

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

**PETITION NO 59: REGARDING THE RESOURCE RECOVERY
CENTRE — CANNING VALE**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 18 JUNE 2008**

Members

**Hon Sheila Mills (Chair)
Hon Bruce Donaldson (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Kate Doust
Hon Paul Llewellyn
Hon Robyn McSweeney**

Hearing commenced at 10.52 am

OLSEN, MR ROD

Resident, sworn and examined:

MULLINS, MR ANDREW ROBERT

Ratepayer and resident, sworn and examined:

CLARKE, MRS MANDY

Resident, sworn and examined:

BAINES, MS CHRISTINA

Resident, sworn and examined:

The CHAIR: Good morning. On behalf of the committee I would like to welcome you to the meeting. Before we begin, I must ask you to take either the oath or the affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath.]

The CHAIR: Thank you. You will have signed a document entitled “Information for Witnesses”; have you read and understood that document?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document you refer to during the course of this hearing for the record. Please be aware of the microphones and try to talk into them. Ensure that you do not cover them with papers or make noises near them. Please try to speak in turn—not all at once.

I remind you that your transcript will become a matter for the public record. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today’s proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session. If the committee grants your request, any public and media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please note that until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. I advise you that premature publication or disclosure of public evidence may constitute a contempt of Parliament and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege.

Would you like to make an opening statement to the committee?

Mr Olsen: Yes, do I have to stand?

The CHAIR: No.

Mr Olsen: Okay, thank you.

I have some copies of some documents here—as requested, eight copies—and I will refer to these documents as I am talking.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Are these in addition to the documents that we already have?

Mr Olsen: Yes.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Okay.

Mr Olsen: The documents in those folders are not in any particular order but they are numbered and stapled together wherever relevant. They are numbered in the top right-hand corner.

From documents and evidence that has been given at various forums, members of the surrounding areas who are affected by this odour from the waste composting facility in Bannister Road have tried various means of getting somebody to take some notice and listen to us. We have approached various politicians, councils, other members of the community. We have contacted unions, WorkSafe, the RSPCA. We have gone to every possible place that we can go to, to try to find somebody who will listen to us and believe what we are telling them that people are getting sick; this is very much impacting on our lives. When the odour comes in, you cannot use your property as you should be able to. You cannot go out and have friends come round for barbecues and use your swimming pool. You cannot have your air conditioner on in summer when you need it because the stink just goes right through your whole house.

So, we thought we had exhausted everything and, I guess, we had a public meeting recently where just people off the street who became aware through some letter drops or word-of-mouth came along to try to find out where we are going to next, because every time an article appears in the newspaper, it is counterclaimed by the SMRC saying how good they are for what they are doing to the community and we should accept that they are saving all the greenhouse gases, that they are preventing landfill, that they are complying with the zero landfill strategies of the government, that they are winning greenhouse gas awards and all this sort of thing. They are virtually saying, “You guys should just shut up and put up with this because it is for the betterment of the whole community”, but we cannot live in our houses; we cannot, you know, run a business in the area that is affected by it. Whether you are a lawn-mowing contractor or a dog catcher, it does not matter. If you are working in the suburbs and this smell is there, you go somewhere else. It is affecting the businesses that are down there. The Shell service station on Bannister Road could have the cheapest petrol in Perth and not have a soul there unless they are just desperate to get some petrol because the stink is just so bad. I go to the tavern across the road from there for a drink every now and again: you cannot sit outside and have a drink anymore or, you know, entertain friends and that there because of this, so it is affecting all those people as well. It gets a little bit desperate to find out where we go to. We have tried politicians on both sides—both parties—and various responses go into Parliament. There have been grievances by several members, there have been questions asked, and all the time it is “this is new technology” or “we’re inexperienced when it comes to biofilter management” and things like that. Yet when this was set up, it was guaranteed that this was going to be state-of-the-art world’s best practice, and for some unknown reason it was put near our houses. We were there first. This thing was put on there—I do not know what sort of deals were done to enable it to be put there when there is so much land around the metropolitan area with a buffer zone around it, so it is not going to affect the people who are living in that area.

[11.00 am]

An unofficial action group—a group of residents—went to an SMRC meeting. It had called to say that it was going to spend \$2.4 million rectifying the problem and that once this was done, there would be no more problems. They could not guarantee it because they were still experimenting with different methods. It has shown and been proven that this odour keeps coming back, and the person who gets it is dependent on which way the wind is blowing. I live 1.5 kilometres away in Willetton. We used to enjoy the sea breeze when it came in; now we do not look forward to it at all because we are in a direct line and when the south westerlies come through, the smell comes. You can be driving down Ranford Road and you will smell it, yet you go home and it is not there—but if the wind switches around, then you have got it. It might be there for 15 or 20 minutes; it might be there for two or three hours depending on the weather conditions. In summer the easterlies blow the smell through Leeming. All these guys live a lot closer to it than me—as I say, I live 1.5 kilometres away—so they get the smell when the easterlies are blowing. If there is no wind at all, it settles over the whole area, especially on the really cold nights. The Jandakot basin, in meteorological terms,

has a temperature inversion problem. The cold air is attracted to the area—the Jandakot area is one of the coldest places in Western Australia—and the hot air from the bio-filters is trapped underneath the cold layer and spreads through the whole suburb. On a beautiful night when there are reflections on the Swan River and everything like that, think of us out there because everybody is getting the smell. It spreads out and stays there until the sun comes up. Changes to the balance in the atmospheric temperature allow the smell out. Many times complaints have been made. You can go to the plant and there is no smell. However, the hot air that comes out of the bio-filters rises up. It might blow over the top of you and you do not know it is there, but it cools down and comes back down. A classic area where you can always smell it is the corner of South Street and Bannister Road. That is about three-quarters of a kilometre away from the centre. It seems to be from there on in: if the hot air is rising, the smell is not detectable at the boundary but is detectable where the houses are—that distance away from the plant. It has got to the point at which there are denials. The SMRC denies it has a problem. We thought we could go to the City of Canning mayor and say, “Please fix this. It’s on Canning land. You guys have representatives on the SMRC”. The representative says, “Look, I’m only one voice, and I can’t get the others to do anything about it.” Dr Lekias, the Mayor of Canning, swears that there is no odour problem. He is a medical practitioner, yet he ignores all the evidence.

Emails are put in. I guess just about everybody in this room has received the emails, and Mandy can probably say how many emails have been sent—there must have been at least 500 emails from people —

Mrs Clarke: There have been 630.

Mr Olsen: Six hundred and thirty emails have gone out. We do not know these people. Mandy has made a website available so that anyone who wants to complain about the odour can, and will know that their email will go to 40 or 50 politicians, local government members and other organisations. They are all going to be aware of it. Initially, people would respond saying, “I have received your email. I feel sorry for you. I will look into the matter” but that has stopped, I guess because of the high volume of complaints being sent in. I guess people are saying, “Oh, there’s another one. Put it in the file. I’ve asked a question in Parliament and the answer came back that they are doing some modifications and they need more time; to let this thing go.” Everywhere we go, it seems that we meet brick walls and not getting to the people who can actually make a decision. Hopefully, you guys will take on board what we are saying and maybe we can resolve the issue. I want to say that I am not against waste composting and recycling. I would like to see landfill not be a necessary thing because of the effects on the watertable and other such things. I am not against all of that. All I am against is the location of this plant, and it is only one part of the plant that appears to a problem. The SMRC was built and organised by the local government to handle the waste. It does a very good job of the other components, but the waste-composting facility seems to be the biggest white elephant—it is a bottomless pit in which to pour money. The end product is not a saleable product. It has too much glass in it. They have got grants from the government. They did agricultural testing on various broadacre farms and wineries and orchards and all those sort of places, and they spoke to the people who make grass turf. Once the testing was done, nobody was prepared to pay the cost of buying and transporting it. The SMRC is manufacturing a product that it now pays Custom Composts to cart away. Custom Composts does some blending with some of the other composts that it produces or acquires from somewhere else. According to Custom Composts, the rest of it goes to contaminated sites. As far as I am concerned, a contaminated site is landfill. We have a \$70 million plant into which all this product is going and which chews up huge amounts of power and the end product is not saleable. Waste is going in one end, costing a helluva lot of money and coming out the other end, and being trucked to landfill. To me, that does not seem the right way to do things. I have researched waste composting facilities all over the world, particularly the Bedminster system on which this one is based. Most of the sites I have looked at are now closed; even the one that this was based on is now closed.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: That needs to be questioned.

