

ST. HELENA
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

THE SPEAKER

The Honourable Cyril Keith Gunnell

ELECTED MEMBERS

The Honourable Rosemary June Bargo
The Honourable Gillian Ann Brooks
The Honourable Mark Alan Brooks
The Honourable Ronald Arthur Coleman
The Honourable Jeffrey Robert Ellick
The Honourable Corinda Sebastiana Stuart Essex
The Honourable Martin Dave Henry
The Honourable Robert Charles Midwinter
The Honourable Christine Lilian Scipio
The Honourable Julie Dorne Thomas
The Honourable Karl Gavin Thrower
The Honourable Andrew James Turner

PROCEEDINGS OF MINISTERS QUESTION TIME

Tuesday, 13th June, 2023

The Council met at 10.00 am
In the Council Chamber, Jamestown

(The Honourable Speaker in the Chair)

ORDER OF THE DAY

1. FORMAL ENTRY OF THE SPEAKER

2. ADDRESS BY THE SPEAKER

Good Morning Honourable Members, and everyone else present. Welcome and a very warm welcome to all those listening to this Meeting of the third Minister's Question Time to be held this morning in the Council Chamber at the Castle of Jamestown. Grateful thanks to SAMS for broadcasting this Meeting live. Before continuing, let me take this opportunity to welcome or publicly welcome back to the island Honourable Jeffrey Ellick and Honourable Christine Scipio. Both having returned from personal business overseas and Honourable Karl Thrower who attended the C24 this year held in Bali. This now means we have a full Council on Island. Honourable Members, as we are aware of the topic that Non-Ministers chose for this Minister's Question Time is SHG's Energy Strategy. The questions on the Order Paper are directed to the Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning, the Honourable Christine Scipio. The questions have been listed in alphabetical order, but it will be selected randomly for response. As I have said before now, Minister's Question Time is regulated by Standing Orders and the number of rules. Teething difficulties can be and have been experienced in early Meetings. During a practice session, Elected Members found that when applying Order nine of the Standing Orders in its entirety, rule six imposed only one supplementary question per each substantive question. And this prevented thorough exploration of the issue raised and the initial response given. There may well be other issues that Elected Members will identify, therefore require review and formal changes made to the Standing Orders after further trials have taken place. And this should include due consideration to any comments that the public may make, or were already made, as the case may be. If I may, can I take you back to the Meeting held on 24th of March 2023. The resolution determined that rule five and rule six of Order nine of Standing Orders be suspended for the duration of that Minister's Question Time. The suspension of Standing Orders allowed Non-Ministers additional supplementary questions, but not only that, because the topic chosen for that reading was very broad. And because parts of it were cross cutting or related to activities undertaken within a particular portfolio that other Ministers was in charge. It allowed another Minister if they decided to assist with answering the question, and they indicated the intention by switching on their red light. The duration of Minister's Question Time starting from the first question is one hour. The clock

and timekeeper for this meeting is Miss Shanice Phillips, Honourable Members, let's go to work. Miss Phillips, may we have the first question please.

The Speaker –
Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –
Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, may I raise a point of order pertaining to suspension of Standing Orders in accordance with Order 19 and Order 21 of the Standing Orders of the Legislative Council.

The Speaker –
Please do so.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –
Thank you, Mr Speaker I beg to move that rule five and rule six of Order nine of Standing Orders be suspended for the duration of Minister's Question Time to be held today.

The Speaker –
Is there a seconder? Councillor Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –
Mr Speaker, I'd like to second.

The Speaker –
Thank you, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex, you may proceed with your motion.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –
Thank you Mr Speaker. I beg to move that rule 5 and rule 6 of Order 9 of Standing Orders be suspended for the duration of Minister's Question Time to be held today. This motion seeks to suspend rule 6 of Order 9 of Standing Orders so that the restriction to only one supplementary question per each substantive question will not apply. This should help to satisfy the public that Minister's Question Time plays an important part in increasing openness, transparency and accountability, which are all central principles of good governance. In order for the parameters for questions in the House, as set out in Order 8 to be applicable following suspension of rule 6 of Order 9 it is necessary to suspend Rule 5 also. Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

The Speaker –
Thank you Honourable Member. Does anyone else wish to speak? No one. So I put the question that rule 5 and rule 6 of Standing Order 9 is suspended for the duration of this Minister's Question Time.

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker –
Clerk the next item of business please.

3.

QUESTIONS***Question No. 1 - The Honourable Andrew Turner to ask the Minister for Environment, Natural Resources & Planning***The Speaker –

Honourable Andrew Turner?

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning tell this Council, what plans do SHG have to install renewable energy systems on Government Landlord Houses in order to reduce energy bills for their vulnerable tenants.

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Mr Speaker, before I answer the question, may I seek permission to remove our jackets.

The Speaker –

I think that will be very welcomed, I would like to do so myself but I can't do that. Anyone wishing to remove their jackets please do so.

