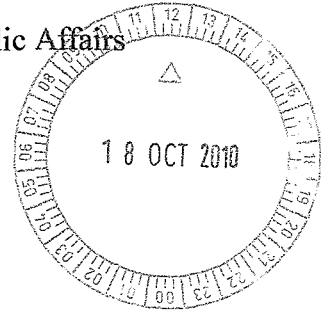


To: The Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Cockburn Cement Inquiry



From: Alexander Williams

My house is 2,740 metres north east from the main stacks at the Cockburn Cement plant. We have suffered unacceptable levels of dust and odour throughout the 8 years that we have lived here since February 2003. The offensiveness and frequency of odour events have declined in that time but they remain unacceptable.

The odour is offensive only when the wind is blowing in the right direction, but the dust accumulates continually on all exposed surfaces and seeps into the ceiling under the roof tiles.

I suffer from chronic illnesses of several kinds including hypersensitivity to chemicals of many kinds. The odour is so offensive to me that I have to go inside to get away from it and do not go out again until the wind changes direction. I cannot do any work outside when the odour is present. I have suffered offensive levels of odour as far away as the Cockburn Central railway station (6,160 metres from the stacks) and South Lake shopping centre (5,490 metres from the stacks).

Our house was built in 2000, and when it was 8 years old we had insulation installed in our ceilings. Such an unusually heavy dust burden had accumulated in our ceiling in that short time that the workman was barely able to complete the job. In contrast, our daughter bought a 100-year old house in west Perth in its near-original condition and had it renovated and it had similar dust accumulation in its ceiling.

Cockburn Cement defend their position on three main grounds, all of which are inadequate:

- They claim that emissions from their site meet all relevant health guidelines. This is irrelevant for at least two reasons. First, because they measure the emissions from their stacks and dilute it by the area of their perimeter fence. It is not the average emission over all directions that poses the problem, but the full plume that goes in just one direction and exposes people to the full emission that poses the problem. Second, health is not the only relevant criterion but nuisance, intrusion, and loss of enjoyment of life that citizens are entitled to.
- They claim that local government is at fault for allowing housing development close to the plant. This statement actually betrays their fault because they are admitting that they have been polluting their environment ever since they first started operating and they are arguing for their right to go on polluting their environment. This attitude towards environmental pollution of any kind is unacceptable.
- They point to all the work they have been doing to solve the problems. This is a frank admission that they are causing problems for which they are responsible. They clearly are not doing enough because the problems continue.

The Department of Environment and Conservation have been extremely slack in enforcing adequate controls at this site, as they have been in numerous other cases, most notoriously in the Magellan exports of bulk lead concentrate through Esperance Port. That disaster was predictable by anyone who knows anything about lead and about bulk shipping practices. I don't trust them to do anything right, at all. Cockburn Cement and the DEC must be forced to act on these matters by parliamentary intervention.

Alex Williams
13/10/10