The CHAIR: When Mr Olsen has finished, Hon Paul Llewellyn.

Mr Olsen: Yes. Many of the plants that have been built have had populations encroach on them. The odour was initially not a problem because of the buffer zone around the plant. Once the residents move into the area, it becomes too close and the smell becomes an issue. The cost of fixing or alleviating the odour problems then makes the product too expensive, or, if it is contaminated, it cannot be sold.

One of the first pieces of correspondence, labelled number 1, is the current Department of Environment and Conservation's licence for the SMRC, which expires in October. In the box about halfway down on the front page of that document it has the category number and name under which the Department of Environment and Conservation issues the licence. The description reads —

Premises on which organic material (excluding silage) or waste is stored pending processing, mixing, drying or composting to produce commercial quantities of compost or blended soils.

Right from the start they are not producing commercial quantities of compost—they cannot sell it.

[11.10 am]

This licence does not say anything about reducing landfill or saving greenhouse gases or cover any of the other claims of the good it is doing to the community. This licence purely allows it to produce commercial quantities of compost, which it is not doing. It was in breach of that licence condition right from the start. It is failing to achieve the purpose of what it is there for. The licence number is 7799/4.

Most of the emails that have been written by residents and the people affected fall into two categories. The first is those who are unable to use their houses as they should be used. They do not have the freedom to use their properties that they worked hard for, whether they are renting or running a business. They cannot use them effectively. The other half of the complaints relate to health effects. Members of my own family have experienced blood noses. When the odour wafts in, we have sometimes—not always—had blood noses. When we are in the backyard, our noses start to bleed for no reason. We start to sneeze and cough and then we have to lock up. My wife has put my kids—some of whom are adults—into a car, driven away and said, “You ring me when I can come back.” She will be gone for a couple of hours. She will walk along the Shelley foreshore or go somewhere else because she is very allergic to something that is in the air. It has been claimed that it has all been tested and there is nothing in the air to worry about. The health department has said that it is below the odour threshold, so it should not have any effect on people. Yet we know that the people who are writing these emails cannot sleep at night and they are feeling lethargic. They do not feel like going to work because they are tired all the time as they cannot sleep or because of some other effect. People are experiencing blood noses and sore throats. People with contact lenses cannot wear them because their eyes will not allow them to because they are either running or they dry out. Everyone is being affected in different ways. These things happen when this odour is present. There is a direct connection.

I have spent many dollars on petrol driving up to the plant measuring the wind direction and verifying the problem before I put in a complaint. During the past three or four months I have hardly put in a complaint. That is not because the smell has gone away; that is because I now have a potential conflict of interest because my wife ran for council and was elected. She is now a councillor with the City of Canning. I have had to back off so I do not compromise her position. She has declared an interest on most occasions during discussions that involve the odour, saying she lived in the odour-affected area, but she has an interest in common with many other residents. My name has not appeared recently on many complaints. I have rung the DEC and asked what it is going to do because the odour is still there. As part of the SMRC's licence conditions and

permission to operate this facility, it had to have an odour hotline, it has to fill in reports, it has to have the name, date, wind direction and verify whether there are odours. In a lot of the newspaper articles, correspondence, brochures that it puts out and things like that, it encourages people to ring the hotline and report the odours. It says that if they are reported after the fact, it cannot do anything about it. From my experience of ringing the SMRC hotline and saying there is a smell, on four occasions its media guy, Chuck Ellis, has rung me back and said, "We received your complaint, we attended the site and there was no odour present. We turned the sprinklers on the biofilters anyway just as a precaution." It could have been a recorded message for all I know. It is just the same message. Other people I have spoken to are getting the same information.

From my research, I do not believe the SMRC management of the biofilters is being done properly. Biofilters should not be flooded. They rely on microbes to subtract or reduce or nullify the odour as it passes through the medium. The SMRC brought out a specialist from Europe to do odour monitoring. On the last occasion I was up there—we were up there one night—with a member of the DEC, we could have been in New Zealand where the mud boils. The biofilters were so full of water that the odour was bubbling out. If there were any microbes in there, they would have drowned for sure. There is no way those biofilters will work with that much water in them. This is the standard response. Then it denies that there was a problem.

Getting back to the health issue, I refer to item 10. I am not sure how your photocopy turned out, but it is a full page advertisement that was run by the SMRC in the local papers. Do you have it in colour?

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: Yes.

Mr Olsen: Even the heading is a lie. It states, "The TRUTH about your Waste Composting Facility". The second dot point states —

- The Health Department verifies there are no toxic emissions from our facility.
- The Health Department confirms our plant does not cause health problems.

The next item, 11, is a copy of an email to Jim McGinty, the Minister for Health. I asked him whether the statements in the full page advert were true. I questioned how the SMRC could possibly write this and say that it had nothing to do with it. If it did not rebuke this and ask for a withdrawal, basically it was supporting what the SMRC said in the advert. The fourth paragraph of the letter that came back from the Minister for Health, item 12, states —

With regard to the statements made in the *Melville Herald* advertisement and its statements attributed to the DOH, these were not approved by the Department of Health (DOH). The DOH has not been able to verify that there are no toxic emissions from the RRRC facility. Some testing around the facility was undertaken by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) in late 2006, and some sampling was also undertaken by the DEC together with some community members . . .

I was one of those community members. It continues —

This testing has not been comprehensive enough to determine that there are no toxic emissions from the facility.

Also, the DOH has not indicated that the RRRC facility does not cause health problems.

I have a full page advert here. Everybody believes what they read in the papers. You beauty, it has fixed the problem! Yet they are just lies. What it has written is a straight out lie and the minister has said that he did not say it could write that.

[11.20 am]

Item 2 is a 15-page document. I will not go through all the 15 pages. It is a paper from the Australian Chemical Trauma Alliance Inc. This is titled "Health Conditions Associated with Low

Levels of Exposure to Chemicals”. This document refers to how they set standards and it says that this is below the recommended standard or the allowable limit and things like that. Any testing that is done to establish those limits takes one chemical at a time. If you combine lots of chemicals, you create a new chemical, and the effect of those chemicals is called multiple chemical sensitivity. If somebody comes to your house and sprays for white ants and you have a reaction to it, six months down the track you may be in a room with somebody who is smoking and the cigarette might have the same chemical content as the thing that set you off when the white ant guy sprayed, and you will react to that. Some people are very sensitive; others are not. There are people in our community who are not bothered at all by this smell because it does not affect them. If you read through some of this document, you will get an understanding of multiple chemical sensitivity. It draws a lot of parallels with chronic fatigue. Some of the symptoms that are listed on page 9 include respiratory symptoms, headache, fatigue, flu-like symptoms, mental confusion, short-term memory loss, gastrointestinal difficulties, cardiovascular problems, muscle and joint pain, and ear, eye, nose and throat problems. These are all things that people are complaining about in their emails, yet we are told that there is nothing wrong and that the SMRC or the waste-composting facility is operating within its limits. We do not know 90 per cent of the people who are complaining about this. They are making complaints through the email set-up simply in response to letter drops and word of mouth. People read about it in the newspaper because some items in newspapers have mentioned how to put in a complaint. There are also other things that are always mentioned in there like the SMRC odour hotline and the DEC hotline. DEC rang up and asked whether we could please spread the word not to ring this number any more because we were wearing out its operators. They were coming out at different times of the night and witnessing the odour and going back and doing their reports. I know that DEC has a report coming out. As I mentioned before, it brought out this guy from Europe who is an odour specialist. It had a comprehensive team working around the suburbs. Those people would go to the waste-composting facility every night and determine which way the wind was blowing and then head that way. They would get out their map and go. You could drive into an area where there is an odour. I smelt the odour so I drove up there and on the corner of Beasley Road there were two guys with a light, stop watches and two-way radios, and on the next corner there were another two and there were two more up Merrifield Circle. They were taking readings at preset times. They were all highly trained people who could detect different odours and different compounds of odours. They would do that for half an hour and then they would move to a different location. They would follow the smell around so that they could get a computer-generated image that showed that at such and such a time the plume was here and then it shifted to here and this is what was in it. We are waiting until the report comes out. It may be the first genuine report that details unquestionably that this is what has been occurring. Every time we have complained in the past to the DEC, it has said that we have to prove that the smell is coming from the SMRC. The SMRC says, “It’s not us; it could be Soils Ain’t Soils down the road. It has compost down there; it could be coming from there.” They drive around and say that it is from the water bores; that people are watering gardens with bore water and that is what we can smell. However, we know the difference. There is a commercial area adjacent to us. It has a fish factory. Kailis absolutely stunk us out two nights in a row. I rang DEC and they went down there and found that it had offal bins outside in the open air because it was Easter time and it was flat out doing as much fish as it could. It stopped like that. DEC issued a warning on Kailis and made it comply with the regulations and put the stuff inside and cover it all up. We smell a bakery, and, to me, that is a pleasant smell. I have not heard anyone object to the bakery smell, but it is still an odour that comes into the area and we recognise what it is. We have the hops smell from the Swan Brewery that comes through depending on the wind direction. We know what each one of them is. Every time this waste-composting facility odour comes in, I can tell you exactly where it is coming from. Most times I drive up there and verify that that is where it is coming from, but there would still be denial.

