



St Helena
Government



ST HELENA WATER SHORTAGE 2016

PRESS CONFERENCE - WEDNESDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2016

A Press Conference with Councillors and officials from Connect Saint Helena Ltd and SHG was held in the Governor's Office at the Castle on Wednesday 16 November 2016. A number of questions were put to the panel on the current water situation on St Helena. These questions had been sent to local radio stations from Island residents.

Below is a transcript of the Press Conference:

Q. Why are we in the same situation as we were in 2013?

A. We are not in the same situation as we were in 2013. The situation we are in at the moment is the result of the lack of any winter rain.

In 2013, there was plenty of water on the Island, water was overflowing from Levelwood reservoir and there was plenty of water at Hutts Gate reservoir, but there wasn't any water in the Red Hill area.

What we did as a result of the situation in 2013 was to put in pump transfer systems so we could take water from Levelwood to Hutts Gate, then link between Hutts Gate and Grape Vine Gut. We then put another link between Grape Vine Gut and Red Hill - so between those three systems, we could transfer water fairly easily and we continue to do that.

In Jamestown there is always surface water available but it is very difficult for the logistics of pumping water over the height that it needs to be pumped and is quite costly and challenging.

The simple fact is this year we just haven't received the rainfall which we normally expect and which replaces the spring sources and fills the reservoir that would have put us in a good state for the next seven months.

Q. Connect was started four years ago, if the directors had that time again, what would you have done differently to avoid our current situation?

A. We probably wouldn't have done a huge amount differently to be honest. When we were formed there was a project which was upgrading water works - making sure the water was safe and well treated. That project was continued and concluded so hopefully now people will see better quality water and in addition we haven't had a microbiological failure for a very, very long time.

We moved focus when Connect was formed, away from moving treated water to the outlying districts - this was put on the back burner as we recognised there was a water resource problem, so we have been focusing very much on getting raw water into our systems.

If we hadn't done that we would have been in a much worse state than we currently are. So we've focused on where the waters are free flowing to actually catch it properly. We've also now moved on with enlarging Harpers Reservoir and Hutts Gate Reservoir so when it rains there will be plenty of space to put the water.

Q. How much water are we using per day Island-wide?

A. 1100 cubic metres a day.

Q. How much less should we be using currently to protect the supplies? And what is the reduction needed per household?

A. At the moment it is bit of a moving target, putting a figure on it wouldn't be so simple.

We have asked the community to reduce their consumption by 10% which is quite a lot because people don't necessarily use a lot of water. We've also focused on the top one hundred users to see if we can make them lessen their consumption.

As the process carries on, if we can target 10%, it becomes easier. If we can target 10% of our consumption now then we at least extend the water by three days or so.

Every 10% that we reduce of our consumption extends our current stock. We don't want to put a target to it if it is not achievable.

Q. If the reservoir at Harpers is 100% full, how long will this storage last HTH?

A. If you look at the Red Hill system that the Red Hill reservoir supplies about 80,000 cubic metres of water, if they were all full, you would have about 200 days of water there, but if look at it Island wide, at the consumption we have daily, then we would have about four months of water.

Across the Island, understandably it makes us very vulnerable in terms of long term security especially considering that we're on growth of at least 6% per annum. So there is a lot of effort that needs to go into building new reservoirs. That's one of the things that we have embarked upon on to improve our water security and that's why Harpers 3 was enlarged by 2.5 times the size it used to be and Hutts Gate for instance has been built and so forth. But if you really want to put a target to that, over a year to get to the 410,000 cubic metres, we are going to need another 20 Harpers 3 reservoirs, and this is going to take a while.

Q. So how long can Connect keep up bowsering and at what cost?

A. The cost of bowsering is £3 a cubic metre. We've actually put a bid to DFID because obviously bowsering forever is not sustainable. We are asking DFID to cover the cost of the bowsering, but also asking for some pipe lines, to where we are currently bowsering, we actually want to lay permanent pipe. So the first of those lines is from Jamestown up to Red Hill and that will take supply from what is running down the Run as we haven't got enough bowsers for it to be caught.

There is a second scheme which we're currently kicking off and that is to take water from Shark's Valley up to Hutts Gate, again, the water's always there but it's such a long way away - but it's an expensive option.

The third scheme is from the fire tank at the Airport which we'll then pipe down to Fisher's Valley and up to the Longwood reservoirs and that is fed currently from the Airport's bore hole which was part of the Airport Project.

We have also asked for funding to cover the hydrology study and some exploratory deep bore hole work, which locates deep ground water in the areas of the water treatment works which will be a fall back solution. But by putting the pipe systems in it will release the bowsers that we are currently using.

Q. So have we applied to DFID for funding, for bowsering in the past?

A. In 2013 we received money from SHG and DFID to support the £50,000 worth of bowsering costs.

Q. So was this situation expected in DFID's perspective?

A. DFID has warmed up to the idea, St Helena is not the only place that has been suffering.

Q. Is it not possible for a small reservoir to be constructed at Drummond's point? The overflow could then find its way to New Bridge Pond where it is controlled by a gate system letting water into the run as necessary.

A. We've been looking at various sites for possible reservoirs and the one problem with the area above Jamestown is there is a high risk in terms of if we have a breach on a reservoir like that it will flood the whole of Jamestown. So we need to carefully consider other priorities that we can focus on.

With regards to the west side, where the pond is at New Bridge, we don't have enough bowsers at the moment to take the water to there. The focus is not so much in the short term, it's to look at specifically developing the pond system at New Bridge or upstream at Drummond's Point and those places. We are looking at a possible larger dam to be built which was all part of the plan to lift water from Jamestown which will be lifted to Grape Vine Gut. We are also looking at the transfer systems so that they will be more effective.

