

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

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

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 25 JUNE 2008**

SESSION TWO

Members

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

Hearing commenced at 11.58 am**McALL, MR STUART****Chief Executive Officer, Southern Metropolitan Regional Council,
sworn and examined:****SCHULZ, MR TERRY****Managing Director, The Odour Unit Pty Ltd,
sworn and examined:****ROBARTSON, CR CLIVE****Deputy Chairman, Southern Metropolitan Regional Council,
sworn and examined:****FITZPATRICK, MR STEPHEN****Manager, Project Development, Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council,
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.

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.

We will go along with the time frame that you have sent to us via email. I think that would be okay, so if you can just keep to the time limits that you have indicated, that would be helpful. We will be starting with Councillor Clive Robartson, followed by Mr McAll, a statement from Mr Schulz and Mr Fitzpatrick, so it is five minutes for Councillor Robartson, 15 minutes for Mr McAll, five minutes from Mr Schulz, and two minutes from Mr Fitzpatrick. I hope that does not indicate the level of importance of each of you!

Cr Robartson: Thank you, Madam Chair, and we are pleased to be here to put the Southern Metropolitan Regional Council's perspective on this vexing issue. We thank you for your time and that of members of the committee. I apologise for our chairman, Councillor Doug Thompson, who

is unable to be here today. I also request that the document referred to by the DEC—the Toxikos report—be tabled in due course. We believe it will be ready by the end of July. We would also like, if it is possible, to use a Powerpoint presentation—I see that it is up there—and we seek your permission for Mr McAll to use that presentation.

The Regional Resource Recovery Centre at Canning Vale was created, as you know, in 1996. It accommodates a number of councils in the southern metropolitan region, and was developed because we believed that changes were necessary to waste management, and that they needed to be environmentally sustainable. The councils collectively contributed close to \$55 million to put that in place.

[12 noon]

The materials recovery and the green waste processing facilities were opened in 2001, and the composting facility in 2005. We are very conscious of the environmental impact of this facility, and we have worked very hard, and are continuing to work hard, to ensure that those criteria are met. It has been performing fairly well for the past three years. It has processed in that time 470 000 tonnes of domestic waste and converted 66 per cent of that, which we believe is a very great outcome, and we are confident that we can certainly increase that amount. Some 13 different products are produced from that and re-used from the community. Some 233 500 tonnes over the three years have been processed.

As you are aware, we have been successful in reducing greenhouse gas emissions to the tune of 450 000-odd tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents. Over the three years we have produced 52 000 tonnes of quality and, might I say, uncontaminated compost. This has been used in turf farms, for cereal crops, also in the viticulture industry, in some rehabilitation of mine sites and also on road verges, and we have some very successful outcomes on its use in olive farms. Ninety-seven thousand tonnes of recyclables have been sold into the industry, and 84 000 tonnes of green waste mulch have been used.

There are significant environmental benefits, and I do not intend to take a lot of time in this committee to refer to those, but mainly to the fact that the reduction of greenhouse gases is significant, and we are one of only a small number of organisations—I believe it is about seven—across Australia that have, through the Australian Greenhouse Office, been accredited and verified with carbon credits.

As I conclude, I just want to make a reference to a document produced by the City of Melville, where I am a councillor, and in that capacity I am a member of the regional council. Each year the city carries out surveys, as a lot of cities do, to try to monitor their direction and where they are going. A company called Catalyse has done this for the past two years. We ask a number of questions to do with community priorities as indicators—it is interesting—and they include things like street lighting, safety, streetscapes, bulk rubbish, city centre developments, local laws; it is a whole host of things. The one that comes out on top, and has for a number of years—I know this is the same for Cockburn and some of the others—is the weekly rubbish collection. We have 95 per cent satisfaction from our residents for that, and they are also asked to make a comment about it. Not one commented either adversely or particularly in favour of it. They all said it is the top priority. We celebrate this as one of the good things. The next, I might add, is the fortnightly recycling collection. I will leave this document. May I table it, Madam Chair?

The CHAIR: Yes, you can table the document.

Cr Robartson: I think that is important, because here is a large city in metropolitan Perth where the residents are delighted with their waste collection. I do know that that is the case for Cockburn and is likely for Canning and others round about. I state that because it is core business of local government—roads, rates and rubbish. It will remain that way. I believe we do it extremely well, and we are diverting a lot of it. I am faced, I suppose, as a politician, if you allow me to call myself

a politician in local government, with dealing with this issue: how do we provide for our residents and their waste? We do it well, and we are going to continue to do it well. The question I might put is: if we are closed down, whose problem does it then become? We had been able to divert it in the past to landfill, but that is not really an acceptable option. We would then have a great dilemma, which I think the state government would have to be very much a part of. Therefore, we are trying very hard to resolve this issue. I believe we have, and we certainly need as much support as we can get to do it.

I am going to pass over to Stuart McAll. I might say that from my experience in moving around the world looking at waste treatment, Stuart is probably one of the leading experts in waste management in Australia, and perhaps internationally, and I think that what he has to say will be very helpful for you in looking at this problem we have and how we are planning to manage it and how I believe we are managing it. Thank for your time.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Robartson. Mr McAll?