Item 3 is a copy of part V, “Environmental regulation”. Section 49 is headed “Causing pollution and unreasonable emissions” and states —

(1) In this section —

“unreasonable emission” means an emission or transmission of noise, odour or electromagnetic radiation which unreasonably interferes with the health, welfare, convenience, comfort or amenity of any person.

The SMRC waste-composting facility is breaching this regulation on a daily basis. There are other parts to this. A person who intentionally or with criminal negligence causes pollution or allows pollution to be caused commits an offence. A person who causes pollution or allows pollution to be caused commits an offence. This is our government’s environmental regulation. Item 4 is a media release from Mark McGowan who was at the time the Minister for the Environment. It is labelled, “Tough pollution penalties a step closer” and states —

The Carpenter Government’s plan to crack down on serious polluters came one step closer today when Environment Minister Mark McGowan released a discussion paper for public comment.

...

“This will be a powerful incentive for industry to adopt the highest standards of environmental management,” ...

Document 5 is an appendix of the proposed amendments to the Environmental Protection Act 1986. It is only a public discussion paper; it has not been adopted, as far as I know. The graph on the next page lists the current penalties, with the proposed penalties next to them. Under section 49(2), which I have just read out to you, a person who intentionally or with criminal negligence causes pollution or allows pollution to be caused commits an offence. The current penalty for a body corporate is a \$1 million fine plus a daily penalty of \$200 000. That was to be increased to a \$5 million fine with a minimum of \$500 000 and a daily penalty of \$1 million. These people have been breaching this section for five or six years. They have not had to pay one cent in fines. I do not understand how we can have policy like this, and now it is proposed to increase the fines to make people toe the line, yet not one dollar in fines has been paid by anyone. It is not worth the paper it is written on. Apparently, if a private enterprise like the Kailis fish factory pollutes, it gets stamped on straightaway; however, the SMRC seems to have this shield around it. Nobody wants to touch it because everybody wants it to work. I do too, but it is in the wrong location.

Graham Jacobs had a grievance in Parliament on Thursday, 15 May. This was a result of the public meeting that was held in Leeming recently. Graham Jacobs got a grievance up and David Templeman responded. I was in Parliament and I heard them.

[11.30 am]

In his response, the minister said —

We have to understand that this is a major concern and we have to act on it. These sorts of facilities are important facilities. They are supported by the government and by the community in terms of what can be delivered if a system or a facility of this nature delivers what it is intended to deliver, but also addresses issues of concern that have been highlighted. It is important that we encourage initiatives that reduce waste to landfill; that we encourage facilities or the innovation of facilities that will deliver positive outcomes for the environment and reduce the greenhouse gas emissions which these facilities can make a great contribution towards. The problem, of course, is that poor planning decisions in the past have led us to this situation. There is no doubt about that.

The minister recognises the importance of waste compost and everything else they are doing at the RRRC, but says that the location is incorrect. That is why we are all suffering, and that is why we are here today. Items 8 and 9 are media statements. The first is from Steve Thomas. We had a meeting with him and he released a statement that Labor must address the stink bomb problems.

Tony McRae's media statement states that the SMRC was closed last year because it was not complying with its operating conditions, and it was allowed to reopen to prove that it had fixed its operations, but it is clear that the SMRC has failed. This was before he was appointed as Minister for the Environment, when he was only the member for Riverton. The press release says that having a world-class recycling centre is what we all want, so that we can reduce household garbage going into landfill and fight climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We all agree with that, but he then says that we do not need a second-rate, unsustainable and poorly managed stink house. That is from our local member. We spoke to him before we came in here today and I told him I was going to table his media statement. He said, "Go for it—I still support you fully. If it does not work properly, shut it down or shift it somewhere else." I am sorry I did not get that in writing.

I have a few other documents including letters to the Minister for Health, some general background, and copies of questions asked in Parliament and the responses, but I think I have taken enough of the committee's time for now. I appreciate the amount of time you have given me. I would like to say on the record that everybody who has worked so hard to try to solve this issue, especially Mandy with her efforts with the computer, should be recognised.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: You made a statement that most Bedminster waste composting facilities had been closed around the world. Can you provide us with the documents on that, or tell us which ones, to your knowledge, have been closed down, what the windup procedures were and so on? Your request to the committee through your petition is to either move this facility or shut it down. If we are to take that seriously, can you tell us where this has happened before? You can direct us to the place where we can find that information.

Mr Olsen: Initially, when I put the petition in, I had an accompanying letter that had some information in it. I do not think it is included in those documents now. It was addressed to Hon Sheila Mills, MLC, on 28 February. It refers to petition 59 and discusses some websites where you can get information on the facility in Cobb County in Georgia. That is one of the plants that the investigating team visited before this facility was set up. They went around and had a look at some different plants and made their decision on going for a Bedminster plant and following certain design principles and how they had been set up. Cobb County was one of the main ones that they went to. That facility, as mentioned on page 2 of this initial letter that I sent through, commenced operations in 1996. It had a fire in August of that year, followed by another fire in December of that year. They shut it down for 18 months. They had had odour complaints to that stage. There is a quote from the website that says that, in the downtime Bedminster Bioconversion Corporation and Cobb County had an opportunity to rethink and re-engineer the facility design with the specific goal of odour control. The facility then opened again in 1998. In 1999 the facility was taken over by the county because the operators could not turn a profit on it, so they wanted out of it. In 2005, an entry in the biocycle magazine tells of how the Cobb County waste composting facility is being closed and the Georgia county is trying to recoup \$19 million it spent on the facility. That is one of the plants that the SMRC modelled the Canning Vale plant on. It was a new facility at that time. There is a Bedminster plant in Vancouver, Canada. If you go into the Vancouver website, one of the highlighted options that you can go to is to complain about the odour. That is the biggest fully maintained stainless steel building in the world. They built it of stainless steel because it would not rot. It had the latest of everything in it so that it would operate properly, and that they have on their city website an option for people to register odour complaints.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Has that plant been shut down?

Mr Olsen: It is still operating, but they are spending a lot of money on it.

Hon KATE DOUST: What is its proximity to residences?

Mr Olsen: It had a clear space of about four kilometres, I believe. The company that built the Bannister plant here in Perth, Environmental Waste Technologies, had one in Port Stephens in New South Wales. They built this one here, and then they built one in Cairns. The one in Port Stephens

was a small plant and they have now got permission to take it up to 100 000 tonnes a year from 35 000—I believe it was—before. They increased the size of that. They bought up farmland and it had a quarry on it. They used to use the quarry for putting their landfill in, or the stuff they could not compost, so they were sort of fully maintained on site. They had an education centre that was fully manned, but recently the Port Stephens council has refused an application for a subdivision to put in, not a satellite city as such, but a big development that was going to put another 20 000 homes in that area. They refused that because they had already been getting odour complaints in the area beyond that at this stage. The city is encroaching once again on the buffer zone that they had around it before. The one in Cairns was operated there, and they had a lot of odour complaints coming in from that, and they had to redesign it. That plant has since been sold to a private rubbish collector. They still have some contracts in place with some of the local councils around the area.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Can I just focus the question? Is the only plant you know of that has been shut down the one in Cobb County in Georgia, or are there other ones that have been shut down?