Q. Could the water flowing away from the Jamestown Run be made available to the public for unsubstantial uses like washing cars etc?

A. At the moment it is a possibility - I would agree to that. All systems will take a while to introduce. The one that we are focused on now is to pump water from Chubbs Spring all the way up to Scotts Mill. So again the water that is currently flowing in the run will be cut off shortly because we will block the gate that is leaking. The gate will need to be replaced, so it's not just a simple process just to fix it.

Q. Why can't the water be caught further up the valley in Sandy Bay before it reaches the beach thus cutting transporting difficulties (tough roads) and costs?

A. This is not a priority now but as this progresses we will look at more sources and employ them into our system.

Q. Is it true that a suggestion was made that the RMS could bring water but it was rejected? If so, why?

A. We are still containing the problem but in time we might revisit that. At the moment there are two issues here, firstly the volume of water that we can get from the RMS is 20 cubic metres a day, the fact is we already have a shortfall of 150 to 200 cubic metres a day and what the RMS can offer would be 10% of that and maybe even less. And second to that, is that it would be very difficult to bring water from the RMS on to shore. So we don't have the systems in place to really do that. That is not necessarily feasible for the short term. But it will be considered in the future.

Q. Would Connect consider drilling for water?

A. Yes, that is part of the business case that we put to DFID. At the moment, we are making use of a number of bore holes and they have proven to be very reliable. So deep drilling might not just bring us relief for just the short term, but the long term as well.

Q. Why does Connect/ SHG not continue to pump water from Sharks Valley like Phillip John was doing?

A. That system is already planned. We have been clearing it to make it better to get to although that is a long pipe line that will run over 4 km to Hutts Gate so we've got a concept design for that already. So here's something that we will introduce, that is our third priority after we bring water in from the fire tank once we are done with the system up at Scott's Mill.

Q. Is the construction industry being treated in the same way as farmers such as all planning permissions, this should be stopped, just as farmers are being stopped?

A. No single user on the Island has been stopped from using water. On the farmers' side, we are working closely with ANRD to assess what people need in consumption in terms of their crop water cycle, and also when their crop water cycle will run out. We are doing the same with the construction industry in terms of their livelihood. I just want to make one comment here, in 2013 the farmers were not provided with water, they were cut off. This year we maintained it throughout and they have never been without water.

Q. Construction takes a lot of water particularly with large scale projects such as the Jamestown Hotel who are currently still using water and there are large scale concreting works taking place there, where is the water coming from? Secondly if the water situation continues to worsen what happens when construction works have to be halted on the Island, will there be compensation for the construction companies?

A. The key points for construction sites are the 1, 2 & 3 on Main Street, the hotel development, but they are using very little water in comparison to this and also we are testing the water in the Run to see whether it will chemically be sensible for them to use that. So we are looking at alternatives there as well.

Q. Will the powers that are responsible for providing water to the Island's residents consider desalination as a redundancy to collecting run-off? The initial investment would be costly but so is bowsering during water shortages.

We have bowsered at least two years in the last four. And as long as rain fall is minimised in future years we will continue paying for bowsering.

A. We discussed that option. It is definitely reliable, but long term we are bowsering at £3 per cubic metre, whereas on Ascension the desalination, for the same amount of water costs £24.60. That's the reality. Although Ascension will never run out of water, it is very, very expensive. So I think the better option at this point in time is to use the other options before coming to this one.

Q. So is that the universal cost for desalination?

A. No, obviously St Helena would be different because we have a different population and so forth. But I am pretty sure that it would be a lot more than bowsering water or catching water.

Q. If St Helena does run out of water, what will be the plan?

A. Well firstly, if we cut our consumption to plan, then we shouldn't find ourselves in that position. At the moment the message is to look at our consumption, let's get our plan delivered, there's obviously the rain issue, and also the deliverability. As the situations change we'll react to it.

Q. Would connect supply residents with bottled water if restrictions continue?

A. No. The water coming out of the taps is clean and safe.

Q. It has been reported that up to 40% of water is lost between source and end-user due to flaws in inherited infrastructure. Were resources to eliminate this lost (and a timeline for infrastructure integrity) factored into the original business case for Connect? If not, why not?

A. The figure of 40% is also questionable as we don't have systems in place to accurately determine that. We don't have full service maps of the water infrastructural cycle so if you can't measure you can't really manage it. So that's part of the problem. Water loss in the system is referred to as unaccounted for water. So it means that some of it is lost through bursts and leaks but some of the water is lost because of chlorine decay or if the water was needed to help with fire-fighting etc.

Q. Why did you drain all the water from Harpers Dam over the Heart Shape waterfall?

A. That was done at the end of our supposedly dry season. It wasn't a lot of water it was dead water (water that has been standing there for a while - not ideal for human consumption) and even now there's dead water in the Harpers Reservoir. The water that we released at that time was dead water and draining has allowed the reservoir outlet that was poorly designed to be revisited which will improve water quality and we took the opportunity to dredge some of the silt that had accumulated since the reservoir was constructed.

Q. Water is obviously a priority on the Island, what kind of undertaking can the government with councillors give to the people on St Helena that you are giving this your top priority?

A. There is a guarantee that we will not run out of water on the Island. It is a top priority, councillors called an ExCo meeting last week because we wanted to get deeper into the problem. The short term problem is when you turn on your tap, water is going to be there, it also highlights the more long term policy issues.

I think what we need to do is think longer term and not just for the moment. We've seen some investment recently - it's about thinking strategically. It's a change around the globe, it is probably going to be the most hottest year on records. We need to work collectively as we have been to be able to address these problems.

**St Helena Resilience Forum
22 November 2016**