

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Forty-fifth Report — “Petition Number 59—Bio-Organics composting facility, Oakford” — Tabling

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [10.08 am]: I am directed to present the forty-fifth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs titled “Petition Number 59—Bio-Organics composting facility, Oakford”.

[See paper 4528.]

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: The report I have just tabled advises the house of the committee's inquiry into a petition expressing concern about environmental contamination caused by Bio-Organics' compost facility in Oakford. The committee's 31 findings and seven recommendations relate to Bio-Organics' operations, particularly its acceptance of controlled waste and the regulation of the premises by the Department of Environment Regulation and its predecessors responsible for the administration of the Environmental Protection Act 1986. The committee concluded that the Bio-Organics compost facility operated for many years with little or no regulatory control. The department did not verify that construction of the facility complied with all aspects of Bio-Organics' works approval; nevertheless, a licence to operate was issued in 2002. The committee notes with concern that noncompliance with infrastructure requirements was a key reason for the eventual revocation of Bio-Organics' licence to operate in 2014. Between 2002 and 2007, the department gave approval to Bio-Organics for 15 limited trials of biological activators to assist the composting process. These biological activators included controlled wastes such as grease trap waste, food processing waste, blood waste, acid sulphate soil and drilling mud. The committee identified serious deficiencies in the department's approval processes and its documentation, monitoring and assessment of biological activators. Because the department failed to correlate controlled waste tracking data and Bio-Organics' waste intake, a green waste composting facility was able to receive at least 87 million litres of controlled waste without the authorisation, or apparent notice, of the regulating authority. Complaints about odour, and the contamination of an adjacent property in August 2013, finally prompted the department to take decisive regulatory action and Bio-Organics' licence was eventually revoked on 27 June 2014. Comprehensive groundwater investigations are now being conducted, and until they conclude in November 2016, the nature and extent of contamination is unknown. Although the department has taken steps to address the regulatory deficiencies brought to light by this matter, its failure—over many years—to provide information about the operation and regulation of the Bio-Organics site served to exacerbate the community's concerns, culminating in the petition tabled in the house.

I commend the report to the house.