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Mr Speaker, to answer my Honourable friends question about if there are any plans for SHG to install renewable energy systems on Government Landlord Houses. The answer at the moment is no. And the reason why there is no plans at this very moment is because last year the utility provider commissioned a grid impact assessment to understand how the grid is affected as a result of an increased number of PV systems connected onto the to the grid. And my understanding, Mr Speaker is that this assessment will quantify the safe maximum amount of PB genuine electricity that could potentially be connected and provide technical guidance for about the electricity grid. So I just want to add on a further, I know you asked what about, Government's Plan? So the answer is no, not at this moment until the grid impact assessment is completed. But Mr Speaker, I just feel that we're reducing our energy bills, as my Honourable friend has highlighted is everyone's business, it's not just St Helena Government's business. And I do know that within my Portfolio, staff has been talking to other Portfolio Directors about encouraging staff to switch off the lights, switch off the computers to try to reduce the energy bills. I also aware that merchants have imported appliances that will have energy efficiencies with that. So it's not only about Government trying to reduce the energy bills. I think it's anyone's business Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

I take your point, Honourable Andrew Turner?

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Well firstly, I'd like to thank the Honourable Minister for a rather comprehensive response but as the answer is no, due to the impact so sort of grid impact assessment, can she give an update on what she's doing to what its progress on this up on this grid stability assessment?

The Speaker –

Thank you Honourable Member, Honourable Minister, please?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Thank you Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, the grid Impact Assessment is due to present it to the URA and St Helena Government next month.

The Speaker –

Thank you, anything further? Honourable Karl Thrower?

The Hon. Karl Thrower–

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I'd like to rise on a point of information if I may, renewable energy is not just the PV systems, the PV systems are currently stocked on the Island. But it also includes things like the solar water heaters. There's lots of different types of renewable energy on Government Landlord Houses.

The Speaker –

Thank you for that information, Honourable Andrew Turner?

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Following on from that point of information, the obvious question is, what are the forms of renewable energy systems other than photovoltaic panels are being considered by SHG for Government landlord tenants?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister, please?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Sorry I haven't been putting my button on so we're not sure, I'm not sure if listeners did hear me earlier. But as Government Landlord Housing comes under Minister Brooks, I will let him answer.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure & Sustainable Development?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure & Sustainable Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I just like to add in a little piece here about what our plans is going forward, and what we have currently done with the new houses that Government have built over the last few years, which isn't very many. But those new houses have been built with the installation of solar water heaters on top as well as rainwater catchments. This is a policy which we want to continue going forward with whenever we build any new Government Landlord Housing, but we are also looking separately at CDA's. Within CDA, under a contractual agreement with the developer insists that they have more renewable energy systems built into the development. So that's something that we're considering however, we don't want it to be a burden on any development. We want it to be in tangent with our whole energy policy, and I think the plans that we have moving forward, so that aligns with our energy strategy in the long run anyway. Mr Speaker, this is something, I'd just like to add that we are considering from the infrastructure side of our Government Landlord Housing. Thank you Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much Honourable Member, Honourable Robert Midwinter?

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Mr Speaker. The Honourable Minister mentioned the investigative report that's being presented at the end of this month. And could she say who's undertaken this investigative report?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

So Mr Speaker just to say to correction, I didn't say this month, I said next month. And it is the utility provider, who is undergoing the impact assessment, but I don't know who actually within the utility provider has engaged to do that. I don't have that detail.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Are there any further questions? No. Next question please.

Question No. 2 - The Honourable Ronald Coleman to ask the Minister for Environment, Natural Resources & Planning

The Speaker –

The Honourable Ronald Coleman?

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning tell this council, what plans has been put in place for harnessing the use of solar energy on all of the SHG buildings potentially to reduce costs in line with the Ministers published Vision?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Thank you. Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I will just say that this question is probably linked to the question that my Honourable Andrew Turner asked earlier about government landlord housing of course, government landlord housing is part of SHGs buildings as well. So I believe, Mr Speaker that harnessing the use of solar energy has three primary technologies. And I'm not an expert in this Mr Speaker, this is what I believe. So one of the technologies the PVS and which directly converts light into electricity my understanding concentrating solar power, sorry can't get my words out here. Concentrating solar power, which uses mirrors to concentrate the suns energy to drive a conventional steam turbine or engines to make electricity and solar heating and cooling that collects thermal energy from the sun, and use this heat to provide hot water and heating. So, Mr Speaker, when the Honourable friend asks about harnessing the use of solar energy, I just want to highlight that there are three primary technologies, that's what I believe I'm not the expert here. So to be able to look at that, even looking at the PV systems, again, we need to wait on the grid impact assessment, before government can make a decision about putting solar energy

systems onto government buildings. Just to add, Mr Speaker that, if any of the members have visited me at Scotland, that we have used the initiative of Sun tunnels, but that was for the support of funding from CSSF. Because of course, we don't have the funding in our recurrent budget to do that. So if anyone has visited Scotland office and I see some heads nodding here, they will see that natural light. Mr Speaker, you visit me recently, you see the natural light that's coming through the building. So this is something that ENRP has demonstrated that can be done, but due to financial constraints is at the moment, we don't have the funding to do that on other government buildings.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Yes, you're quite right I have seen those tunnels. Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure & Sustainable Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I just like to add on to my Honourable friends answer here, that harness solar energy also includes water so heating water, and there's a lot of government properties that is already using that, I've been using that for a number of years. And it is our intention within our policies, when, like I said before, when constructing new properties is to maintain the use of solar water heaters, as that is one of the most efficient ways of heating water.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much for that. Any further questions? No, next question please.