Mr Olsen: There are many others. I do not have that information here, but I can get it to you.

Hon KATE DOUST: Perhaps if you could, that would be useful.

[11.40 am]

Mr Olsen: There is a section on the internet that has a list of all the Bedminster plants that have been closed. They are still opening new ones. I think they have just done one Scotland and one in northern England somewhere, but I do not know what sort of bio-filters they are using or what they are doing. There are many different ways of composting. Some of them also involve putting up a smokestack and burning the product. However, that is not feasible on this site, because it is in an airport zone, and among the houses. Also, I think the Western Australian government has regulations about not allowing furnaces and the burning of waste other than in hospitals. I will get that information to you by the end of the week.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: I am not an engineer or odour consultant, but what about having a stack with scrubbers, very much like what they have done at Alcoa Wagerup? Obviously, that must have been looked at. I am just wondering whether you know if any investigation or thought has been put into that.

Mr Olsen: There are scrubbers on the bio-filters on the tipping floor, because that is where they say the worst of the smell is. A few times the excuse we have had from the SMRC is that the scrubbers have gone down, so we are getting some smell. I believe the problem is in the bio-filter management and the way that is set up. Sorry; the question was about the different methods and the stack. I have looked at a whole lot of different variations. Some bio-filters are set up like wheat silos, with separate chambers. They might have 150 of these things in rows of 10, or something like that, but they need only 120 of them, so there are always three rows that are being maintained and upgraded as you go along. There are also vertical systems, where the air is pumped into the bottom and it has to go through all these filters, and it then comes out and it has scrubbers attached to it then as a final escape. Also, they always have some spares that they can take off and recharge, and they can then bring them back in and make that row obsolete and go to the next row, because they have redundancy built into it of about 20 per cent. That is another system that I have looked at. However, I consider that it is not my job to actually come up with a system that is going to make this thing work. All I want is someone to take responsibility for it and not let it happen any more to us, or even at Mindarie. At Mindarie there is a buffer zone around the plant, but I believe it is a commercial buffer zone. What about the people who work there? It is not just the people who live there.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: The group of councils in that area has spent \$2.4 million and has had this air odour consultant come over—a very highly qualified and experienced person. Has that made any difference?

Mr Olsen: No.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: After all that money has been spent, nothing has really changed?

Mr Olsen: No.

Hon KATE DOUST: Is it worse?

Ms Baines: It is as bad, or worse.

Mr Olsen: If I can just briefly explain, when that was put out for tender, the odour unit came in and designed this air collection system. There were huge sheds, and all they had in them for collecting the air were these big pipes in the wall. Those pipes used to suck the air in, and it would then go through the bio-filters. The \$2.4 million that they spent, all they did was join pipes onto those other pipes and collect the air from a high point in the roof. Therefore, they were collecting the air probably at the foulest point, because the hot air rises. It is up to 70 degrees in there. It is very intense heat, and there is a very strong smell in there. They are now collecting the air from the worst place—the highest point. However, it is still going out through the same bio-filters. We said at the start that that was not going to fix the problem. I am a builder. I have another engineer who I work with. We got the tender documents on those premises. We were given an escort right through the plant and everything so that we could analyse and tender on the process. That was the start of the \$2.4 million. I have all the tender documents, the plans, the specifications and everything at home. We knew exactly what it was going to do. However, it did not fix the problem. All it did was collect the air from a different point, and then put it through the same system. We tried to say that to the council representative at the time, Silvio Trinka, and he would not have a bar of it.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: We have seen the new air ducting system, and we have also seen the new bio-filters. Given that that did not work, and given that the plant is actually located there, there are three choices: shut it down, move it, or mitigate or manage the odours on the site through vertical bio-filters.

Mr Olsen: That is only one option.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I know. Would you be satisfied if the company invested in a different system of bio-filters with spare capacity? What are you suggesting? Is there a solution?

Mr Olsen: It would need people a lot more qualified than I am to say whether it is going to work. Once again, there might be new technology, and five years down the track you might find that the plant is not really serving the purpose that it should be serving. I do not know. It might be financially really expensive to go with such a system. I do not know any of those costs or anything like that. If the treatment of the odours could be managed in some way so that it did not affect any of residents, there would be no reason to shift the plant.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Okay.

Mr Olsen: It is the same as the other components there—the green waste and the recycling. We do not have a problem with any of that. It is just the odour and the potential health risks.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: If the company was required to take steps to remedy the odour emissions, and those measures were effective, the problem would be finished for you?

Mr Olsen: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you for your evidence today, Mr Olsen. You will receive a copy of the transcript for any corrections that you might wish to make. I need to remind you that the transcript is confidential.

Mr Olsen: Sure. I understand that. I will get for the committee a list of other Bedminster systems.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Thank you.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: I have one final question. You have given us a map of the area where you live. I know where north is, and where east, west and south are. I am just wondering where the greatest odour trail is over an arc, if you know what I mean. If there was a northerly wind —

Mr Olsen: A northerly wind blows now across Jandakot, so you do not get too many complaints. The five-acre block is in that area behind the old landfill site. We are still getting calls from people in that area who are affected. The main area is Leeming, where the easterly blows all through summer. They have the problem that if there is no wind and the odour dissipates over the whole area, they are the closest. I would say that on a really calm night, I would not detect it above two out of the scale of six that DEC has—two being detectable, and three being significant. It goes up the scale to six, which is very strong. I would get it at a two, so I know it is there. That is on a really calm night. I think that is because it is just dissipating; it is not blowing around in the wind. However, the people closest to it get it the strongest, and it sort of gets weaker as it goes out. When you know what this smell is like, it is not hard to recognise. I play golf down near the freeway —

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: At Whaleback?

Mr Olsen: Not Whaleback—Glen Iris.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Lucky for you!

[11.50 am]

Mr Olsen: I go with the old fogies on Tuesdays! The smell was distinct. The guys whom I played with said “That’s that smell again”. They said they had smelt it the week before when they were at Whaleback. People who live in Leeming, who know what the smell is and who work at Murdoch hospital say “Wow, we hopped out of the car and it was there”. If you ask anyone else, they think that the rubbish bins have not been emptied. I can tell the difference between that smell and the smells that come from the bakery and the fish factory. They all have distinct smells.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Olsen.

Mr Olsen: Thank you very much for your time.

Mrs Clarke: Rod has covered quite a few issues. Because I have given you a submission in writing, I will skip over some issues so that you do not get sick of me talking, because I have a lot to get through!

Thank you for listening to our concerns today. I know that the odour issue has been brought to your attention. However, I want to outline how some of us have experienced the odour in our area. For the past four to five years residents in Leeming, Willetton and Canning Vale and other suburbs that surround the RRRC waste composting facility have been suffering at the hands of the Regional Resource Recovery Centre’s waste composting facility, which is run by the Southern Metropolitan Regional Council and located in Bannister Road, Canning Vale. The RRRC facility was built about 500 metres behind my place. It is situated in the middle of a residential and business area. The residents were in the area first. It is not as though everyone moved into their houses after the facility was built. We have been living there for years. It is unfair that it has been built so close to us. Rubbish from five councils is sent to the RRRC waste composting facility. That rubbish is coming from green wheelie bins. You would be aware of the type of stuff that is thrown into green wheelie bins. It is not very pleasant. The facility is just around the corner from our house.

The RRRC waste composting facility is promoted as a facility that recycles green wheelie bin rubbish to help combat greenhouse gases. However, of the total amount of rubbish delivered to the facility 44 per cent is used as land fill, 38 per cent is turned into compost and 18 per cent is moisture loss through the process, as stated in the City of Canning minutes dated 25 March 2008. I have

provided a copy of those minutes. The compost, which is not salable due to its impurities, is carted away—that is paid for by the SMRC—and used in landfill. Eighty-two per cent ends up as landfill. The odour from the RRRC waste composting facility is putrid. It smells like someone has placed green wheelie bins, the contents of which have been allowed to rot for weeks, in our homes and backyards. The odour regularly reaches as far as 1.5 kilometres away from the facility. The odour can be smelt by people at schools, shops, restaurants, sporting grounds and parks in Leeming, Willetton and Canning Vale.