Mr McAll: Thank you, Madam Chairperson. If I could commence, what I would like to do here is actually show where the emissions are coming from on the sites. There is a picture of the entire RRRC, or the regional resource recovery centre. We have three emissions. We have a green waste emission, we have a biofilter emission, and what we try not to have, of course, are fugitive emissions from the building. Those are the three sources of potential emissions on that site. How do we manage those fugitive emissions? Firstly, our requirement is for them to be at an absolute minimum. What we do is that we have some significant fans where that red arrow is. They are drawing air out of the building and forcing the external air into the building, so it stops any of the fugitive emissions running backwards out of the building.

[12.10 pm]

What happened was that when we first took over this facility during our commissioning phase from 2003 to 2005, we ended up with unequal negative pressure in the building, and that allowed some fugitive emissions to get out. We then in 2006 introduced a collection system—a piping system—that traps the odours at the most appropriate point. When the compost, which is cooking at about 60 degrees C, gives off the odours, it then rises and the thermal current takes it up. We are now catching it at that point. We have now been able to capture the odour very effectively. I will refer to a report by the Odour Unit in a minute. Also, we have designed this facility now so that with the 10 fans that we have running, we can keep negative pressure even if three of those fans are off, because we know things are going to break down. Therefore, we are very attuned to making sure that that plant is running all the time, and we have those safety backups.

The other area through which fugitive emissions can escape is our doors. We have imported some very fast opening and closing doors from Italy. We have put those in the main areas, and they are working very well. The other thing is that the buildings are inspected on a daily basis for any damage in case there are any holes. We also checking the level of negative pressure every day, and that is logged. On top of that, we bring in an independent auditor to do an audit of the buildings and the piping structures etc to make sure that the integrity is still there.

I will deal now with fugitive emissions. While we have all those things in place, we have also engaged the Odour Unit to have a look at our buildings for fugitive emissions. Using thermal imaging techniques, pressure readings and visual inspections, the Odour Unit just recently was not able to observe any significant fugitive emissions from the buildings that would have an impact on the community. That is in the first document that we have handed to you, which is the Odour Unit's report dated 18 June 2008.

The next area of potential emissions is the biofilters. That red air that you can see pictured coming out of the building is piped into the biofilters. It is brought underneath the biofilter medium material. That is an organic compound, basically made up of compost and barks to get certain

porosities etc. We pass the air going through there. That air before it goes in is running at about 10 000 odour units, which is a measure of the strength of the smell. Once it has passed through the media, the bugs in there are broken down with volatile organic compounds, and we get an odour unit of about 300. We average around 350 to 400. In some cases, some of these biofilters are working at 50 odour units. They are absolutely brilliant.

One of the critical management issues—they are quite simple—is that if we allow this material to get dry, the bugs stop acting and go to sleep. We then end up with what the DEC calls a dry spot or a dry tracking problem, where the odour that is coming out of the composting facility just travels straight through and does not get affected. When we did our upgrade, as part of that \$2.6 million we put in humidifiers, or moisture injection into the air, so that we are wetting that biofilter from the bottom as well as having sprinkling systems at the top. That slide shows you how quickly that can be fixed. Therefore, it is very important that the community tells us if there is a problem, because we can respond very quickly.

The other issue that we need to look at with biofilters is the degradation of that biofilter medium. We now have a very good handle on that and we do daily observations on it. We expect to get three to four years out of that material. However, we do not take any chances. We are continually looking at it. The other area that we are looking at continually on a daily basis is leakage of any of the pipe work. The original contractor put in poor quality pipe work that was eroded very aggressively very quickly. We have now replaced that with fibreglass and stainless steel sections so that that will not happen again. That is also done on twice-daily inspections.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Was that leakage within the bioreactor or on the way to the bioreactor?

Mr McAll: On its way to it. Once it gets into the bioreactor, we have PVC systems in there, and they are fine.

The other very important thing is that every three months, we have an independent audit of the integrity of the biofilters, and, most importantly, of management's adherence to the procedures. These things require constant supervision. That is also audited by our independent auditor, which in this case is the Odour Unit.

I turn now to performance. I want to refer here to a paper by Anton Van Harreveld, who is probably one of the world's experts in biofilter management. He did a paper on 50 biofilters that are processing municipal solid waste in the Netherlands and Belgium and found that only four per cent of the biofilters assessed met an emissions target of 500 units or less. Most of them were over 2 500 odour units. The SMRC's biofilter emissions, as determined by independent testing, were found to be an average of between 380 and 500. These are independently verified every three months—in fact, in some cases more frequently if we think there is an issue. For that reason, we consider that our management practices are world's best standard. We have submitted the paper by Anton Van Harreveld and three documents from the Odour Unit regarding its auditing of the facility. We do one of those every quarter.

The next slide is a chart of an Ausplume model. The DEC has referred to the consultative environmental review that was done. When this was done, we did an odour modelling of the facility. This is a statistical analysis of the weather conditions, as well as the output. Therefore, if 300 or 350 odour units are emitted on average from the site, that orange line shows the boundary where we should have 2.5 odour units. We are averaging between 300 and 550, so that is where our boundary is according to this mathematical model. I would encourage you to ask Mr Terry Schulz, because he is our expert, and he certainly does know a lot about this, if you have any issues with that. As you can see from that slide, we are doing very well in keeping our odour units at between 300 and 550. We certainly feel that we are meeting our ministerial conditions. We also have a certification document from the Odour Unit dated 24 January, which is submitted as document 5 for the committee.