Question No. 3 - The Honourable Gillian Brooks to ask the Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning.

The Speaker –

The Honourable Gillian Brooks?

The Hon. Gillian Brooks –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning tell this Council, why the SHG Energy Strategy October 2016 was not achieved by the 1st April 2022, as was the stated intention?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning.

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, it was the intention of the St Helena Energy Strategy 2016 to meet 100% of electricity demand of all consumers connected to the national mini grid through renewable energy by first of April 2022. Mr Speaker, I noticed that there's a humming on the mic and I hope that the listeners doesn't have any problem in receiving our session today. So Mr Speaker, in order to achieve the 100% of electricity demand, as I mentioned earlier, seems to be the government in partnership with the islands utility provider Connect St Helena. Invited proposals for the supplier for long term renewable energy under a power purchase agreement, at that time, the successful bidder was selected to finance and provide wind and solar generating capacity, as well as battery storage Mr Speaker, a mix model of energy production and storage. A contract was signed between Connect St Helena and Sustainable Energy One

Limited, a subsidiary of PASH Global in May 2020. However, following a period of negotiations and planning, the changing circumstances during COVID 19 pandemic, it was not possible for PASH to deliver the proposal within the original parameters, which led to the termination of the power purchase agreement in November 2021. Discussions then followed Mr Speaker with the reserve bidder, which took place under the original 2017 procurement, we need to be mindful that the original procurement exercise was still ongoing. And of course, we are obligated to ensure that that exercise is completed and closed off before we can do anything else. So, taking into consideration that circumstances were significantly different from when the bids were originally submitted in 2017, it was concluded that it was not possible to proceed with that procurement exercise. Therefore the procurement was drawn to a close in July 2022. So July 2022, is after 1st of April 2022.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Martin Henry

The Hon. Martin Henry (Minister for Health and Social Care) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Just to add on to my Honourable friends answer, just to add that I think we all know now and the Council would've if known that going 100% renewable by 2022 was a bit ambitious. I still fully support going 100% renewable and I think it was the right path to take. However, we also know now that there may have to be an element of fossil fuels added into our system, as an initial start. Before we can look at other elements to add to that to go 100% Green. So I think in hindsight, which is often a very great place to be, it probably was a bit ambitious, but I totally agree with the idea and the strategy.

The Speaker –

Thank you Honourable Minister for Health and Social Care, Honourable Gillian Brooks.

The Hon. Gillian Brooks –

Thank you, Mr Speaker and thank you to the Ministers. Can I just ask, under the objectives, the intention, if mentions were to reduce energy costs for the community, of course included, which will include the public, private and NGO's can I just ask what work has been done with the private sector and NGO's to further encourage this?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

So Mr Speaker, since this came to my portfolio in April 2022, without any technical experts within the portfolio or any resources to carry this out, my understanding Mr Speaker, is that part of the strategy has not been addressed.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Ronald Coleman?

The Hon. Ronald Coleman –

Thank you Mr Speaker, Can I just ask what happened with the reserved bidder?

The Speaker -

You may, thank you very much. Honourable Minister?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Yes Mr Speaker, as I said that the procurement exercise closed in July 2022.

The Speaker –

Thank you. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can the Honourable Minister state whether there is an intention to actually review the strategy now and determine what is still applicable and within what framework it can be rolled out?

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning.

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker the strategy was looked at again since April 2022, and what we did in the portfolio is looked at options for a policy for renewable energy, and that's something that we're working on at the moment. At this particular time, there is no intention to change energy strategy, but we will be reviewing it.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Can the Honourable Minister please give an indicative timeline for the completion of the policy?

The Speaker –

Honourable Minister?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Yes Mr Speaker, I can and that would be the third quarter of this calendar year.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Karl Thrower?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would just have to question why we're not going to do another energy strategy. You know as the Minister herself said, there has been significant changes, significant differences since the energy strategy was done in 2016. A lot of work was done on the energy strategy since 2016, like its got anaerobic digestion in it. It was decided anaerobic digestion couldn't move forward because we weren't producing enough biomass. But unless we do a strategy, then a policy really doesn't work if you haven't got the strategy to base it on. So I would just ask whether we could review that idea and do a new strategy.