I, members of my family and other residents have experienced the following symptoms as a result of the odour that is being emitted from the RRRC waste composting facility: blood noses; extreme chest pain; elevated heart rates; dizzy spells; severe migraines and headache; rashes under our eyes and on our face; burning and peeling facial skin; burning eyes and runny noses; coughing, choking and gagging; nausea; and, sore neck glands. These are all common symptoms that residents experience when they are exposed to the odour from the RRRC waste composting facility. Most residents who complain of the symptoms have stated that they did not have allergy-type illnesses before they came in contact with the odour from the RRRC waste composting facility.

Our pets are also suffering as a result of the odour that is coming from the facility. They have experienced choking, gagging, runny eyes, terrible skin and inhalant allergies. Over the past few years residents have stated that some of their pets are falling victim to other medical conditions, one of which is cancer. Many animals in the area who are breathing in the odour have been diagnosed with cancer. I have two loving, loyal and gentle labradors. They are suffering terribly because of the odour. Both of them gag and cough and suffer from runny eyes and noses and itching. One of them has severe dermatitis and sore and burning skin. The other suffers from acute breathing problems, including lung infections. I have included a photo of my dogs, one of which has just had an operation. On Friday, 30 May 2008, one of our labradors was diagnosed as having a cancerous tumour in his leg. The tumour is the size of a golf ball. As I have said, other animals in the area have been diagnosed with tumours and cancer. The dermatology department at Murdoch University Veterinary Hospital said that the area in which we live is one of the worst suburbs for animal allergies. My other labrador—he is in the background of the picture—has the worst case of allergies that the vets had ever seen, to the point that they had to use treatment that was available only in the United States. My dog had legions and his fur was falling out. He could not breathe without the help of medication. I pulled him out of the program and sought alternative treatment because the side effects of the mainstream treatment were so terrible that it was not worth it. No matter what treatment he received his allergies continued to grow worse. I took both my dogs to the Holistic Animal Medicines in Osborne Park, because Murdoch's treatment was not working. I had to find an alternative treatment to help them. My vet is okay with that. He is appalled that our animals are getting so sick. We have had to rush our dogs to the vet at times when the odour is really bad.

When my husband and I are exposed to the odour we experience headaches, migraines, occasional blood noses, and chest pain. Sometimes it hurts to breath and my chest becomes really tight. I get really sharp pains and I cannot take a deep breathe because it hurts. Before the odour, none of us had had any problem with allergies. Both of us were very fit and healthy. We love sport and outdoor activities. We love keeping fit and healthy. There is a picture of my ugly mug in the submission! It is scary!

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Not at all!

Mrs Clarke: The photo shows the type of rash that I get on my face when I can smell the odour. If I do not use Fexotab, which is a generic brand of Telfast, within a few hours my face is an absolute mess. I get a rash on my shoulders and arms. The skin all over my body burns like crazy. It is like someone has put a naked flame next to my face. It is worse than sunburn.

Hon KATE DOUST: Have you sought a medical opinion about that?

Mrs Clarke: Yes. I have been to the doctor about it. My doctor does not want to pinpoint the rash on the odour. He said that it matches—that is, I get the rash when I can smell the odour—but he does not want to speak out against it.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Have you sought a second opinion?

Mrs Clarke: We have a list of other doctors that I will talk to about this problem.

Because the facility was built so close to our home, my husband and I experience the odour almost every day. Medication, including pain relief for migraines, eye drops and tropical creams for rashes and generic Fexotab allergy tablets are a part of our lives. The photo of my face reveals what happens if I do not use Fexotab allergy tablets when I am exposed to a large bout of the odour. My husband and I would like to have children. However, we are concerned about falling pregnant because we have seen the terrible symptoms that the kids in our area are experiencing because of the odour. I have seen an obstetrician and he told me that it is too risky for me to fall pregnant because our health is being affected by the odour. I had also expressed my concern about getting pregnant because so many other kids in the area have been getting sick. We have held off having a family in the hope that something will be done about the odour because we live so close to it. We cannot sell our homes; no-one wants to buy in our area, so we are stuck and have to sit tight.

[12 noon]

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Has the Department of Health done an epidemiological study on all these cumulative health impacts in your area?

Mrs Clarke: I have actually spoken with DEC and the health department about it and said that we want blood testing and other testing done. They said that they cannot —

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: But there has been no systematic study of the health impacts in your area?

Mrs Clarke: No. I wanted DEC and the health department to get together to do the testing, but they said that they did not feel that it was necessary.

The CHAIR: Have you or your husband sought private blood testing?

Mrs Clarke: No.

Ms Baines: May I say something? My daughter is 17 years old and she has been suffering ongoing liver problems for the past three to four years. As well as that, she also suffers a range of problems that I think Rod mentioned. We went to an accredited homoeopath and he tested Stephanie's system. She was found to have in her body three of the toxins that were confirmed as being emitted from the plant. The toxins found in her system were acetaldehyde, benzenes and acetic acid. Those three chemicals were confirmed as coming from the plant. Cadmium, formaldehyde, petroleum and urea were also found in Stephanie's system. I cannot say that they are definitely being emitted from the plant. However, when you speak to other people and hear that their symptoms are very much the same as Stephanie's—apart from the liver—because we are breathing in this contaminated and chemically toxic air nearly every day, you have to wonder how it is affecting all of us.

The CHAIR: Why did you go to a homoeopath rather than a doctor?

Ms Baines: Rather than a doctor? I took Stephanie to a doctor about three-plus years ago when she suddenly came out with rashes on different parts of her body. The rashes were hurting her and she was in pain. Since then she has had intermittent episodes of feeling extremely sick, nauseous and fatigued. It was only a few months ago that she was diagnosed with glandular fever. However, she had these symptoms before then. The glandular fever lasted about four months. We went to a homoeopath to get her levels up because, similar to Mandy, my family believe in natural or other treatments. The homoeopath said that Stephanie's body had just about shut down. Her immune system and other levels were so, so low. Again, he could not say definitely that that was caused by the plant, but he said that he would not want to live that close to the plant.

The CHAIR: Just bear with me; I do not agree with homeopathic medicine. How did the homeopath ascertain the levels of chemicals in her blood without doing a blood test?

Ms Baines: Thank you. He had a computer set up. I do not understand it either. He told me that a scientist went to him and said, "I don't know how you do it, Ross. It is amazing". This man is now opening up cancer clinics out Midland way. He connects you to a machine and goes by the points on your fingers and toes. He puts prods onto each of those points. The computer makes a noise and somehow it picks up readings from within your system. I am sorry, I do not understand. I can certainly phone him and ask him to give a description of what he does. However, it is all picked up on the computer. My mum has had breast cancer. Other people have been to him. What he does is amazing. Stephanie was so sick. Two weeks after she started going to him, she had to commence taking drops. He told her that she would start feeling better in two weeks. In two weeks we could see the difference in the colour of her face. She started to feel better. She was on the drops for about six weeks. She recently started to feel sick again. She went back to the homoeopath and he said that it looks like she has the same virus back that causes glandular fever or chronic fatigue, which is really unheard of. I cannot say it is definitely the plant, but I cannot say that it is not either, because there have been too many health complaints and too many people are suffering the same symptoms as Stephanie.

The CHAIR: Did you not think about crosschecking what the homoeopath said with a medical doctor's opinion?

Ms Baines: I asked Mandy if we could put these test results in from the homeopath —

Mrs Clarke: —to the health department. We were told that it would not accept them.

Ms Baines: Because they are not blood test results.

The CHAIR: That is what I mean. Did you not consider going to a doctor to get a blood test done to confirm what the homoeopath said about the chemical traces?

Ms Baines: No, not at that time. I did not think that it was the plant until probably a year ago or so, but now I am wondering.

Mrs Clarke: When I visited my doctor I took all the chemicals with me, because I wanted to know whether it would be worthwhile having them tested. I said that I could not get help from the health department or DEC. My doctor said that if I had the testing done they would probably think that I was crazy. He said that no-one would test for all the chemicals that I was concerned about. I said, "Well, where do I go then?" He said that my best shot would be to go to the health department. I said, "Well, the health department won't help us." It is dealing with the lead situation in Esperance and I thought that if it was prepared to help the people down there with blood testing it would help us, especially given that so many people have been complaining about similar symptoms. My doctor is concerned. I have to admit that my doctor knows Mayor Lekias. When I said that Mayor Lekias supported the facility, I think he decided to take a step back from it. Shall I continue on?

