

**REGIONAL RESOURCE RECOVERY CENTRE — NOISE AND ODOUR INCIDENTS**

*Grievance*

**MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot — Parliamentary Secretary)** [9.50 am]: I will start off by saying that I am absolutely convinced that my colleague the member for Riverton, who sits next to me, shares my sentiments 100 per cent on this issue. Once again, my grievance is about the Southern Metropolitan Regional Council plant in Canning Vale. On behalf of my constituents and those of the member for Riverton, I want to highlight the SMRC's ongoing failure in the operation of its Regional Resource Recovery Centre in Canning Vale.

The long and controversial history of the SMRC's resource centre is well documented. It is an issue that has adversely affected the residents of Leeming for more than a decade. Earlier this year it malfunctioned once again, causing the plant to emit noxious odours, further disrupting the lifestyle of nearby residents, who I sympathise with entirely—I share their frustration and distress 100 per cent. Since March I have received more than 130 emails relating to the SMRC, which is in my electorate. I have no doubt that the member for Riverton has received a similar number, if not more.

In June it failed again, providing a new inconvenience for nearby residents. As the minister is aware, the Department of Environment and Conservation received complaints from residents in Leeming and Willetton over the period 1 June to 10 August regarding the SMRC's new issue, which is noise. I provide a sample of the emails I have received in the past month. According to my notes, Deane wrote —

Walking out onto my patio, I smelt the familiar rotting acrid compost smell coming from the SMRC. I am extremely disappointed that now this smell is not only confined to summer and this is a terrible omen for the hot weather to come ... I honestly feel that the many solutions and assurances given by the DEC that this problem would be rectified were all hollow. I was also shocked to find out that the SMRC has also had a number of noise complaints in recent weeks. I feel that is disgraceful that the SMRC has added another level of annoyance in the reduction of amenity for the residents of Leeming.

On 11 August Lorna wrote —

The solution to the pre-existing odour problem, which saw the closure of the plant temporarily, appears to have been the installation of fans to assist in dissipating the build-up of waste gases, the only problem is, the fans which run day and night —

That is 24 hours a day —

are emitting noise levels above the accepted guidelines ... I would like the people in charge of sorting out this problem to come and sleep in my bed for just one week. Perhaps then they may be more empathetic to what we currently endure night after night. I have forgotten what it is like to go to bed and just hear silence.

On 17 August Mandy wrote —

When I smelt the odour I felt burning eyes, burning nose and throat and chest pain and shooting pain in my head — which means another migraine from the SMRC RRRC WCF emissions. My dogs start to whimper and cough when they experience the emissions from SMRC RRRC WCF ... I didn't bother phoning DEC as I feel that DEC only have the SMRC's interest at heart and not the long suffering residents. It stinks to high heaven. What else is new. Guess the repairs aren't working AGAIN ... they haven't been for nearly a decade so I guess it would be stupid to think they would work this time around.

I understand the SMRC and the Department of Environment and Conservation engaged the services of an engineering consultant to investigate the new noise. Unsurprisingly, it found that the noise emissions not only came from its own plant, but also exceeded the noise levels stipulated by the Environmental Protection (Noise) Regulations 1997; I would suggest that this failure alone is deserving of immediate licence suspension. The SMRC has been given until 21 September to rectify the noise problem, which seems an exceedingly long time considering that the noise started in June.

DEC wrote to me recently stating, according to my notes, that —

Confirmation that the principal source of the noise is the discharge ducting indicates that the increase in noise is an unintended consequence of measures taken to reduce odour. On this basis, DEC considers that the SMRC should be given sufficient time to address the problem

I just need the minister to sense my frustration. Residents have to put up with not only the smell from this plant, but also now the noise—a constant hum at a constant frequency 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I do not want to speak for the residents, but I am guessing they would prefer just the smell. They are now being hit twofold.

With the onset of warmer weather last weekend, the noxious, repellent odour returned in force. There was no expected reduction in the intensity of the odour, given the measures taken to alleviate the smell. Now, local residents have noise and odour to contend with.

I do not believe the SMRC facility should remain open. I believe the SMRC has failed in its operation of this facility. Since 2010 I have made four submissions on the renewal of licence conditions of the SMRC's Canning Vale plant, as well as repeatedly raising the issue with the government since the 2008 election. Minister, how much longer must the residents of Leeming, and Willetton in the member for Riverton's electorate, continue to endure the noxious odour and now noise? The intrusion and interruption this plant has caused to their lives has been devastating. How long must ratepayers and taxpayers continue to prop up this failed enterprise?

The emails and phone calls I have received on this issue reflect and underline that residents living near the SMRC's plant no longer have confidence in DEC to be an independent regulator of the SMRC. Why does DEC constantly allow the SMRC to emit odours, and to now also emit noise, outside its licence conditions? It is in breach of its licence—why have there been no consequences? I reiterate that I do not believe that the SMRC facility should remain open. I believe the SMRC has failed in the operation of this facility. Minister, I am just begging on behalf of the residents of the eastern side of Leeming, and the residents of Willetton in the member for Riverton's electorate, that something be done; it is just not fair to continually punish these people with not only the smell they have put up with for 10 years, but also the noise resulting from the attempt to reduce the smell that is having no impact whatsoever.