The Speaker –

Review strategy, Honourable Minister?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Yes, Mr Speaker, like I said, we did look at and then we look at the objectives of this current strategy, which is to reduce the energy costs for the community, is to provide and look at a mix model for energy production and storage. So the objectives of the strategy remains the same going forward, and it links into the Minister's Vision. So I wouldn't want to just do things ad hoc and change a strategy that always exists between key objectives just for the sake of doing it. But like I said, it has been looked at, and we're doing the policy on the basis of what was agreed by the officers prior to this form of Government, because it does link into our SEDP and the Minister's Vision.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Mr Speaker, may I rise on a point of clarification.

The Speaker –

You may.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Mr Speaker, I do not think that any of us are proposing throwing away the old energy strategy and starting with something totally new, that's going to have different objectives and different parameters. I think all we're asking is that the details of the strategy be revisited and checked to see which remain relevant today, and which need tweaking and some modification in the light of changes that have taken place since 2016. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you for that clarification, any response to that, any Ministers?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Well, that was a point of clarification, I thought I did say that earlier and forgive me Members, if I didn't, that a strategy has been looked at. And we are still reviewing. And I think to my Honourable Corinda Essex, I did say that we are continuously reviewing the strategy. But at the moment, we're not changing objectives. But of course things has changed since 2016. So you know, we're going through this process, and we will look at it.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, seems like that question has been exhausted. Next question please.

Question No 4 - The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex to ask the Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning:

The Speaker –

The Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you Mr Speaker. Will the Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning tell this Council, what action is being taken by St Helena Government to ensure that energy efficient lighting is being used in all its buildings?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. As I did mention earlier, Mr Speaker about the sun tunnels that we have at the Scotland Office. So Mr Speaker, I also mentioned that the staff from my portfolio has been talking to different Portfolio Directors about how we can be more efficient with our energy. But in lighting throughout Government, and I gave an example about switching off the lights, if you're not there, switch off the computers and things like that. But I think more needs to be done, because I think that there isn't any enforcement of very simple things like this. And, you know, it was obvious, Mr Speaker that when you change a light bulb, that you change with an energy efficiency bulb or, you know, fluorescent tubes, because throughout Government buildings, there's a lot of fluorescent tubes. So it is really common sense, in my humble opinion, Mr Speaker that when you replace the lighting, you do try to do with energy efficiency bulbs, but we also need to be mindful that the different bulbs with different colours and again, I'm not the expert on this. Mr Speaker, but the different colours of the bulbs means different things so we need to ensure to be some sort of policy direction to the ENRP Portfolio Director. So to encourage that when you do things like that, you must change to energy efficiency.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. I think Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development? Your light was on I'm not certain you wish to speak.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. And I think I'd just like to add here, because obviously, government landlord property falls under my remit, Mr Speaker that, I think, agreeing my honourable friend, and actually, a bit surprised that there isn't a policy already in place that we know of, we will, as a government ensure that whenever there is a light button to change, it's changed with the equivalent energy efficient replacement, I think simple things like that doesn't cost anything because it has to be replaced anyway. And that's some way, this could go a long way, in transitioning all our energy lighting bulbs from the old, you know, traditional method, to a new LED. My honourable friend already mentioned, sun tunnels or sun pipes that we used to call, which obviously use no energy at all just convert the light of the sun into more efficient lighting inside the building. But also looking and I know, my honourable friend has already alluded to this in another question, but looking at more efficiency in appliances. So whenever we, as a government, bring in appliances to use, obviously, within our own establishments, that we look at bringing in a rating or b rating appliances. So that is something that as Ministers, we were quite surprised wasn't already in a policy, it might be in best practices. But we feel as a government that should be reinforced to make sure that all portfolios is taking the opportunity to reduce their energy or their carbon footprint whenever possible.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister for Health and Social Care?

The Hon. Martin Henry (Minister for Health and Social Care) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I just like to add to both just as this is a discussion under Question Time that we have to also consider the practicality of policies as well, it will be my opinion. And it's just my opinion here that a policy is such should actually sit under the Minister for Infrastructures Portfolio, because he would have the workforce that changes the lights. So if there's a policy in place that instructs that workforce to only purchase LED lights, then it would be far more practical than telling the Portfolio Director of Health and Social Care that she must also take care of what lights she put up, because I think that's where some of the issue is. So it's not only about writing the policy, it is about where we place the policy to ensure its most effective.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Chief Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think also just from conversations had in the UK recently, I know there's some funding available under different funding streams. And you know that, ENRP makes whole use of Darwin, etc. It has been highlighted through some discussions prior to me leaving but also, whilst in the UK, that there are some funding streams there could assist other Portfolios as well, that doesn't mean because the green and blue agenda sits very squarely under ENRP, that other Portfolios couldn't request assistance for things of going green, if I can put it that way that would assist us in going forward. So we don't have to look within our recurrent budget for funding streams. So all I do at this time is encourage all Portfolios to look at the options that's available when funding streams such as Darwin, etc. comes out and see if these initiatives that we can take under those types of funding that we could probably help to push this forward. Thank you.