I turn now to the management of green waste emissions. That is the third emission that can come from the site. When member councils bring their green waste to us from verge collections, it is put into a pile. We then grind it, and from that grinding we create a mulch. When it is raining, that large amount of verge material does not start to compost, because it has too much structure and allows too much air into it. However, once we have turned it into a fine mulch, if it rains, we will get emissions from that. We have noticed that just recently, and we will show you a chart of complaints in the April-March period when we had a lot of rain and we had a certain amount of mulch that was starting to fire up and compost. The critical management issue with this is to minimise the size of that pile. When rain is forecast, we arrange with our purchasers of this material to get it offsite as soon as possible. We do not give this material to the community, because it is unprocessed. All that has been done to it is that it has been mulched. It then needs to go to professional composter—we do not do it—that will heat treat it and get rid of the weed pathogens. We have only three contractors who are taking that material. What is under consideration as we speak is that we are looking at some way in which we can alleviate that impact when the rain comes, other than moving that material offsite.

I turn now to odour surveys. The SMRC engaged the Odour Unit to do two surveys—one in March 2007, and one in May 2008. At this point, I will hand over to Mr Terry Schulz, and I will come back at a later stage to talk about these odour surveys, because his company did them. I might just add that when we got these problems, we went to the DEC and we asked it who it believes is the best company in this country to deal with this matter, and it indicated that the Odour Unit is one of the best. Currently, the Odour Unit is the principal consultant for the air management odour systems for I think it is now five waste composting facilities in Australia, so Mr Schulz is well recognised. I hand over to Mr Schulz.

[12.20 pm]

Mr Schulz: We were engaged by the SMRC to undertake both of these surveys because it was looking to determine the actual level of odour impact. Based on my experience, when you have a sensitised community such as this, complaint data can be a little misleading. We set out in a systematic way to determine what the level of odour impact was. I believe the methodology was similar to the methodology used by the DEC officers. It involves systematically walking around the community recording wind direction, wind velocity, odour present, odour character present and, if possible, trying to say what the likely source of that odour is. I will not say much about the March 2007 survey other than 15 independent surveys were done two to six weeks before closure. Other than that, the 2007 survey did not attempt to define odour character; we were looking only for the odour that was present and how strong it was. The 2007 survey was less useful than the May 2008 survey. We carried out 10 surveys in the most problematical wind conditions, which were light east to southerly winds. They were carried out by one of my staff, who is an experienced odour consultant who was specifically looking for the smell. It must be taken on board that he was looking for it with his nose in the air.

Part of the 2008 survey procedure involved looking at the level of odour in the Canning Vale industrial estate. DEC has already referred to the industry there. A number of different types of smells prevail in that area, including the ones that were mentioned before. I believe there is a brewery, a fibre cement plant and various organic sulfurous emission points and bakeries in that area. My message is that this is no different from most industrial areas that I come across. There is odour in the community, particularly in industrial estates. From my point of view—I have worked in all the states of Australia—it is relevant that the objective of most environmental regulators is to develop policies that achieve or require an acceptable level of odour in the community. I believe that in this case it is unreasonable to expect to have no odour emissions. It is not a case of having no odour; it is a case of having an acceptable level of odour.

The CHAIR: Do the dark brown markings on the other side of Roe Highway shown in the slide relate to extremely strong odours?

Mr Schulz: No, they are the complainants' houses.

The CHAIR: Are they coloured brown for the sake of it?

Mr Schulz: The next slide shows the selection of the houses.

The CHAIR: It is a bit confusing because you have put "extremely strong" in your intensity standard.

Mr Schulz: That leads us to the next slide. This slide shows the worst result of the 10 surveys. I will put up three and discuss them briefly. The black areas are the 10 houses that I understand contributed 65 per cent of the complaints. There is no question that they are in the impact zone. I have not described the procedure, which I think I need to do. The legend on the left-hand side is the German intensity scale. It has been referred to as a six-point scale; it is, in fact, a seven-point scale, with zero being no detectable odour. Blue is distinct level 3, going through to brown, which is extremely strong. That is what is displayed by the inner colour in the circles there. More significantly, in this slide are the perimeter colours on the character key on the right-hand side of the slide. The blue circles are for odours that we believe came from the biofilters, which create a typical earthy, musty and sometimes pine-type of smell. The circles with the green perimeter have a green waste-type character, which is a composted green waste type of smell. The red circles are the odours that we could not describe but that we are certain did not come from SMRC sources. It is probable that some of the sources shown in the previous slide in the Canning industrial estate contribute to those smells. There are none on that particular slide. The brown circle perimeter shows the locations where we could smell an odour but could not define what it was.

