

CONTAMINATED SITES — EXMOUTH

Statement

HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral) [9.44 pm]: Sorry, Madam President, I just thought you were being nice to me. I thought I would wait to see my crew get together.

The PRESIDENT: I was being nice to you.

Hon KEN BASTON: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

This year, I have become aware of the very concerning issue of groundwater contamination across multiple sites in the light industrial area of the town of Exmouth. In March 2017, the Contaminated Sites Committee found that Lance Gregory and his wife, Francine, were responsible for the presence of hydrocarbons under their service station, better known as Exmouth Fuel Supplies, located at 26 Nimitz Street, Exmouth, or lot 617 on the plan. I visited the site in September this year. The Gregorys' property is across the road from the disused Exmouth power station, which is also a contaminated site. The former Exmouth power station operated from 1960 until 2008, when the power station was decommissioned. The site comprises two lots. One lot is owned by the Regional Power Corporation, which now trades as Horizon Power. The other lot is owned by the Shire of Exmouth. On 5 September, I received an answer to a question without notice that confirmed that this power station site is contaminated with diesel and oil. I asked the Minister for Environment quite a few questions and it is clear from the answers provided to him by his department that there is no precise or complete understanding of the level of contamination at the site. No-one understands the enormity of what the site might be contaminated by.

On 5 September, I asked the following question without notice of which some notice had been given —

- (2) When was the earliest known episode of contamination at this site?

I was provided with the following answer —

- (2) The contamination at the former power station was first identified during a site inspection by the then Department of Environmental Protection in 2000. The former power station commenced operation around 1960, and the diesel contamination has been dated at around 30 years old.

I understand that it is very difficult over that time frame to collate everything, particularly because ownership of the power station changed when Western Power was split up and Horizon Power was developed. Horizon Power ended up with responsibility for the site. I remember that one of my questions had to be referred, because we asked Western Power when it should have gone to Horizon Power. Western Power was split up during my first years in Parliament and Geoff Gallop was the minister at the time. The Minister for Environment's answer to my question was that there is an understanding that the site is contaminated, but that a source site does not exist.

An excerpt from the executive summary of a report by Environmental Resource Management, a company acting for Horizon Power, about the Exmouth power station, published on 9 June 2017, states —

A recent determination of responsibility for remediation made by the Contaminated Sites Committee ... found that Horizon Power had zero responsibility for remediation of impacts present on the EFS site.

Exmouth Fuel Supplies refuted this claim, and has engaged environmental scientist Mr Colin Walker from Geo & Hydro Environmental Management to investigate on its behalf. Numerous witness statements and statutory declarations illustrate instances of spills and leaks et cetera going back many years. I have copies of those in my office. The environmental safety run became more of an issue in the 1970s and, with environmental protection, more modern practices took place. One hopes that there are also more modern practices for clean-up. There was a significant period, of course, before that, and that period caused the damage.

In 2016, the Contaminated Sites Committee provided Horizon Power, via Environmental Resources Management, with an opportunity to respond to Cornerstone Legal and Geo & Hydro Environmental Management's submissions to it on behalf of the Gregorys. The closing statement stated, in part, that ERM considered that the Gregorys had not presented a credible model that showed that the power station contaminated their service station. This is despite decades of people putting in affidavits to state that there was spillage. It seems that an onus of proof is being put on a small family business to prove that they did not contaminate it—not the other way around. I point out that the power station is only some 25 metres across from the service station. It would be a road width away. There is still the old bund there. Back in the 1960s the fuel used to be supplied by the US Navy, so it used to pull alongside, push a hose through the fence and flip it up. Every time someone put that hose through, which was about 75 to 90 millimetres wide, it would have some diesel in it. There are also records of some 24 000 litres of diesel being dropped there. Those people who know Exmouth well will know that it is limestone underneath and very cavernous. Of course, that can store fuel for many years.

I do not believe that that small business should be the only one responsible. It should be a collective responsibility because if we start remediating one area—particularly where the service station is, because the powerhouse is above that; there is a slight elevation—we will still have contamination coming down the hill again underneath. We need a holistic approach to clean it up, and it is extremely important that this site is fixed. I would like to throw

open an invitation to the Minister for Environment. I know that it will not be a problem for him because it is in his electorate anyway. I am more than happy to help facilitate that and to get this on the road. It has been going on for far too long. It is a family business and this issue continues to put pressure on the couple who own it. It can also devalue the land, which is extremely important.