The CHAIR: Yes, please.

Mrs Clarke: Basically, we never know when the odour is going to affect our homes. As Rod said, those of us who live close to the facility cop the odour just about all the time, whether it is winter or summer. When the odour comes into our homes, it seeps into all the rooms in our house. It seeps into our curtains, clothes, carpets, furniture, mattresses—everything. The whole house stinks and we cannot get rid of it. Even when the odour goes—you know what I mean—the smell remains stuck in our house for a few days. If I open the windows to get rid of it, you can bet that the odour comes back and floods the house again. We do everything that we can to try to reduce all the chemicals in our house. We use eco-green friendly cleaning products and whatever we can to try to cut back because we are concerned about what it leaves behind each time it comes into our home. We cannot entertain family and friends at our house because they start to feel sick and leave. If we sit outside to have a barbecue or something like that, we end up having to move inside. When we

move inside the odour comes inside too, and our visitors just pack up and leave because they start feeling sick. They get runny noses, headaches, migraines—all the allergy-type symptoms that we get—when they experience the odour. Those of us who live in the area and cop the odour do not deserve this. We have done everything we can. We have approached MPs. We should not have to go looking for medical testing, for goodness sake! This thing is breaching the Environmental Protection Act every single day by omitting this odour. We are not just concerned about the health issues; we are concerned that this odour is being inflicted on us in general. Do you know what I mean? We should not have to tolerate this. This has been going on for nearly five years—it is ridiculous! Doors are being shut in our faces all the time. When we approach MPs or councillors to tell them that this is affecting our health and to beg for their help, we are scoffed at and made out to be idiots or hypochondriacs. That is hurtful, because the odour is genuinely making us sick. It is not fair that we are being treated like that.

[12.10 pm]

Basically, we never know when the odour is going to come. We wake up each day and can pretty much bet that every second day the odour will be at our place. We have no quality of life. We just exist in our area because we cannot move away. We would like to sell our homes but we are also worried that if we sell our homes we are passing this situation on to someone else. Other people in the area are trying to sell their homes and a few of them have had their houses up for sale for 18 months—they just cannot get rid of their places. The people who do leave, sell their homes for a lot less to get out and then some other poor bugger moves in and is in the same situation. It is not fair. Nothing is being fixed. It is a vicious circle.

You will note that I am skipping through a lot of material.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Is everyone in your street suffering in the same way?

Ms Baines: No; not everybody.

Mrs Clarke: Some people do get the odour but they do not want to speak up about it.

Ms Baines: The strange thing is I was at my place at the end of a cul-de-sac and there was no odour. I walked four houses up the road to Mandy's house—this was about three or four weeks ago—and the odour was so bad at her house. I found it unbelievable. I could not smell it at my place. It is like a fine ribbon of whatever width.

Mrs Clarke: Yes, there are hot zones. If you walk along the Roe Highway—my house backs on to the Roe Highway; the noise wall is my back fence—you can see the blocks and each area affected by the odour. As you walk along, it will just about choke you, then the odour dies right down and then it comes back again. There are hot zones; that is, specific areas that are getting the odour. If the odour is strong at my place it will be less strong four houses down the street. However, there have been quite a few occasions when it has just been terrible at both our houses.

Ms Baines: It has been just awful.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: Can you point out where you live—compared to Mandy?

Mrs Clarke: It is about a millimetre on the map—four houses down.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: A millimetre!

Ms Baines: We are three to four houses apart.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: Do you live on the same street?

Mrs Clarke: Yes.

Ms Baines: Yes.

Ms Baines: I am at the end of the cul-de-sac which comes around and Mandy is at the end of the street.

Mrs Clarke: My house is located in a dip. You can drive down the street in winter and there is a real boggy area at my house.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: So you are copping the temperature inversion.

Mrs Clarke: Yes.

Ms Baines: My house is on the rise.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: So you would not get as much of the odour as Mandy.

Ms Baines: Not as much; but I get it most days.

Mr Mullins: Can I just say something? I live probably 500 metres from Mandy's place.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: On what street?

Mr Mullins: Mellor Court. It is one of the highest points in Leeming. I believe we get the odour first and then it seems to drop down below us and the lower-lying areas get it. However, in the middle of summer when you have your air conditioner on, the first thing it does is pump your house full of this horrible stench and it wakes you up.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: Thank you. I am sorry to have interrupted you.

Mrs Clarke: That is all right.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I just wanted to ask one question. The real estate agents must know or have some sense about how many people are putting their houses on the market to try to sell them.

Ms Baines: We have a lady on our street who has had her house on the market for about 10 months. This is the second time that she has tried to sell it.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Has anybody done any investigation into the number of houses coming onto the market in the area?

Mrs Clarke: Rod Olsen has tracked a lot of that information.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I am looking for ways to get parallel measures.

Ms Baines: There were 10 on Merrifield Circle.

Mrs Clarke: Yes, there were 10 houses for sale on Merrifield at one time—that was about a year or 18 months ago. Merrifield cops the odour. That street is about 500 metres from the facility towards South Street.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Okay.

Mrs Clarke: We have also had many residents become angry with us—well, not angry with us; they are frustrated by the odour—and they are pleading with us, saying, “Please don't say anything else about the odour because we cannot sell our homes.” You know what I mean. We feel terrible because we want to save ourselves and we want to help them too. It is not fair for them to have to worry because they cannot get out of the area. “Google” 9 Capill Corner and it comes up odour, odour, odour. If I try to get rid of my place, I will be in a bit of grief!

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: Did you own your house before the plant was established.

Mrs Clarke: Yes.

Ms Baines: Yes.

Mr Mullins: Mandy, did you say that real estate agents would often ask questions about the best time to have a home open because of the breezes?

Mrs Clarke: Yes; people were changing their home open times, dependent upon the odour—thanks for reminding me. I have spoken to some real estate agents who have said the people have asked about the odour and they just say, “I don't know.” It does not benefit the real estate agent to tell somebody about the problem.

Mr Mullins: If I can interject there: I have seriously contemplated selling my house and may do so again. I would only contemplate selling at a time when the sea breezes were predominant because come the summer easterlies, you will not sell your house to anybody. I am telling you that now. It is terrible.

Mrs Clarke: I also wanted to let you know—because I am not sure if it has been put on record anywhere—that there have been 22 reports made by the water authority in Bannister Road about how the RRRC waste composting facility odour has affected its employees. The water authority is located right over the road from the facility.

Also, residents standing at bus stops waiting to catch a bus on at the intersection of Beasley and South Streets have contacted us and put in written odour logs. They are sick and tired of copping the odour everyday they are at the bus stop. One guy who wrote in said that he always gets it going through Canning Vale on the bus. He said that he gets home and throws up and has a blood nose. He said that everyone on the bus asks, “What the hell is that?” because the odour is strong.

People using the Roe Highway walkway have stated how sick and tired they are of putting up with the odour. They use the walkway to exercise and get fit and have to cop this odour. Over the years, families using the Dundee Street park play area—which is on the tabled map and only a few streets up the road from us—have had to take their kids home because they cough, gag, get runny eyes and noses, sore throats and cry because, as the kids say, they feel sick. Dog walkers and folk exercising leave the park because the odour is so strong that both they and their dogs cough and gag. People also say they feel nauseous and cannot get away from the park quickly enough. On many occasions, DEC has confirmed the odour in the park.

The RRRC waste composting facility is financially supported by state and local government via our rates and taxes. Residents feel insulted that their rates and taxes support this facility that pumps out a noxious odour into their lungs, homes and streets. Did Rod run through when the facility was shut?

The CHAIR: We are aware of that.

