infrastructure, especially if activated carbon was chosen as this requires a lot of land, and the physical constraints of Handois (one of the two water treatment plants) would make this challenging. Discussions have been held with Regulation and considering the recommendations from Report 2. Ministers have met with Ports of Jersey, and want to make sure that everyone has access to mains water.

Deputy Tom Binet – Minister for Health and Social Services

Deputy Binet apologised for being late to the meeting as they came directly from States Assembly. He reminded Islanders that legislation takes some time to change.

An Islander addressed the room and thanked Peter and his team for everything they have done, especially providing the clinician for Islanders to consult with. They read a statement indicating that they have studied PFAS for 10 years and its effects on human health. They believe Jersey Islanders in all parishes have been exposed to PFAS in their drinking water supply for 30 years. They indicate that they believe levels are above global background levels, and understand that Jersey's levels are still increasing, which is different to levels around the world which are declining. They believe the institutions controlling our Island remain ignorant and that nothing is being done about the problem. They believe a significant proportion of people in the Island do not know that their children are at risk, and believe that water treatment plants are required, and that the public should be made aware of what is in the water and whether they want to filter it or not.

Deputy Luce reminded Islanders that the PFAS levels in mains water are below the UK Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) levels and that the scientific understanding as the Government understand it is in the public domain in Report 2 from the PFAS panel and the various media articles.

Question and Answer session

An Islander mentioned that Grace spoke about the comparison of Jersey 2022 blood test results to America. The Islander wanted to understand the context, and asked where in America is this, is it industrial and is it appropriate to compare to Jersey. Grace explained that PFAS in blood has not been studied as extensively as we might like, but to understand our islanders levels, it was necessary to have a comparison group and the only comparison that was known about at the time was from America. America has a large nationally-representative health survey and they have measured PFAS in blood from residents outside hotspot areas. This was chosen as the comparison for Jersey because it was the only sample of the general population tested that was known about at the time, but it is not a perfect comparison, as there

may be many differences in types of PFAS exposure between Jersey and America other than water consumption which could account for some of the difference in results between Jersey and America.

An Islander asked if there was a low pollution environment such as Scotland to compare to? No, as far as we know, this data is not available. Internationally we are really early on in this process, and the data might not be available for many years.

An Islander indicated that these meetings are focusing on PFAS exposure at the west end of the airport, and mentioned a house which was contaminated with AFFF during a fire incident. They requested the area around St Peter's Parish Hall is considered in investigations. It was explained that for the 2022 Government blood testing, this area was considered to be part of the affected area.

An Islander asked how highly the views of the Australian and UK governments are regarded. They explained that the Australian Government have recently released new proposals for reducing the mains water limits based on animal studies and not human data. The Islander believes there are health conditions which are not being covered by the PFAS Scientific Advisory Panel's report such as decreased fertility, thyroid, miscarriage, reduced sperm quality and cancer. Governments look at the scientific literature and make informed decisions using the information available to them. Peter explained that one of the benefits of the clinical review service is to ensure affected islanders are treated as individuals for their presenting symptoms, regardless of what the scientific literature shows.

Peter does not accept that studies on animals are better than humans when trying to understand the health impacts on humans. The Panel can only report on the evidence that exists, and they have looked at the area which most closely mirrors the experience of the hotspot in Jersey.

An islander commented that the Islander meetings are not conveniently timed. Kelly committed to undertaking a survey for Islanders about where and when meetings can be held most conveniently.

An Islander asked if any testing had been done at the water treatment plant on the wastewater going in and out, and the byproducts such as sewage sludge. This analysis is within the scope of Report 4 which has not yet started. Islander inputs into this report will be sought in early 2025.

An Islander commented that there have been historical rubbish dumps in St Ouen's bay. They said there has recently been a study released which identifies that PFAS are more toxic when mixed with microplastics than separately. The Government committed to investigating and getting back to the islander.

An Islander commented that it is clear there is PFAS in the water Island wide which is within DWI levels. The Islander questioned what the plan was for the rest of the Island outside of the plume area. Report 4 will investigate this aspect of PFAS in the environment.

An Islander commented that there had been no mention of water filters being made available to the plume area residents and asked if this is something which will be provided? Deputy Binet replied stating that filters may be a short term solution, and that he would want the relevant officers to fully investigate the issue and invest in the best equipment, so that Jersey has a reputation for the cleanest water in the world. He stressed that he is keen

that concern about PFAS is proportionate to the risks, and that the Government is as keen to get this issue sorted as the affected Islanders are.