The Speaker –

And thank you very much, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the Ministers for their responses. And as it seems that the responsibility for this issue is shared, I will address this question to Chief Minister. Can the Chief Minister, please give a commitment that the development of a policy relevant to this issue will be started as soon as possible and that appropriate funding streams will be explored.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. And I thank the Honourable Dr Corinda Essex, for putting that fairly on my table. I can only look towards my minister for TISD. And say that, I'm sure because we can see the necessity of such that a policy like that will be put on our table. I can't guarantee at this particular time what funding streams will be put towards it. But I'm guessing that if they have a budget line for repairs and maintenance anyway, it would just be about reassurance, reconfirming that we go for the green initiatives.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development. I see your light was on even before the Chief Minister began to speak.

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. And I like to thank the Chief Minister for delegating that to me. And but just to say, I'll be happy to do so if this is something that's important. And I think something that does wouldn't take a lot of resources to implement.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Honourable Karl Thrower?

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Just to ask will the Ministers please consider employing a professional Energy Manager to help them with developing the policies that the time they're talking about?

The Speaker –

Thank you that question to Minister's, any Minister, Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. And I thank the Honourable Karl Thrower for his question, I think what needs to be recognised here, even though the strategy has been going for some years now, we are reviewing it. And it's very much somewhat of a priority for us, we want to get this moving as quickly as we possibly can before our tenure is complete. We are reaching out already, I can't promise you an energy manager at this stage. But as the options come forward, specifically on how we take this forward, at the moment, it's very much sitting under the Minister for ENRP but as she's rightly said, they are moving along and when it hits our executive table about how we wish to take this forward, then recruitment etc. will have to be taken on board. But we do have quite a lot of resources very close to us, actually, within FCDO that's very much focused on green energy. So Alfie Alsop, I'll use a name here because when he was here, that is one of his key areas as well. So I'm not suggesting we won't, but until the options are clear as to how we go forward, I think it's something that will be considered further down the line.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Next question please.

Question No 5 - The Honourable Rosemary Bargo to ask the Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning:

The Speaker –

The Honourable Rosemary Bargo.

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you Mr Speaker, Mr Speaker as one of St Helena Governments initiatives is to harness solar energy. Can the Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning tell this house, what steps the Government is taking to allow for the recommencement of the connect of photovoltaic panels as expeditiously as possible?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, again, this question is linked to the questions that were previously asked. So I think, Mr Speaker that I do recognise that there are advantages of having additional electricity generated through renewable energy sources, but consideration also must be given to any risks where unmanaged feeding could potentially present to the stability of the grid. So as I mentioned earlier, the grid impact assessment is has been commissioned, and will be presented, the outcome of that presented to the URA, and secondly, the Government next month. So I don't think there's anything further that we as a Government can do until we allow that process to follow through. So, Mr Speaker, my understanding is, you know, the grid impact assessment, as has been mentioned a few occasions this morning, is really critical to understand the feasibility of integrating customer owned renewable energy systems into the electricity grid, and the outcome of this assessment will help us to understand the surface stability of the grid. So, I did some research Mr Speaker, when I note that there are some different approaches to the customer owned renewable energy systems to the electricity grid amongst other small island states to avoid the frequency and fluctuations and grid stability issues. So for instance, Members will know that I visited the Falkland Islands recently, and they do not allow the connection of customer owned renewable energy systems. And I also understand that Turks and Caicos Islands, they do have planned customer renewable energy programs, but that was only following detailed assessments to determine the capacity of the electricity grid. So Mr Speaker in a nutshell, here, the Honourable Rosemary Bargo was asking to know what steps we are taking as a Government, until we receive that impact assessment? I don't think there was anything else that me as a Minister, you know, ENRP is able to do. But I gone astray just a little bit Mr Speaker, if you allow me, but I understand that the utility provider is also doing an assessment of accessing wind turbines, the battery energy storage system, and a power system study. So although we are waiting on the grid impact assessment, these are the work studies that the utility provider is undergoing as well.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development, did you want to help with this?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –

Yeah, just can I rise on a point of information, please? Yes, just to make sure that my Honourable friend, and the listening public understands that the halt on photovoltaic panels is only in relation when it connects to the grid. So there is no hold on photovoltaic panels, if there were a standalone system, so members of the public can continue installing them if they wish to do so. Thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you for that clarification. Honourable Rosemary Bargo?

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. And thank my Honourable Ministers for the response. And I know you've pointed out how important this grid stability report is and how instrumental it is for us to achieve your strategy. So I was wondering if you can see if there's any collaboration between SHG and Connect, you know, in trying to get this report done as soon as possible.

The Speaker –

Any collaboration, Honourable Minister for ENRP?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Yes, Mr Speaker, as I say, is going to be sentenced to seeing the Government next month. The way I feel at the moment, I shut my eyes and before I knew it was going to be Christmas, because the days is just going so fast. So to me next month is just around the corner. I don't think we as Government can do anything else. But wait until that process is completed next month.

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you for that. Honourable Rosemary Bargo?