Mrs Clarke: I will skip that. I wanted to also go over the emergency pollution response number that DEC advised residents to call. A few months ago in March-April 2008, DEC was inundated with calls from residents reporting the odour from the RRRC waste composting facility and the on-call DEC officers could not keep up and had to ask residents to choose another option when calling the emergency pollution response number. The on-call DEC officers were exhausted. This is not the only occasion on which this has occurred. Many times, on-call DEC officers have been cranky with residents due to the lack of sleep they were getting because of the residents' calls. When the RRRC waste composting facility odour has overrun their homes, their families are choking and gagging and the kids want to throw up, it has been frustrating for residents to have an on-call DEC officer imply that the odour is not an emergency and that we should choose option two on the after-hours number and just leave a message for them to look into the problem the next day. How is it that a petrol truck rollover can be dealt with swiftly and other dangerous situations that involve pollution and emissions, yet the RRRC waste composting odour has been afflicted on us for more than four years?

[12.20 pm]

One on-call DEC officer stated that he could not continue being on call—he asked to be removed from his position—because it was frustrating and upsetting knowing what residents were going through and how they were suffering from the odour coming from the RRRC waste composting facility, yet nothing was being done about it. During March and April 2008 there were 160 written odour logs.

Then there is the other end of the scale. There have also been many occasions when DEC officers have attended an odour complaint and it has taken them 45 minutes to two to three hours to show

up. I understand that they need to seek permission first as it needs to go through occupational health and safety and there are other emergencies along with ours, but in some instances on-call officers —

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: We have the document you are reading from. I do not think it is of any great value for you to read it back to us. It would be better for us to ask some questions.

Mrs Clarke: Will this definitely be taken into consideration?

Hon KATE DOUST: You have tabled it. We will use it.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Maybe you need to tell us whether there is anything specific and important that we need to look at here rather than reading the whole thing to us.

Mrs Clarke: With regard to the air samples that we took with DEC, residents were involved with this. In April, May and July 2007, residents took odour samples from our areas with canisters. We followed the rules set by DEC, which were to make sure that we ring DEC and within 30 minutes someone would come out to our place, pick it up, log it and verify the odour. In one instance the on-call DEC officer left her phone in the car while she was at the gym. She missed the call and phoned me hours later saying she was tired and had perfume on and did not feel like coming anyway. We phoned DEC and Ken Raine came out to complete the duties of the on-call officer who could not be bothered coming. Once we completed our samples, we waited for months for the toxicology results of the samples to come back. They went missing for awhile within the state government departments and no-one appeared to know where the samples were. When they were found, excuses were made that our odour samples were backlogged due to the Esperance lead issue. We did not receive our results until about halfway through October 2007.

Hon KATE DOUST: Has any more testing been done this year?

Mrs Clarke: No, other than what DEC has done. We wanted to carry out independent testing, and we asked DEC about that. We went to the bucket brigade seminar in June 2007. We were trained in accordance with the US EPA quality control and quality assurance program. We were there for the launch of Air Care Australia. While we were there we learnt that for results to be effective, samples had to be tested within 72 hours. Ours went missing. It took months. We still got the results back saying what was in there anyway. The fact that they went missing for all those months is ridiculous. When we got the results back, we sent them to Ruth Breech from GMC's bucket brigade. I will not read it out but my statement includes what she said. As I said, we asked DEC if we could have the same arrangement with it as it had with CAPS in Yarloop, with DEC funding the independent samples done by the bucket brigade method, which are then sent to Caslab because it is far more efficient and it tests a lot more thoroughly. As I said before, we had also asked for blood testing of the residents. DEC and the health department said that independent testing for blood and air samples was unnecessary.

The CHAIR: Ms Clarke, in your document you mentioned some chemicals. You do not cite a source of where you got that information.

Mrs Clarke: These chemicals were from the canister results. According to the international advice that we have received, especially from the bucket brigade, parts per billion is considered serious.

Hon KATE DOUST: They are the standards in another place. Standards that apply here may be vastly different and those are the standards that we have to adhere to.

Mrs Clarke: Even Graham Jacobs said that our testing was from the 1950s.

Hon KATE DOUST: It is. There are issues with multiple exposures rather than singular exposures because we do not know how the combination applies. This committee is fully aware of those from another issue.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Some of this stuff is highly detailed and on the public record. I do not think we need to go into documentation about the impact of specific chemicals. If you wanted to get

to the bottom of this, it is more like an epidemiological study. What kind of corroborating evidence is there, even using real estate sales, values of land, parallel measures that are actually on top of these health issues, and also reported health measures and so on that will corroborate your claims that impacts are happening? Then we need to look at what kind of remedies there are, either at law or whether there are technical remedies or even administrative remedies like shutting it down.

Mrs Clarke: Do you not also think that the fact that it is emitting the odour in the first place, whether we are getting symptoms or not, should be enough to kick its butt? This facility is emitting an odour every single day and it is affecting our lives. People cannot live in their homes normally. Then the SMRC odour hotline —

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: There is no denying the fact that odours are coming out of the facility. We now know that there are measured levels of certain chemicals. I think that evidence in itself is sufficient. We need to know that there are these toxic chemicals above limits in the air samples.

Ms Baines: I wish to make a statement. I spoke to Mr Chuck Ellis from the RRRC two to three weeks ago. I was concerned because I could often smell a very strong chemical smell in the air, more so than normal. Mr Ellis told me then that two years ago DEC had told it to add chemicals to try to mask the smell. The SMRC has not done that for two years but we can smell an even stronger chemical smell.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: So it is using masking agents in the bioreactors?

Ms Baines: It was two years ago. We can still smell it.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I might have asked a question in Parliament about the use of masking agents.

Mrs Clarke: You also received our odour logs.

Mr Mullins: I often smell that smell. It is a biofilter-related smell. I have been down to the plant, and it comes in a mist form. It burns your eyes, your throat and your sinuses. That is where I believe my blood noses come from. The chemical smell is very, very strong. The masking is very evident when the sprinkler system is turned on at the plant.

The CHAIR: I suggest we open this up to questions from members who want to ask questions because various members have to go to other appointments. The issues have been covered very comprehensively by you and Mr Olsen.

[12.30 pm]

Hon KATE DOUST: I thank you very much because it has been very broad information. I know that you have also given us written information, which we will take into account. I thank you for putting my name on the list. I have been receiving the odour logs, and I have been going through a mapping exercise in my office to track the key issues. I want to talk about the communication between the community and the SMRC. I note that in one of the examples of the odour log, the range of people that this information is sent to on each occasion is quite diverse. However, I do not see the SMRC being notified at all when an issue comes up. I would have thought that it should be notified on each occasion simply so that it is registered, and it should be taking some action on that. Why is it not on the list at all?

Mrs Clarke: Doug Thompson is on there. He is the deputy chairman. Clive Robartson is also —

Hon KATE DOUST: Okay.

Mrs Clarke: They are both on there.

Mr Mullins: I think you will also find that people will make a phone call far quicker than do an odour log. I know that I prefer to do it.

Hon KATE DOUST: Do you find that many residents will lift the phone and call the hotline?

Mrs Clarke: Yes; DEC has told us. The other night we had several odour logs, but DEC said that it had been run off its feet.

Hon KATE DOUST: Did DEC then transfer that information back to the SMRC?

Mrs Clarke: Yes; it rings it immediately. That is what DEC has told us; it rings the SMRC immediately so that it can get on to it.

Ms Baines: A lot of residents have given up calling the SMRC. I phoned on 6 and 7 June when the odour was extremely strong and definitely coming from the waste-composting facility, and Mr Chuck Ellis phoned me back the following day and told me that his inspector had said that there was definitely no odour. There is no question that the odour was very strong—it was about a five out of six—from the WCF.

Hon KATE DOUST: Does the person who comes out to inspect make contact with the person who has made the complaint?

Ms Baines: No.

Mr Mullins: Usually, no. I have waited out the front and cornered him. Chuck Ellis has also said to me that someone came out and had a sniff around and could not find anything after my complaint. I thought, “I’m going to sit where I can watch what’s going on.” On maybe one out of 10 occasions, someone has turned up. I cornered this guy one night, and it ended up being a bit of a street party because all the residents came out to see what all the commotion was about. Someone said, “I thought all the pads in my air conditioning were rotting and I was going to get them changed. Is that what the smell is?” They did not know what the odour was. This guy sniffed and said, “It smells quite nice to me” and we thought, “What are you on?” They are obviously working that close to it that they cannot recognise the smell any more, or they are playing the corporate line; I do not know which one it is.

