

**Sewerage (Amendment) Bill 2014 –
Third Reading approved**

Mr Coleman to move:

That the Sewerage (Amendment) Bill 2014 be read a third time.

The President: Now we come to the Third Reading.
I call on Mr Coleman.

Mr Coleman: Thank you, Madam President.

I am grateful to Hon. Members for supporting the suspension of Standing Orders so that all the stages of the Bill could be taken in Council today, and I am also very appreciative of their comments, which will be taken on board.

I think all issues have been addressed and hope that Members can support the Third Reading of this Bill so that it may pass today and progress to the Royal Assent process.

Madam President, I beg to move that the Sewerage (Amendment) Bill 2014 be read a third time and do pass.

Mr Downie: I beg to second, Madam President, and reserve my remarks.

The President: The Hon. Member, Mr Turner.

Mr Turner: Thank you, Madam President.

I do not wish to revisit the points I made earlier, as we have dealt with this Item in the one session. However, I do feel that putting this legislation through in one sitting – all three readings... I do feel we have done a disservice to the public we serve by rushing it through.

If I may just pick up the point Mr Downie made about the Department coming with the Road Races, this particular Bill deals with, I still maintain, a major change of policy. We have changed from a system whereby people's taxes funded... the revenue funded the sewerage system. We brought the charge in last year, which was a departure from that, and we are now moving to a rating system. So it is a major change of policy and I do not feel this is the way we should be bringing legislation through, particularly as there are so many question marks hanging over how this is going to affect people – because we just do not know.

I will explain why the Road Races Bill is different when it comes to that point, because that does not involve a change of policy, but I will go with that – and it is the Department that is asking me to bring it through, not me, but I will come to that when the appropriate time is upon us.

I will not be supporting the Third Reading of the Bill, as I think there are too many question marks in this. I think it would have benefited from even closer scrutiny, and it will be interesting to see... I have no doubt that it is going to pass, but it will be interesting to see how this pans out. I think it will not be the utopia that many people think it is going to be: I think this is only the start.

The President: The Hon. Member, Mr Braidwood.

Mr Braidwood: Thank you, Madam President.

I will support the Third Reading. I will give the benefit of the doubt to the mover of the Bill. I do, as I have said previously, have my reservations. I think it has been changed on the whim of the Authority... when we had it as a charge and it was going through as a charge, and now we have changed it as the rate, because some people thought it might be more beneficial to the rural areas than the urban. However, one thing that is being introduced... and I will see how it goes for this year,

but with the rateable value coming through and a proper equitable rate charged, then I will go forward and support the Bill.

A Member: Hear, hear.

The President: The Hon. Member, Mr Butt.

Mr Butt: Thank you, Madam President.

I do support the Bill and I do support the principle of changing the rating valuation system. I think it is important, but I must say that, although it was on the horizon to do that, it was on the distant horizon and was certainly not a priority of Government until the amendment came through to this Bill.

We now hear it is going to cost £2 million to change that revaluation. That £2 million could have been £2 million more used as subvention for a couple of years to get the MUA through their difficulties. In fact, I do not see how that comes into the parameters of Government. Two million pounds: in the Health Service – and lots of other places could say the same – we could have brought in patient safety measures which we have asked for and been turned down on, in terms of money, which are a far higher priority than this. The revaluation of the rating system is needed but is not urgent in these difficult times, and that £2 million could have been spent much more sensibly actually to save people's lives.

I think really I am quite shocked to hear the cost of it, purely brought about by an amendment to a Bill, which I did not fully support but I do believe that I will support it because we do need to revalue the rates at some stage and... *[Inaudible]* charge has to be levied.

So I will support the Third Reading, Madam President, but I have made it quite clear.

The President: The Hon. Member, Mr Downie.

Mr Downie: Thank you, Madam President.

I am pleased to hear that Hon. Members are realising now that we need to get on with this. There is a massive amount of work to do in this area to complete this process. I think Members can be assured that on a regular basis the recommendations will come forward to Tynwald. Many of them will require the concurrence and approval of Tynwald to move on. So we are not at the end of this Bill; we are actually starting another journey really in another place, where I think you will receive your regular updates about how things are going to be charged, how the banding is going to work and so on.

I think, as has been said, there are thirty-odd thousand properties out there to be dealt with, so it is a big task. I would disagree with some of the comments made. It has always been Treasury's ambition to do this but, for whatever reason, other things have come along and had to take priority.

I would just like to endorse what Mr Butt said: there are major priorities in Government and there are times when we have got to really stop looking at things that are nice to have and things that are essential to have.

For my own view, I think the re-rating of the Isle of Man has been essential for a long time because of its unfairness, and I think there has been a growing concern between the urban and rural and towns and villages and so on, and we have really got to address that. If we are going to start to charge for things, let's do it on a proper, fair and equitable basis.

I would really like to finish off by saying that one has to question things like regeneration projects and nice-to-have projects. We have got to be targeting our money and our resources more to dealing with the main planks that people are concerned about – health, education and so on.

I will be supporting the Third Reading of the Bill and I will be looking forward to the officers in Treasury getting their teeth into this and getting on and producing some good results that everybody will be able to sign up to.

The President: The mover to reply.

Mr Coleman: Thank you, Madam President.

Again, I thank the Hon. Members of Council for their comments.

I respect Mr Turner's views on this and I hope it follows through all of his political career.

I think, as far as Mr Butt's comments were concerned, we are here not just talking about the re-rating affecting sewerage rates; it will also affect water rates and general rates, so there will be a knock-on effect, which maybe this has prompted, where equity and fairness will come more to the fore in all of those areas.

A Member: Everybody will be paying more.

Mr Coleman: That is equity, like I said.

I agree with Mr Butt's comments that maybe the money could be better spent somewhere else, but as the priorities go, it has been decided that this will be spent from this particular function.

I think there seems to be some view that this Bill has come around just like a whim. It has not. I think that there was a lot of dissatisfaction in the Keys about going up to a charge of £100, to the extent that there was some doubt that it would actually get through the Keys. At that point, I think there was an informal working group set up with Treasury and the Manx Utilities Authority to try and look at ways forward, and I think Mr Watterson was actually in that group as well. So this is the amendments, and what we have in front of us today have come over a lot of discussion, and some pragmatism as well.

That said – and again with my appreciation for the suspension of Standing Orders and for the comments of the gentlemen today, who have obviously thought about this quite considerably, and their comments are appreciated – I beg to move that the Sewerage (Amendment) Bill 2014 be read a third time and do pass.

The President: The motion is that the Bill be read a third time and do pass. Those in favour, please say aye; against, no. The ayes have it.

A division was called for and voting resulted as follows:

FOR

The Lord Bishop
Mr Butt
Mr Braidwood
Mr Coleman
Mr Downie
Mr Crowe
Mr Corkish

AGAINST

Mr Turner

The President: Seven Members for and one vote against. The motion therefore carries, Hon. Members.

That concludes our business for this morning. The Council will now adjourn. The adjournment will be until 20th January in Tynwald Court and thereafter in our own Chamber on 27th January.

May I wish you all a very peaceful Christmas and a little bit of rest before we commence again in the New Year.