The Hon. Rosemary Bargo –

Mr Speaker, Sorry, I might have not clarified myself. But I was wondering, like, have we had any input or any you know been able to feed into that report, as it is?

The Speaker –

Okay I see where you're coming from. Honourable Minister can you help?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Mr Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, when we, this was transferred to us in April 2022. We don't have any technical or experts in the Portfolio. So we don't have the experts. So I wouldn't be able to, my Ministry wouldn't be able to fit into that assessment. I leave it to the experts to do that.

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you very much. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. As the Honourable Ministers indicated the lack of expertise in this area within SHG, can she please clarify who in fact will be actually examining the study and verifying its accuracy when it's received?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning.

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker as the Chief Minister mentioned earlier, that we do have Alfie Alsop who works for FCDO and he has also helped us with doing the policy review as I mentioned earlier, so that is the expertise as we don't have it on the island, FCDO who is willing to proving us with the expertise?

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you very much. Honourable Andrew Turner, first please.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. As we've heard time and time again, throughout this session, we are waiting on the grid stability assessment, having done some reading that assessment has been waiting for since August of 2022. How has it taken so long?

The Speaker –

How is it taking so long, Honourable Minister?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Mr Speaker, I only go make an assumption. But I would I will ask the Honourable friend to ask a utility provider. I guess it's not having the expertise and depends on the workload of the utility provider. I'm unable to provide that substantive answer here. Mr Speaker.

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you, Honourable Andrew Turner.

The Hon. Andrew Turner –

Well, Mr Speaker, the state owned entity in question is owned by 100% by government. So what oversight do you have to ensure that this is done expediently?

The Speaker –

What oversight? Thank you very much, Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

So I just think the only thing I can raise to say that has been something we've been chasing. Hence, I think it's come as quick as it has. It's not, it's not been easy. Obviously, we all know the implications that Connect has experienced as well, when generators were up and down and everything else. So we've been pushing on a regular basis to try and get this grid impact assessment done because it is hindering our ability to move forward on what is more concrete options on how we progress to green energy. So just want to reassure you all that hasn't been something that we've taken lightly. We've had a number of meetings with Connect St Helena, and we are now a month away, which is not, I can understand the frustration. But believe me, that is felt from us as well, but we can't push if the expertise weren't in house at that particular time. Now they are, it's moving along.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. I know. Honourable Dr Corinda Essex before Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, will the Honourable Minister for the Environment, Natural Resources and Planning, please clarify the precise steps that will be taken on once the grid stability report has been received.

The Speaker –

Thank you, Honourable Minister?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

So Mr Speaker, I don't know, because that document is owned by the utility provider, but I can clarify that for you, Dr Essex.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Coming to you a little bit later on, Honourable Minister. Okay thank you, Honourable Dr Corinda Essex?

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

Can I respond to the comment from the Minister, please? I thought the Minister said that the document would be being passed to SHG, and the URA next month. So what steps would SHG be taking on its receipt, please?

The Speaker –

Okay, so what steps will they be taking? Minister?

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

Thank you. I think until we know the content of that assessment, it's difficult to say specifically what action we're going to be taking. Because we don't know if it's going to be a, if I can say positive report, if there's going to be a lot of work that needs to be done. So until we can have that assessment from URA, but also Connect St Helena to tell us how good or bad the actual grid is. That will also depend on how much investment it will require to stabilise the grid. If that's what is required. I think it's difficult, I think where Minister Scipio is coming from to say what the next steps are until we know the status of our grid.

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you very much. Did you intend to? Yes the Honourable Dr Corinda Essex.

The Hon. Dr Corinda Essex –

I thank the Honourable Chief Minister for her response. But surely first step should be to examine the report to then get expert advice on it and so on. These are the sorts of actions that I'm asking about. I'm not asking about the implementation of recommendations, or even decisions regarding recommendations that will emanate from the report.

The Speaker –

That was a point of information, thank you very much Honourable Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development?

The Hon. Mark Brooks (Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. And I'll try to add a bit here, just so everyone's on the same understanding. So the grid impact assessment and I do agree with my Honourable colleagues here is taking some time and is overdue to when we were promised that it would be with Ministers or with SHG. But what we also understand is SHG as my Honourable friend, Minister Scipio alluded to, is that we don't have the expertise to even take that information and turn it into an understanding of how we move forward. So part of this grid impact assessment is to look at the assessment and make recommendations. So when we receive the report, we won't be just receiving the raw report with all the technical details that probably wouldn't make much difference to us but we will be receiving recommendations from the utility provider, which then we can cue with our sort of advisors in the UK and it is not just within FCDO, if you know as you do is not

particularly sort of involved with renewable energies. But through FCDO they're reaching out to other arms within the British Government so that we are more focused in this sort of advice to the people who understand renewable energy. So that is where we will go with the next steps and the next step is for us to Q & A. The recommendations within that Report. And then that should give us a sort of route of travel in how we implement our energy strategy.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, I think we are still in line with the original question. Honourable Minister for Health and Social Care?