It can be seen on the slide that at point 1, which is just outside the facility in Bannister Road, there is a distinct level of smell believed to be coming from the biofilter. That is pretty consistent with what we achieve most of the time. That is 20 or 30 metres from the biofilters and we smelt a biofilter smell there. That smell was also present in a weak form at point 4, which is on Roe Highway, and was not detectable in any of the other locations to the north or north-west of the facility. It is significant that green waste was detected on the other side of Roe Highway in the Leeming area on that particular day. In the next slide we will see a similar pattern. The previous slide shows what we believe is the worst event of the 10 that we did. The same pattern is repeated here. In this case, we have a strong odour of biofilter in Bannister Road and no other biofilter smells were detected beyond there. Only green waste smells were detected on the other side of Roe Highway. I will put up one more slide showing a different wind direction but the same trend. It is an identical trend that is transcribed 90 degrees to the north.

Our conclusion from this work is that green waste is the most detectable in the community. As a consultant, I have to say that I took some heart as the company that designed the system because we genuinely believe that we have eradicated the odours from the point sources; that is, from the biofilters themselves, and the fugitive sources. Mr McAll has already mentioned the fugitive odour work that we have done.

Mr McAll: Our odour complaints system is critical to us. A hotline is set up 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As soon as a complaint is received on the hotline, it is sent by an SMS to our duty supervisor, who is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It also goes to a number of other people in the organisation. This is a critical issue for the SMRC and we treat it very seriously. From there, the duty supervisor will check all the issues that I explained regarding controlling the fugitive emissions etc and he will log any problems and rectify them. They are fairly quick to fix. He then drives to the area of odour complaint and also logs his finding. We are trying to see whether there are any odour emissions and if they relate to anything we have done. The plant manager then reviews the findings of the report, which goes to the operations and communications managers. The

communications manager always gets back to the residents and tells them what has happened. We have no secrets. We tell them what has happened so they can understand. If a certain level of capital is required, the operations manager is authorised to begin corrective action immediately. If a significant amount of capital is needed, the proposal will go to me and then to the council for its approval. We take this very seriously. We have a very intense control system.

Another area I would like to talk about is referred to in document 8, which is our complaints hotline. You can see a range in the number of complaints we have received on the hotline. We launched the hotline in February, which essentially is when we had completed all the physical works on the facility. You will see that in March the complaints went through the roof and we decided to close that. The reason we did that was we had not balanced the negative air pressure within the building.

[12.30 pm]

It just was not balanced, and we were getting fugitive emissions, so we closed it. You will notice also that, even when we were closed in April, we were still getting phone calls. The number of calls is on the top line. We did not open until 1 May. At that point, we believed that we had it balanced. On the second line you can see the number of incidents we believe had the potential to cause emissions. They may or may not have. As far as we could see, there was a total in that whole period of 207 people who had complained between 7 February to May 2008 of which I believe, from memory, there were only about four or five incidents for which we thought we may have caused a problem. We also received calls on the hotline from the DEC. Not all those calls are verified complaints. Some are. As the DEC mentioned earlier, they are considering three odour complaints, which they say started from October last year to May to right now.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Of the 207 complaints you received, how many complainants were there? You might have had 207 reports, but how many actual households or complainants were there—do you have that number?

Mr McAll: We do not have that. All we get is the person who rings. In our own evaluation, four people from the same house may ring the line. We count every one. Those are the records you are seeing there. This is the hotline system. It is not the email system; they do not come to the SMRC; they go only to the people the Action Odour Group wants them to go to.

We can see that in February and March particularly, there was a big ramp up. In March-April we had a significant amount of rain—in fact we started having records—and we suspect that the green waste fired up and was creating quite a bit of emissions at that time. The Odour Action Group—basically, those 10 households—had launched a letterbox drop, which we believe ramped up the number of calls. The SMRC has undertaken also a community survey. Essentially, that slide shows the quadrants and scope of the survey we undertook. You have a full copy of this document, and I think you were given one previously also. Of those people surveyed, which I think numbered just under 300 people, which is a fairly representative sample, with a high degree of confidence, 85 per cent said that they were aware of us. On a scale from 0-10 where 0 means “not valuable at all” to 10 “extremely valuable”, the question was asked, “How valuable do you think a facility like this is to the community?” and 87 per cent scored 6-10, so we know that the community is very supportive of the work we do at the RRRC. At this point I would like to hand over to Mr Steve Fitzpatrick, the chairman of our community reference group, which was set up a year ago.

Mr Fitzpatrick: As Stuart says, the SMRC’s RRRC community reference group was formed in June last year. That was done by an expression of interest process to the SMRC. Three residents are on that committee, Geoff Major, Steve Labroy and I—together with three councillors from the SMRC region. Stuart McCall and other officers attend the meetings as required. We meet every two to three months, depending on the issues that need to be discussed. When the reference group was first formed, we tried to engage the CMC Odour Action Group on at least two occasions that I can recall, and we did not receive any response that I can remember. A public meeting was organised by

the CMC group in May this year, which I attended as a Leeming resident. I tried to encourage members of the meeting to use the hotline that Stuart has referred to. I tried to address some of the misconceptions that were being put forward. However, my comments were howled down. The reference group commissioned the community odour study that Stuart has referred to. We also resolved to introduce a community-based participatory research program for air quality management by the community. This is document 10 in your papers. This is a program that has been designed by the DEC. It is intended to be a partnership approach with the community, researchers and government agencies to address all aspects of the research process.