An islander requested that Jersey is honest that it has a problem, and commented that Australia, New Zealand and England have done this. They believe people in Gorey think that they are fine, but commented that PFAS has been spread around the Island since 1997 and that there are cancers everywhere as a result. They requested that Jersey is honest with everyone. Government of Jersey is addressing PFAS head on with the Scientific Advisory Panel who will be examining the environmental situation in Report 4.

An Islander commented that there is no guarantee that bottled water is free from PFAS as there is no regulation which forces them to test for PFAS.

An Islander commented that they believe it is essential to population health that PFAS in mains water is removed, which would require a £20 million new water treatment plant, but that the Jersey Water shareholders would not approve it as that would reduce their profits. Deputy Luce explained that it is important that the right solution is found first, and that, if a new water treatment plant was necessary, that funding would be made available. Kelly Whitehead indicated that the purpose of Report 4 is to look at international best practice to take PFAS out of the water, and that there are several different technologies depending on the levels. The panel will make a balanced recommendation about what levels should be. This work will be done during 2025 and results will be shared in the usual ways with islanders and on the website. Regulatory and legislative changes will be made as soon as practically possible to implement the Panel's recommendations once accepted by Government.

An Islander asked the Ministers what information is available about what PFAS levels were in water in the past. Deputy Binet replied indicating that he did not know. Kelly Whitehead commented that it is difficult to extract information from Government unless it is in a database. The current gaps are relying on knowledge from individuals who have worked in the area for many years, and this will have to be gathered. She committed to get back to the islander on the question.

An islander commented that Deputy Luce should be telling Jersey Water what to do, not discussing it with them. They indicated that Guernsey removed the vast majority of the PFAS contaminated land and put it to one side and that Jersey should be telling Ports to remove the source. Deputy Luce replied that they had also been in discussions with Ports of Jersey and have spoken about regulations and more deeply on actions to date. There is more work to be done, however the information needs to be gathered from scientists first and the various options evaluated. The legislation is required to be changed in order for Regulation team to enforce it. Report 4 will evaluate legislation around the world and decide appropriate measures in Jersey.

An Islander commented that they wish for action before the next election, as they are worried that a new Government will mean the Islanders need to start the discussions and campaigning again. Deputy Luce indicated that if the information were available, then it would be actioned as soon as possible.

An Islander requested filtration in plume area properties again so that they are not consuming any more PFAS in mains water. Deputy Luce confirmed that it will be taken away and considered.

An Islander asked if research had been done on household filters which can be purchased in the meantime and recommendations for disposal of used filters. KW undertook to take this away and come back with a response. A detailed response is in the Q&A responses circulated to islander alongside these minutes and available on the PFAS Website.

An Islander asked if the mains water supply has been checked. Jersey Water do regular testing and put their results online. The mains water levels are compliant with the UK guidance and EU regulation. Deputy Luce reiterated his commitment to look at the Jersey Water figures again in light of the suggestion that the levels are increasing, as this is contrary to his understanding. Jersey Water's Water Quality Report for 2024 and previous years can be viewed on the Jersey Water website, [here](#).

An Islander asked how the levels in Jersey compare to elsewhere, such as in the UK? The levels of PFAS in water are different across the UK. The expressions of PFAS are different and so it is not easy to compare PFAS levels. Levels in Jersey are regularly checked and are below UK guidance and European regulation levels.

An Islander asked if Jersey water are still blending the supply? This will be investigated and an answer provided.

Ministers and Officers undertook to respond further to some of the questions above where they were unable to answer fully on the evening. These questions and are available on the [PFAS website](#).

Closing words

Prof Peter Bradley indicated that the meeting would close shortly and he thanked the Islanders for their inputs and honesty. Peter invited the Ministers to provide some closing words.

Deputy Luce explained that he appreciates that the Ministers can't move as fast as the Islanders wish them to. He commented that they are doing their best and it cannot be changed overnight, as disappointing as that is.

Deputy Binet agreed, and confirmed that in himself and Deputy Luce, the Islanders have two elected representatives who are committed to this topic, but that there are practical issues and knowledge gaps which must be investigated first. Shareholders or regulation will not be allowed to get in the way when there are issues that need solutions. Where there are solutions, they will be implemented as quickly as possible. Jersey Water also have this as a priority.

The Government will arrange another meeting for Islanders soon.

Meeting closed at 7.03pm

The next public meeting will be on Tuesday 11th February, 6 PM at Les Ormes