The Hon. Martin Henry (Minister for Health and Social Care) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I just like to rise on the point of information just to, you know, speak of the elephant in the room, which is the fact that yes Connect St Helena is 100% owned by SHG. However, like all other organisations owned by SHG, there are articles which separate what we can and can't do, because it's important that the public knows this, we cannot just go in and demand what we would like so this important negotiations to be held that at that stage, currently, under the current energy being provided on St Helena let's just make this clear. Of course, if people do put on more PV panels, it is less money for the current provider that under the current circumstances, so just want to get that out there. Because this is what we are dealing with, the complexities of the situation. The most important thing I want to raise here is the important role of the URA. They are separate from us as Government, in terms of the advice they can give, and they are separate from Connect St Helena. And they say the URA made a very strong statement to Connect St Helena on the last report, on the last time that they discussed raising the price. And I know we are in the process of strengthening the URA so that they can make stronger recommendations but professional advice. So I just think it's important that we discuss what is actually at play here because the only way we can move forward with this if that we as a Government, our current energy provider, although owned by government, and the URA, all will working towards that strategic objective, cooperatively okay, I say thank you.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, can we try to get the next, last question in Honourable Karl Thrower please.

The Hon. Karl Thrower –

Thank you, Speaker. If you don't mind. First of all, I'd like to start on a point of information. Thank you. And then the question. First of all, obviously, I'll declare that I do have an interest in renewable energies, I'm pretty sure everybody will know. However, I'm not going to go into my point of information is about the importance of the grid stability report. The grid stability report isn't just about renewable energy, it's about the energy grid, we've all experienced power cuts, flashing lights and things we've all seen the damage it does to electronic devices. When these events occur, the grid stability report could identify all sorts of things, it can identify that six kilometres of cable needs replacing because it's the wrong diameter cable, it could say that we've got outdated transformers and things like that. So trying to pre-empt what the grid stability reports going to say is very difficult because the electricity grid on the Island is made up of quite literally 1000s upon 1000s of separate components. If the grid stability report has been done, well, every one of those components should have been checked. If the grid stability report had been done before the generators, and we had all that very expensive problems, it would have picked them up. So that's the key of the grid stability report. It is a massive piece of work that's been undertaken, I can say that nobody is more impatient for it to be finished than I am for obviously, for the reasons I've just said, but it's a very

important piece of equipment. You know, it's a very key thing to move in the island forward for renewable energy. And if you don't mind, I'd like to ask question, given the fact that it's very clear from what the Ministers have said, we have not an ideal relationship between the Government and Connect St Helena, what are your plans for changing it?

The Speaker –

What are you plans for changing it? Did you say? Okay, thank you very much. Honourable Chief Minister.

The Hon. Julie Thomas (Chief Minister) –

I'm just going to say, I think we've been very careful how we talk about changing it, because that would suggest that we are soon to rid ourselves of Connect St Helena and that's not something that we've said out loud at any time, and neither something that's been considered, we are hoping that we can improve just like all the rest of these long term relationships that we have with different state owned entities, it is when we have the opportunity to revisit the agreements that we have with them that those things will be done, that opportunity has arisen, but without the quality assessment etc. So when we get that I think we'll then start looking at the longer term relationship with Connect St Helena and any other energy providers as we go forward.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much Honourable Chief Minister. Any other questions or comments to make on that note? Or are we thoroughly exhausted? I think we have about 12 minutes left that we should be able to get the next question in. and that is Honourable Robert Midwinter, Honourable Robert Midwinter.

Question No 6 - The Honourable Robert Midwinter to ask the Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning:

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker I recognise that being last in the lottery runs the risk to the listening public, of being repetitive, but I will however ask my question. Will the Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning tell this Council what actions have been taken by her Portfolio since she came into office in order to increase the production of energy through renewable sources and reduce the island's reliance on imported fuels?

The Speaker –

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, there are challenges for St Helena within this particular sector. Our remoteness will always require a level of contingency to ensure that the Island can continue to supply electricity. We have an aging infrastructure as critical assets have exceeded or near to exceeding their expected lifespan and trying to understand the electricity demand because of course, we just opened up last year and tourists are slowly coming in. Availability of funding, St Helena being at a disadvantage competing with others who are focusing on investing in gigawatts, whereas due to our very small customer base, we are seeking to expand our renewable energy infrastructure in terms of megawatts and due to the disruptions of supply changed because of COVID-19. Potentially there is a longer lead time for procurement. So we do have some challenges. So Mr Speaker currently, St Helena generates