Mrs Clarke: When we did all our leaflets in March, we spoke to hundreds of residents. We were shocked at how many residents said to us that they had been calling the SMRC odour hotline and they thought that it was the same as DEC. Especially with the full-page ads, a lot of people think that DEC, the SMRC and the health department are all in one together. Every person we spoke to who had called the SMRC odour hotline said that they were nearly always told that the odour was not coming from the facility even when DEC confirmed that it was. They are told that they are the only person who has called or reported the odour, even when others have. They are made to feel that it is all in their heads and they are foolish for phoning. You were at the community meeting. There were community members who agreed with that. I have one of your emails, which is over the page.

Mr Mullins: They are all true.

Hon KATE DOUST: That is the one I am referring to.

Mr Mullins: They are all true. As I said before, it is much easier to pick up the phone and ring the SMRC. I have it in my speed dial because I ring it so often. Chuck Ellis said to me, “Every time, Mr Mullins, you smell the odour, please ring this number.” He rings me back every second or third time, but he does ring me back and says, “I’m very sorry you experienced the odour.” I ask whether anyone else has complained and he says, “No; there was one other one but nowhere near where you are.” That is fine, but I know what I am smelling. If it is only me who is picking up the phone and ringing, they can be apathetic about it, but it affects our way of life, our resale values and everything else. As I said before, we are seriously considering moving at the moment because we do not want another summer like last year. We cannot have friends over for a barbecue. If fact, you are all welcome next summer! Come over for a barbecue in the heat when an easterly is on and experience it first-hand because it is quite disgusting.

Hon KATE DOUST: Would it be true to say that the community's view is that the SMRC is not taking complaints seriously —

Mrs Clarke: They are dead-set furious about it.

Mr Mullins: You really feel as though you are wasting your money.

Hon KATE DOUST: — and that the SMRC is not taking enough action to try to remedy the problem?

Mr Mullins: We have not seen any positive action odour-wise from there whatever.

Hon KATE DOUST: Just to reinforce what was asked earlier by Hon Paul Llewellyn of Mr Olsen, if there was a viable solution to remove the odour permanently, would that satisfy the members of the community?

Mrs Clarke: If there was a 100 per cent guarantee of that. How long would it take? Do we have to wait another five years while it continues to treat us like guinea pigs as it has been?

Ms Baines: We have been hearing for the past three or so years excuses after excuses; it is the biofilters, the scrubbers, the tipping floor or this and that. We keep on hearing excuses; it is going to be rectified in January 2007. It is never ending.

Mr Mullins: I know the amount of money that this facility has cost. I hate to see waste like that. I am not answering on behalf of the community; this is my personal view. If I thought that some more money could be spent on it and it could be rectified—we do not see or hear the plant, but we sure smell it. If we could get that third one done and I am not affected in any way by the odour or with symptoms of it, I would be quite happy for it to stay there. However, how many more millions of dollars are going to be thrown into it to be here in another five years saying that we still did not achieve that? Are we best to cut it loose now and put it somewhere so that the odour goes out to sea and not as many people are affected?

Mrs Clarke: We do not want anyone affected by it.

Mr Mullins: We do not want anybody affected by it. If we could have it so that no odour is experienced within the boundaries of the regulations, I do not think there would be a problem with it being rectified, no.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: I have a question about your submission, Christina. Twenty-four toxins were identified in your daughter. There is a date of 13 December 1990 —

Ms Baines: 18 December 1990 is her birth date. I do not know that the 24 that are listed there are all toxins; I just know that among that list are some of the toxins that are being emitted.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: There are no blood tests to establish those.

Ms Baines: No, there is not. That was done by the accredited homeopath.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: A blood test done by a GP can indicate the types of things that are required. It can cover a wide range. If it is not against your belief in doctors, had it been my child I would have made sure that I had full blood tests done on the child.

Ms Baines: As I said, initially I did not know what was causing her to be sick. It was probably only a couple of years later and I thought she had this, this and this and my mum suggested that she go to the homeopath. Stephanie went to the homeopath about three weeks ago. Her toxin levels had decreased. She was a lot better. However, having said that, she has also been living at her father's house for the past four months, which is well away from the waste-composting facility. Yes, maybe I should have had the GP do the blood tests, because the health department does not recognise those tests.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: You have issues such as insulin, for argument's sake. That would be done in a glucose test. There is also hepatitis B. I am not a doctor, but we will make that inquiry to find out how you can arrive at these particular outcomes.

Ms Baines: I can certainly get a report from the homeopath to send to you stating how he does that. I do not know the scientific bits behind that.

[12.40 pm]

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: It might be a secret formula.

Ms Baines: No, I do not think so. He is a very busy man and treats a lot of cancer patients.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I think that methodology can be found out without necessarily having to do that. It is a common practice for homeopaths to use those tools. I do not think it would be useful evidence for us to know how the machine works. It is common practice for homeopaths to use those diagnostic tools.

Mrs Clarke: The Department of Health will not accept it anyway. They said that, because I have offered to send stuff in.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: Obviously, the department will not accept that. However, with the number of complaints that have come through it is something we could look at in recommending that some blood tests be taken. They did that at Esperance, and if this is the case, there is more validity in a blood test than a homeopath. I am not a doctor, but I know how it operates.

Mr Mullins: I guess at the moment, it is a whole heap of individuals all trying to survive in this environment, and they are all going about it on their own. This is not a structured assessment of everyone's health. This action group is not a group of any people other than a couple of concerned people giving a baseline for someone somewhere to go to help with this. I remember when I first wanted to ring up and complain, I rang the Melville shire—not their problem; Canning shire—not their problem. I must have made 30 phone calls before I got hold of the SMRC, and it said, "No, it's the place next door where they do the green waste." It was not until we were down at the park with the dogs and met some residents who put us on to this website that we even knew how to report the odour. It is all of these people, all dealing with their own things in their own ways. I really welcome someone to say "We're going to do a little study here. We'll provide funding or whatever it is going to take to get some concrete evidence." Everyone is managing as best they can, and it really is each for their own at the moment.

Mrs Clarke: We have begged DEC and the Department of Health to come and do blood testing. We want them to come and do that, but they do not feel that it is necessary. If you can make it happen, that would be awesome.

The CHAIR: How many people actually use your odour logs—not repeats, individual people?

Mrs Clarke: Probably over the years, I reckon there would probably be about 200 different people, maybe more.

Mr Mullins: That is taking out of the system maybe—I have got elderly neighbours in the street and they do not have computers and they used to report the odour and they were wasting their money; they have given up. It is a lot more than —

Mrs Clarke: A lot of people have said that they have given up. When we speak to them they say the state government is not going to do anything and the councils are not going to do anything about it; they do not care about us. That is the way that residents feel. They have had enough, because they are sick of feeling sick. I know that from your point of view, or from looking at it from another point of view in regards to all these health symptoms, all these hundreds of people are all experiencing very similar health symptoms when they are exposed to the odour. The health department should be helping us, rather than sweeping us under the carpet.

The CHAIR: One last comment, then we will have to wind up.

Mr Mullins: When Mandy was going through the health issues and so on, I was listening and, probably the same as all you people, I was thinking, “Why the hell are you still living there if this is what it is like? I would not be subjecting my children to it”—I am at the moment—“Why are you still there. Why don’t you move?” That was all that was going through my mind—“What are we still doing here?” The thing is, I have been there for seven years. When the plant was built we were told, “You’re not going to see it, you’re not going to smell it and you’re not going to hear it.” Beautiful—let it go. But they have let us down terribly. Why should we have to move because it was there? We have to move all of those residents out. I got fuel at the Shell petrol station in Farrington, and I smelt it there. We are talking probably around 2 000 homes that need to move out of that area.

The CHAIR: I think we have got the picture. The committee will have further hearings next week, and we will be also listening to people from the recycling plant as well. Then we will make a report with recommendations. That is the process from here on in.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: They are aware we have been down there.

The CHAIR: Yes, we have been down to the plant ourselves.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I have been down there twice.

The CHAIR: I need to remind you what I mentioned to Mr Olsen. You will get a transcript of your evidence to the committee today, and it is confidential until we report. If there are any corrections you need to make to that transcript, please do so and then forward it to the committee as promptly as you can. Thank you for your attendance today.

Mr Mullins: Thank you for the opportunity.

Hearing concluded at 12.46 pm