Mr McAll: As part of that research program that Mr Fitzpatrick referred to, we are already running a research program. We would like to share this with the community and get them to be part of it. We have four programs running at the moment. The first is, the e-nose electronic odour detection system. We would like an electronic system that could give us early warning, so that if any of the odour does get out to the community, we can be there and stop it before it happens. We are doing that with the Environmental Biotechnology Cooperative Research Centre. This is fairly advanced engineering stuff, so there is some success out there. These guys are looking at it from the perspective of tracking our particular type of odour so that we can get a very positive response. That probably has another year to run before we get an outcome. The second is the biofilter medium. We are looking at different types of mediums that may improve odour destruction. Also within the facility are the large digesters I believe the committee saw when we went out there. They produce the strongest odours out there, but it is a very small amount of odour, so we are looking at a system that is being developed with CSIRO and a company called OET, which will absorb that odour and take it out of the system. We are also relooking at our biofilter design to improve odour retention time-the longer the odour stays with the bugs, the better it is dealt with-and also to reduce variable emission velocities across the biofilter. We are doing that in conjunction with the Odour Unit, which is preparing designs for us as we speak. We have budgeted for that for the next financial year.

The next slide is a slide of the primary conclusions of the Toxikos report. It has been done in draft forms. I would like to submit it to the committee on the basis it remain confidential until the full report is done. The reasons for that is that we would like to consult the health department and DEC before any such document is released, if that is permissible.

The CHAIR: We can do that in camera.

[The committee took evidence in private session.]

[12.41 pm]

The CHAIR: We are back in public session. Thank you, Mr McAll.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: I have a document from the Canning community with a motion to disband the City of Canning council. I believe that motion was to be debated last night.

Cr Robartson: Indeed, it was.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: Are you aware of the outcome of that?

Cr Robartson: The outcome was that it was defeated. Only two council members supported that. Mr McAll was there, so he could comment.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: I just wondered. Hot off the press, the grapevine in local government is very good, so I knew you would know.

The CHAIR: I have a very general question. Mr McAll, you were at our hearing last week, and thank you for your presentation. Why do you think there are such disparate views between the community group and your scientific evidence and what you are presenting? It seems to me that never the twain shall meet. I cannot believe that two groups of people could be at completely opposing ends on what they smell and what effect it has on their health.

Mr McAll: My feeling or my opinion on this matter—I cannot be accurate on it—is that they do not trust us. Because of the odour issues from previous years, they do not trust us.

The CHAIR: I think that is clear.

Hon KATE DOUST: That might be an understatement.

Mr McAll: They would like to see us gone. Our job is to get that trust back. We believe that we are managing this facility by world's best practice, and we have the scientific evidence to demonstrate that. What we now have to do is get the community back. I have a lot of hope for the community participatory research program at DEC, and we hope to bring DEC in with that to try to get some integrity and trust and to rebuild those bridges with the community, remembering that this is a community facility for the community.

The CHAIR: How do you think you will manage that given the obvious depth of the antagonism of those people towards the waste recovery plant? How are you going to convince them when they will not ring you up? They prefer to ring DEC, obviously because of a lack of trust. You are gulfs apart. Surely you must have some strategies, other than sitting them down in a room and saying that this is the scientific evidence and that their perceptions are wrong.

Mr McAll: No; we would certainly not do that.

The CHAIR: I know, but I am interested in the sorts of strategies you would have.

Mr McAll: This committee is an empowerment committee. We want them to take control of the research and the work that we do to improve the air quality in their community. We want that. Some people are entrenched—possibly about 10 households as demonstrated, and we have to work around that. They have managed to attract another 80 or 90 people. Those are the people we need to get into here. We cannot allow this to continue, so we will be approaching them on an individual basis. There is no point going to them and saying, "I've a document here. It is confidential; we cannot release it to you." We want to have all these documents open and allow them to see the documents—the health report, the odour surveys, and the completion of the DEC ones—and we want them to work with us. Let us do this on an open footing and bring them in. Hopefully, in August we will have all that information available.

The CHAIR: How do you get over the barrier when these people genuinely believe, for whatever reason, that they are suffering various ailments and allergies as a result of what they perceive are the emissions from the waste recovery centre? They genuinely believe that that is the problem.

Mr McAll: Absolutely, and, unfortunately, our inability to respond immediately because we are not toxicologists has allowed this to fester within the community. Now we have to put in place a program to rebuild this, and we hope to work with the health department on that and to get that trust back into the community. That will be part of that program. It may be that it is recommended that we do letter drops and we continually show everybody what we have found in terms of the health report. However, that has to be worked on and we take that very seriously.

The CHAIR: Would you support these people getting the required blood tests from the health department to identify what they think is wrong with them or to give them a clean bill of health or whatever? Would you actively support that?

Mr McAll: Based on what the toxicologist has said, it is very unlikely that they can trace anything to the SMRC?

The CHAIR: Notwithstanding whether they can or cannot, would you support it as an objective measure to satisfy these people who believe, rightly or wrongly, that they are suffering side effects; that is, that the Department of Health conduct blood tests that would maybe satisfy these people?

Mr McAll: I would rely heavily on the health department. I am not able to answer that question because I am not a medical person. It would know far better —

The CHAIR: That is not what I am asking. Would you, in principle, support it?

Mr McAll: I support the health department absolutely. If the health department feels that that is the way to go, I believe that. There are some very well-trained people in that organisation and they know which way to go and they have no vested interests.

