

*Dalyellup Mine Site — Titanium Dioxide Production — Adjournment Debate*

**HON SALLY TALBOT (South West)** [10.05 pm]: This afternoon in question time, I asked the Minister for Environment whether she is familiar with the problems that have arisen in Dalyellup recently. I was very pleased to hear that she is aware of what has been happening down there. However, I rise tonight to go into the situation in a little more detail, because I think that what we desperately need is more information and more communication. The issues that the residents are trying to get attention paid to need to be taken seriously, and some of their questions need to be answered.

Tonight I want to start by making it very clear, having spoken to both the members of the community and a representative of the company, that I am not picking up any great anti-company feeling in that community. Indeed, the people there have lived with the operations of this company for many years, as the minister quite rightly pointed out in her answer this afternoon. The place where the company—that is, Cristal Global—has been putting its waste material is right in the middle of the Dalyellup community. The minister said that the company has been doing that since 1992. My information is that it has been done for about 20 years, so that is about right.

When this waste site first started to be used some 20 years ago, no-one was living in Dalyellup. Dalyellup is a new subdivision. I am sure that some honourable members know the location. It is very, very attractive. The local government and the state government worked very hard to protect the bushland in the area to preserve some of those unique environmental values that make it an attractive place to live. It is now home to around 5 000 people who have chosen to live there partly because of the environmental values of the area. Slap bang in the middle of that community is the place where Cristal Global has been dumping the residue from its product, which is titanium dioxide, for a couple of decades.

As I just said, I am not sensing any great hostility towards the company. What I am picking up is an enormous concern about the plan that the company had always talked about, which was to finish dumping at that site in 2010. Indeed, in one of the communications that I have seen it says that the company will finish dumping either when the site is full or in 2010, whichever comes sooner, so certainly the community thought it would stop in 2010 at the latest. However, the company has now applied to the Shire of Capel for a three-year extension to take it to 2013.

As I said, when this site began to be used for the disposal of this waste, no-one was living in the area. It was not of particular concern. Now, with between 5 000 and 6 000 people living there, I do not think it is unreasonable to suggest that if the company were to come along today and apply for a new licence to put this material in that position, it would not be granted the licence. The community has lived in relative harmony with this facility for some years, and it has just been told that it will have to put up with it for another three years. This is what has lit the fuse and is causing so much concern in the community. It seems to me that the community has every right to be concerned about this material being dumped on that site. It is not glow-in-the-dark stuff; it is not going to creep up on people when they are in bed at night. However, it is low-level radiation. We need to remember that Dalyellup is not far from Capel. It is actually within the Shire of Capel. Many members here tonight will recall that about 20 or 30 years ago, large areas of the Capel town site had to be dug up and replaced with clean material. That is because the tailings from the mineral sand mining operations had been used to fill in car parks and playgrounds in the town. That was not done with any malicious intent. It was done because that seemed to be a good use of that substance. However, that was precisely the kind of low-level radiation which, in that context, was known to be potentially harmful. There are people in that town who remember very well the debate that took place at the time, when for several years the mineral sand mining companies in that area had been arguing that there was nothing wrong with using the tailings for that purpose, and that it was a good way of recycling the tailings, but then had to bite the bullet and admit that there was some danger.

I do not think it behoves the company well to downplay those concerns by talking about the fact that the products that are made from titanium dioxide are everyday household items such as toothpaste and cosmetics, to say nothing of paint and paper. That belittles the concerns of the community somewhat. The company needs to take the concerns of the community seriously and issue some information of real substance. I understand that several years ago, the health warnings associated with the residue from the production of titanium dioxide were upgraded from type 3, not considered dangerous to humans, to type 2B, carcinogen, possibly dangerous to humans. Therefore, this matter needs to be taken seriously.

I acknowledge that the company has put out some information on this matter. We work in politics. Our business is to communicate with our electors. Therefore, we all know how frustrating it can be to try to communicate with people. We may put out reams of material, and we may run advertisements and distribute them in letterboxes and put them on television, but people will still come back to us and say, “You didn’t tell us. We have not heard from you in three years.” I grant that the company has been trying to communicate with the community, and I give it credit for that. Unfortunately, it is not working. Sometimes we need to put out our message 100 times before it

gets through. Therefore, the company needs to upgrade the type and tone of the information that it is putting out to the community.

The concerns as I read them go back to several statements that the Environmental Protection Authority has made over the two decades or so that this site has been run as a waste dump. On 19 December 1988, the EPA said that this site was environmentally unacceptable beyond three years; it was acceptable only for short-term disposal. I grant that the minister was right—extensions have been granted over the past 20 years. However, every time an extension has been granted, riders and conditions have been placed on that extension. In October 1993, the EPA again said that it would grant an extension, but that it did not support the general principle of the use of interdunal depressions on the coast for the disposal of this kind of waste.

We also had reference in those findings to the former Department of Conservation and Land Management's management plan 38 of 1998-2008 for the Leschenault peninsula. When referring to this part of Kemerton, it stated, according to my notes —

The solid waste is currently deposited in sand dunes at Dalyellup, south of Bunbury, pending a permanent solution to its disposal.

As I said, the concerns that have been expressed by the community need to be addressed very thoroughly and very promptly. Allay the community's concerns if they can be allayed. If they cannot be allayed, this is an opportunity to close down this site.

It is very important that we do not allow these fears and suspicions to grow and that we do not belittle them. We have to take people seriously. The thing that is really getting under people's skin is that they feel they have these concerns and that wherever they turn they are just given words to make them go away and they are not taken seriously. That is a big mistake. I urge the minister to have a very careful look at this issue. Let us have an inquiry if that is what we need, but let us take the concerns seriously. Let us help the company work its way through this issue, and by doing so we can get a sensible outcome for everybody.