approximately 20% of its supply from renewable through wind and solar, which does not include renewable energies generated by privately customers. So the remainder is from diesel generation. So the question is asked, what actions has been taken upon this Ministry that I head up. So as I said earlier, this only came to us in April 2022. I alluded to Mr Speaker earlier that a live procurement exercise was ongoing, so we couldn't really do anything at that particular time until the procurement exercise was finished in July 2022. So after that had taken place, a task and finish working group was set up to look at alternative models to reduce the reliance on diesel generation to ensure future energy generation is more environmentally friendly and opportunity for energy security is improved. And of course, energy costs are reduced where we are possible. So a few months ago, in April this year, the Portfolio Advisory Board discussed some different options for the Renewable Energy Policy. So I hope the listeners will bear with me Mr Speaker, when I'll just give them some examples of the options that our Portfolio had looked at. So one of the options was a renewable energy power purchase agreement. So a renewable energy purchase agreement, identifies and contract a partner to design, install and operate a system to allow the utility provider to reach the renewable energy strategy. So, Mr Speaker that was I think I alluded to earlier on about PASH. So that was one of the option in looking at what was previously looked at the power purchase agreement. And another option was to design a system for operation by the utility provider. So the utility provider themselves identifies the system and design it, install it and operate it. Another option was combination of a power purchase agreement with a system designed by the utility provider. So, this will be a smaller power purchase agreement with an external supplier to deliver the utility providers design. Another option was looked at in individual commercial or household private, renewable generation and storage. We also looked at shared distributed generation. So, this refers to local power generation using privately owned solar panels and possibly wind in the commercial sector and in the home where energy is purchase for distribution through the National mini grid. Options were also discussed in the Portfolio Advisory Board in respect of the supply technologies and how we manage the demand. So, the board was asked to consider the use of policy to support the adoption of household and commercial appliances that are more energy efficient, battery storage technologies to store energy from wind and solar sources. So, battery energy storage systems which we refer to as BESS. The expansion of wind power, expansion of solar power, building a smart grid to better manage power demand, this would mean upgrading the system to allow it to communicate across different supply technologies, explore emerging renewable energy technologies, this could be a floating solar PV floating wind farms with wave energy and any other ocean technologies and hydrogen storage. Another option looked at, replace the large generators with smaller ones. And also looking at the option of power station generators using bio diesel. So Mr Speaker, I just want to mention that electricity consumption has declined during the period 2017/18 and 20/23. From 10.5 megawatts are in 2017/18, less than nine megawatts are in 22/23, which Mr Speaker equates to approximately 14% decrease. So Mr Speaker, the potential reasons for this decrease could likely be to declining populations. I know that a lot of our Saints have gone overseas to work, it could be reduced commercial demand, particularly from the tourism sector, due to travel restrictions during the COVID 19 pandemic. It also could be increased use of the private PV systems that I mentioned earlier. And also changing habits, consumption habits. So Mr Speaker, the board agreed to the combination of a power purchase agreement with a system designed by the utility providers so that the design can be split into phases and particular components to enable the flexibility of using funding source resources and approaches, which also expand the wind and solar power and battery storage technology. So the board made that decision because that is in alignment with the strategy, we're having a mix model. So since that decision as to the options for the renewable energy policy, now the policy needs to be drawn up, and then it will be presented to the Executive Council for endorsement. So my Honourable Robert Midwinter, we've

been focusing on the options for a renewable energy policy and also other things in which you it earlier that I don't want to repeat again.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much for that. We've got two minutes left, can we can we get done in two minutes? Honourable Robert Midwinter.

The Hon. Robert Midwinter –

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and again, I thank my Honourable colleague for her response. As I said, most of my questions have actually been answered already, but I'd just like to ask if she stands by the statement that was made by the Chief Minister, particularly she's made reference to the policy, or the Chief Minister made a statement to Elected Members in May 2022, and I quote, to proactively and efficiently move speedily to come up with a draft plan that can be shared with all Elected Members for their input and consideration, with the prime objective of producing a plan that helps to alleviate the pressures being placed on our entire community. So again, just to ask for the commitment that will be shared with all Elected Members.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. Can you respond Honourable Member?

The Hon. Christine Scipio (Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning) –

Yes, Mr Speaker, of course, we will have a discussion with Elected Members once I've seen the final draft.

The Speaker –

Thank you very much. We just about out of time, but I will allow another question if there is any, no, nothing at all.

4. CLOSING REMARKS BY THE SPEAKER

The Speaker –

Okay, thank you all very much, that has brought us then to the end of Minister's Question Time for today, and in fact, for this month. Thank you all very much for your valuable contributions. And thank you, the listening public. We certainly hope you found the content interesting and informative. And of course, we will look forward to the public to give us some feedback. Only five questions today? Six questions. They were all thoroughly explored. Everyone had a chance to ask a question. And everyone had a chance to provide an answer. So I think it went very well. And we managed to get it done just on the hour. So this is no more for this month, if you didn't have one in in May. But we explained the reason why there wasn't one in May. The Honourable Member who answers the questions today was unavailable at that time. And as you could see, there was only one Honourable Member really who could answer the questions as fully as was answered. No more for this month because we got Formal Legislative Council coming up at the end of the month and of course, we won't have time to do anything as far as bringing up another Ministers Question Time. We look forward to of course one next month. I wish you all a productive and interesting day. Thank you all very much

Honourable Speaker

Date