Hon KATE DOUST: Mr McAll, people have provided evidence or have sent in quite a volume of submissions to the committee, which I am always impressed by because it takes some effort for people to put pen to paper and list their concerns. Quite a number of those people have said that they lived in the area prior to this facility being built and did not experience these problems prior to this facility existing. They were quite specific in the nature of the health complaints they are suffering and the disruption to their family lives. Your toxicologist might be providing this information, but I attended the same community meeting that you did and I was surprised at the level of hostility towards your organisation and your communications officer. People talked about feeling as though they had been brushed off and they did not know whether their complaints had been addressed appropriately or had even been taken up. Although you might have the data there, these people are still saying that they have a problem. You might have narrowed it down to 10 houses, but you will still have to provide some sort of solution so that those people can continue to live in the area without any discomfort. We talked earlier to DEC about the other options that are available. I think Hon Bruce Donaldson talked about the Wagerup facility, which has put in higher stacks with additional filters. Is that sort of option available to you as a way of alleviating this problem for the community?

Mr McAll: It is a question that we put to our odour expert, Mr Terry Schulz. I will get him to respond.

Mr Schulz: The tall-stack option is a standard solution to air pollution and odour problems. In this particular case, theoretically it would be possible. We have to forget that Jandakot airport is next door.

Hon KATE DOUST: Is that a difficulty? We talked about this during another hearing. Because of the location of the facility and the airport, would there be difficulty in putting in a higher stack? Are there limitations because of the airport?

[12.50 pm]

Mr Schulz: As an odour consultant, I cannot answer that, but I can say that in order to utilise the stack option, you need to first identify the source of the emission in order to put it up a stack. You have to find out what is the smelly air.

We have got an odour control system there that I genuinely believe is best practice in a design sense. I believe it is being operated very well. We know that there are no fugitive emissions. We have looked at it three different ways and we know that there is no air leaking out of those buildings now. You can rule that out as a source. We know the biofilters are working very well. Yes, we can do better, but the modelling that Stuart put up showed that in the current operation, the way it is operating, the biofilters are not contributing to off-site odour impacts. It is a long answer, but we do not know what to put up a stack. If we had a problem source, you could consider that.

Hon KATE DOUST: The operation of the plant, is it 24/7, or is it in specific shifts, day shift-night shift?

Mr McAll: It is 24/7. The digesters do not stop, so we have it manned 24/7.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: This air being drawn off the top of those biofilters, you say there is no fugitive emissions from that air?

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: That is a different concept.

Mr Schulz: I am saying there are no fugitive emissions coming out of the buildings. The biofilter air is generally well treated. There are occasions where we get a limey-lemony-citrusy-piney smell

that comes out of certain areas of two of the biofilters. We have discussed in the past whether, as a broad option, you could collect that and put it up a stack. The answer is yes. Before you even went down that pathway, you would have to look at eradicating that emission by making those biofilters operate effectively 100 per cent of the time. That is our focus right now.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: What you are saying is that there does not seem to be any emissions coming out of the plant, yet people are complaining about the odour. It has got to be coming from somewhere.

Mr Schulz: That is the dilemma. As the designer, I am frustrated that there are still complaints, but I look at the May 2008 ambient odour surveys—and admittedly there are only 10 of those and they are snapshots in time, no question—but those show categorically there is a green waste odour that is out in the community. My own personal and professional view is that the people who have waited a long time to have a solution to this problem had the solution, had it delivered to them, it worked okay and the complaints did drop there for several months. Then we started getting the odd breakdown or the odd incident that caused genuine odour emissions and then we have ended up with, in more recent times, this green waste issue, wet green waste. Personally, my view is that the sensitivity is such that they are interpreting green waste as coming from the composting facility and its associated health concerns in their eyes, in their minds. That is where I am at.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: With regard to the green waste, because that was a theme of the surveys that you were doing, obviously there is a management issue. You kind of take it offsite, or is there another option of maybe putting that into a shed? If you believe that that is the source of the issue, then maybe that is the solution.

Mr McAll: That is a possibility that we are reviewing. These are very expensive to put in, so it is not something we take lightly. I might add that the green waste smell that we are smelling is not a smell that is not dissimilar to what actually happens in the community. When people have a pile of mulch delivered to their home, you get the same type of smell. If it rains, it starts to cook up.

Mr Schulz: Might I add to that? Environmental health is not my area, and certainly not toxicology, but I think you need to wait until the toxicology report comes out and, as Stuart has indicated, indicates that there are no health risks or health concerns from the emissions from the facility. If the green waste is identified as a potential source, I would hope that the community's attitude would change, some of them anyhow, in that they might be a bit more tolerant of an odour that has been pinpointed, if we can use that term, from that source.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: It has been suggested to us that the SMRC is in denial. How do you comment on that—that there is an odour problem and you are in denial?