**MR W.R. MARMION (Nedlands — Minister for Environment)** [9.56 am]: I acknowledge the member for Jandakot's grievance, which incorporated the concerns of the member for Riverton. Both members have consistently raised the issue with me over the time I have been Minister for Environment. I acknowledge their concerns around the odour and, more recently, the noise. I just wish to put on the record the background.

As I stated in this place on 22 September last year, this is a long-running and complex issue that has proved difficult to resolve. The facility has been the source of odour complaints from the community for eight years, and there were still serious concerns about its performance and impact on the community earlier this year—I acknowledge that. For that reason, on 30 March 2012 the Department of Environment and Conservation issued the Southern Metropolitan Regional Council with a 10-week licence for a managed phase-down of operations at its Regional Resource Recovery Centre until additional pollution control equipment had been installed. The centre had been put on notice six months prior to that by the department, and I had also expressed my ongoing concern in this house. SMRC was advised that a new licence would be considered if the centre installed new primary odour treatment equipment, or enclosure, and secondary odour treatment equipment, and improved its quality assurance and monitoring systems. DEC's action led to a positive response from the SMRC and its participating councils—the Cities of Cockburn, Fremantle and Melville, and the Town of East Fremantle—which committed to a multimillion dollar improvement at the Canning Vale facility. This led to the department issuing an amended licence on 7 May 2012, which includes 21 new conditions including the installation and commissioning of new odour treatment technology, in the form of wet scrubbers, by 15 December 2012. Until that date, the new conditions restrict the acceptance of putrescible waste to 1 365 tonnes a week, which is 65 per cent of the facility's allowed throughput capacity.

In addition, SMRC requires further operational controls, including stringent limits, targets, and continuous monitoring of biofilter performance, to minimise odour emissions. SMRC is also required to have independent ambient field odour monitoring conducted, which is to be reviewed by DEC. This sampling must be done monthly between July and December 2012, and weekly from December 2012 to April 2013. The Southern Metropolitan Regional Council must also implement a more accountable odour complaints management and response system.

The licence also required SMRC to submit by 29 June a detailed construction and commissioning plan for the installation of wet scrubbers to remove odorous gases, and this plan was submitted by SMRC. Importantly, if the wet scrubbers are not installed and operational by 15 December, SMRC will have to cease accepting any putrescible waste—so that is a given—but I understand from what I have been told that it is on track, in terms of its commissioning, to meet this deadline.

I can report that since the amended licence was issued, the number of odour complaints from 7 May to 31 August this year was 27, compared with a total of 131 complaints during March this year. Nevertheless, there are still —

**Mr J.M. Francis** interjected.

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** Yes, I know, but we are coming up to summer and it should have all the wet scrubbers in by then.

I can also advise the house that as an unintended consequence of measures taken by SMRC to reduce odours, the Department of Environment and Conservation has received a number of complaints about noise coming from the facility, which is the member's point. SMRC engaged an engineering consultant to investigate the noise and its possible sources. The consultant's report has identified the discharge ducts connecting the ventilation fans to the biofilters as the loudest source of noise and recommended that SMRC apply acoustic insulation to the straight section of ducting. SMRC has given DEC an undertaking that it will install the necessary insulation by, as the member said, 21 September, which is this month. If the SMRC does not address this issue by that date, DEC will consider appropriate enforcement action. So SMRC is on notice.

When the amended licence was issued to SMRC in May this year, it was made very clear to it that this was its last chance to get things right. A total of 54 licence conditions, including 21 new conditions, that SMRC must comply with aim to minimise odour and other problems as much as possible and improve the lives of all the residents surrounding the facility, particularly in Leeming. However, I can advise the house that DEC is currently investigating SMRC regarding alleged breaches of odour and reporting conditions. I was very disappointed to learn about these breaches, but I understand that the issues around reporting and monitoring these results have already been remedied by SMRC. SMRC has also undertaken what it terms a "brutal truth review", which has already resulted in improvements to its management systems and will lead to further adjustments.

The safety, health and amenity of the community are paramount, and I am firmly of the view that SMRC cannot continue to operate this facility in a substandard manner, nor can it continue to impact the local community. The government, through DEC, has provided a number of opportunities for SMRC to lift its game. SMRC was again put on notice just yesterday by DEC that if the odour and noise problems are not resolved, DEC will take appropriate enforcement action. It has been made clear to SMRC and its member councils that they must make the plant work properly and meet its licence conditions.

I will close by putting on the public record that I will be keeping a close watch on this matter and ensuring that SMRC meets its licence conditions. If the highest standards cannot be met and maintained, I question the long-term viability of the SMRC's operations at this site.

**Mr J.M. Francis:** Regardless of whether it is achieved by the twenty-first of this month, will you at least ask if something can be done to put a curfew on the noise emissions that continue for 24 hours a day? At least let the people sleep from 11.00 pm, as you say.

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** That is a good point. I will see whether there is an opportunity, particularly in the evening, member, to do something —

**Mr J.M. Francis:** To shut the fans down or —

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** Yes. That is a very good point. I will follow that through.

**Mr J.M. Francis:** Thank you, minister.