Mr McAll: You are probably asking the wrong person. We do not believe so. We do not believe that we are in denial. I have had —

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: You would not, but that is —

Mr McAll: When you get this number of emails that are coming out, my elected members come down and say, "What is going on, Stuart?" They will come out and they will have a smell and they will say, "You're right, there is nothing here. But boy, there's a very strong other smell"—the bore smells are extraordinarily strong in some areas there. The councillors themselves come out and actually smell this. This problem has engaged from the top of the organisation right to the bottom. We do not believe we are in denial because we think we have fixed everything as well.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: I know that the bore water—and Point Peron is a prime example of that, as Hon Kate Doust would attest to—that can be a real stink, a bad egg gas. You can smell it from a long, long way away. Unless people want to use it properly, they have to actually put it into tanks to let it aerate for some time before they can use it. But when it is just pumping onto lawns and that, it is actually terrible. An example is Jurien Bay; up one end of the town the water is quite

good; at the other end of the town it has got that bad egg gas smell when people are actually using their bores.

Cr Robartson: Perhaps I should answer the question. There is no question that during the period prior to being closed by DEC we had mechanical problems, other problems, and there were certainly serious fugitive odours that occurred then. I have been out there at one o'clock in the morning, stumping around trying to find these as well. It is very difficult at times. We have spent a lot of money, close to \$3 million now, and worked very hard at trying to track them all down, and I believe we have. I do not know the answer to the question that Hon Sheila Mills raised of how do you convince these people. There were odours of course before this plant was built, because one of the regular complainants I used to have some difficulty with perhaps 10 or 15 years ago when the City of Melville landfill site was still operating; we had problems there, as is fairly normal around a landfill site. We have overcome it, and at night-time we had the problem with the bore water —

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Is that at the same site?

Cr Robartson: It is very near. It is quite close to one of the people on the southern end of Leeming where there are complaints. There were those sorts of problems. We firmly believed that with this plant being constructed, we would not have those problems. In fact, the very person to whom I said that we would not have problems, I have had to admit since, apologise, that it was certainly my belief that this plant would not produce those. That was the evidence from our trips to Atlanta, where they had them operating; we got Mr McAll over to have a look at it, but that was not going to happen. We had a breakdown and we have addressed it, and I think we have repaired that. Of course, any time there is any sort of odour, it seems that we have to bear it. One example from the call line was, "What does it smell like?" "It smells like Araldite", so obviously a chemical smell, but it was our smell. Clearly it was not. That is now what we have got to live with and we have got to work, as suggested, to try and get that confidence back in the community, and that will be a long process I guess.

Hon KATE DOUST: Why was that site chosen by the councils involved, given its proximity to a residential area and indeed a growing residential area at that time?

Cr Robartson: I will make some comments and perhaps Mr McAll might follow up. If we had not put this plant in, we were faced with taking this waste to a landfill at Toodyay—the Red Hill site. The cost of transport was immense. Saving on that transport made it possible to look at alternative waste technology. That is what we went to. I guess then it was a matter of finding a site that was within the southern metropolitan council region, otherwise you have lost the advantage. Sites were looked at and this site became available, given that it was between the Canning landfill site, which was still operating, and effectively the City of Melville landfill site. Bounded on one side by a major reserve, an airport, and an intended freeway, it did appear to be quite a good site. We firmly believed that the 500 to 600 metre buffer was adequate.

As I said, we went to Atlanta, and over there, there are residential properties 75 metres, 100 metres—within 100 metres of the plant. I understand—Mr McAll can comment—we sent him over to look at—he doorknocked that street, and some of the residents were not aware of it. The feedback we received was that, you know, there were not any problems. We believed, on that basis, that we would be able to control those odours; we still think we can.

[1.00 pm]

Hon KATE DOUST: I just want to follow up on that one. When you made that decision, what sort of analysis was done of the area in relation to temperature, airflow, those sorts of things? When people have raised these issues with us, they have talked about how the odours seem to flow out in a plume and just sit in certain areas, so it is not in a fixed pattern, it is quite sporadic. Was there any analysis—thinking about the issues we had with Wagerup and those particular winds —

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: Katabatic winds.

Hon KATE DOUST: Katabatic winds. Was there any of that sort of analysis done?

Cr Robartson: I do not know the answer to that; Mr McAll might.

Mr McAll: Yes, there was extensive work done. That was undertaken when we did the consultative environmental review work, whereby we used statistical analysis using all of the current data, weather data, and we plotted the odour, as I showed on document 5. We showed the boundary where the odour would go to at 2.5 ou. So we felt quite comfortable. The Ausplume model, by the way, is a model that is used by, I think, just about every state in Australia for mapping the type of odour and extent of the odour. So quite a bit of work was done on it; it was not taken lightly. If I could just refer to the question I believe that you asked of the DEC, which was, what are the acceptable buffers for in-vessel composting facilities? At the time we were working to a guideline which stated that the buffer distance should be 150 metres. We have 500 metres there, so we felt quite comfortable with that.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I just want to refer to the submission that we had this morning. Firstly, I want to make a statement that I think that the facility is well operated and it is absolutely essential. I do not know whether you are in denial or not, because some people are saying that they smell things, and other people are saying that—and they are saying that they have been severely impacted. I want to say that the summary that we got from the DEC is that the DEC considers that despite the SMRC carrying out extensive odour reduction works at this composting plant, it does not appear to be meeting the predictive odour performance of the plant as stated in the consultative environmental review. If they have concluded that—and they are our technical lead agency—there is something to answer for, then it supports the community's concerns. I think that there is a public—it is not just a public relations issue; how do you respond to that assertion in their summary, that you do not appear to be meeting the predictive odour performance?

Mr McAll: If I could refer to Terry Schulz and his document 5, which is certification—the DEC do not have this document, I believe, and they probably do not have access to the odour calculations undertaken in the Ausplume model, which is where our conditions come from. Terry, if I hand over to you.

Mr Schulz: The consultative environmental review was defined an odour boundary. I mean, from my understanding—and I was not involved in those days—the prediction was made of the 2.5 ou contour; that was approved and that is now the odour boundary that we are required to meet. I have to say it is unusual. In other states of Australia there is a separation between the consent conditions and the licence conditions, or the compliance conditions, but in this case it appears we still have to meet the consent conditions, even though it was made many years ago. I put that aside—forgive me for raising that point.

So we have this odour boundary of 2.5 ou. It is actually in the first environmental audit that we did—it is in document 4; 12 February 2008. In addition to the audit, the SMRC asked us to determine whether or not, based on the measurements that have been taken of the biofilter performance, whether or not the CER conditions were met. We came to the conclusion—and I can quote —

The results of the modelling are shown in the attached Odour Contour Plot. Model configuration and output files can be provided separately, if required. A visual comparison of the modelling plot with the Consent contour indicates that the two contours are very similar, given the accuracy and resolution, of the dispersion modelling process.

So we believe that we meet the CER condition.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Okay.

Mr Schulz: I am somewhat perplexed at the DEC position.

The CHAIR: Hon Paul Llewellyn, we are getting constrained by time now; the house starts sitting at two o'clock. Do we have one final question from everybody? I do not want to cut you short, but —

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: No, that is okay.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: Where to from here? I mean, that is the point. Obviously you must be making plans. Is there still the strong support amongst the regional council for the facility? I guess you are still pouring money into it, I presume, but at the end of the day you believe in the best interests of the constituents you all represent, but the point is that somewhere along the line the regional council must be, amongst the council, saying, "Well, okay, we've come to this point, we've still got a problem and we need to address it." How are you moving now? Has Mr Schulz now then been instructed to look at further measures?

Cr Robartson: Despite the issue that you referred to at Canning last night, there is strong support by the five participating councils in this project, and also of course the others—Kwinana and Rockingham—will be looking, in the future, at alternative technologies, and of course across the metropolitan area there is a strong move towards similar technologies. So I think not only is there strong support for this approach in our region, but it is important for the whole of the metropolitan area. We look after almost a third of the metropolitan area. We should not overlook the recycling component, which has the capacity to deal with 50 per cent of the metropolitan area, should it be called upon. We certainly have that in place. I believe we have just got to keep working at it, and some of the things that Mr McAll referred to—the research programs we are putting in place—we will be working with those. Hopefully we will get some solutions there. I guess what we all need is some time to get these things into place and some time to try to gain the confidence of that very small portion of the community who have been impacted for whatever reason, and who we think that perhaps are unreasonable in some of their statements, but they are entitled to do that. As you said, there is a very strong feeling out there, and these sorts of issues come and go in communities. We just have to keep working at it.

It is a magnificent technology. I have had a look at it, as I said, and I think where else do you go? There is going to be a great call on compost—and there is a changing trend at the present time; other technologies are now starting to be seriously looked at. There is one in New South Wales that we are watching very closely, and one up at the western suburbs that looks at both aerobic and anaerobic digestion that is about to come on-stream, and so we will be looking at those sorts of technologies. That is the way it is going to have to go because we are going to have to have those in place to deal with those waste streams. It is a difficult question to answer. I think the confidence is there from the regional council; no question there. We have to work through the issue, and we believe we have got it right, but it is a bit difficult to prove, given other odours and things that are happening.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: It was mentioned, I think by Mr McAll, when we were out visiting the resource centre there, that you were looking at an improvement to the removal of glass, the technology that was becoming available, and that you hoped then, down the track, to be able to remove a lot of the glass to make your compost more saleable. Is that still heading down the pathway?

Mr McAll: It is indeed. We have looked at this quite intently and we have done a research program on weekly collection of recyclables. What we have found as a result of that is that people do not put glass into the waste in first place, so it makes our life a lot easier. Having said that, the systems that we have in place for glass removal in the compost are more than adequate to meet the demand. In fact at one point we worked down at a very low level to develop the market, and we went to our purchasers of the product and said, "Do you need it at this level?" They said, "No, we don't; it's not an impact for us, so you can release it back here."

[1.10 pm]

We have a couple of grades that we make. The more screening we do, the more expensive it gets. We are a commercial operation and we have to balance those two things.

The whole issue of the glass is part of the campaign that is deliberately being run, which I believe is quite mischievous. We are very comfortable with the quality of our compost. It meets the standards that we are required to meet.

The CHAIR: Thank you, gentlemen. I remind you of what I said earlier about confidentiality. You will receive a transcript of your evidence for correction and return to us.

I will make one more comment. The usual appropriate manner for any individual or group to seek a change to a date to appear before a committee of Parliament is to write to the committee requesting a change. That was done by way of an email request by Mr McAll. However, the committee resolved to proceed with today's hearings. The representatives of the SMRC are welcome to finish this committee hearing with additional information if they wish. Okay? Thank you, gentlemen.

Hearing concluded at 1.11 pm