

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN AT
EMERALD COLONIAL LODGE, MARGARET RIVER,
TUESDAY, 20 NOVEMBER 2001**

EIGHTH SESSION

Members

**Hon Christine Sharp (Chairman)
Hon Kate Doust (Deputy Chairman)
Hon J.A. Scott
Hon Louise Pratt
Hon Frank Hough
Hon Robyn McSweeney
Hon B.K. Donaldson**

DOWN, MR ROSS,
examined:

Mr Down: I have read and signed the "Information for Witnesses" document.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you appearing, basically, as a private citizen who was involved on the council?

Mr Down: Yes. What I have to relate comes directly from the time I spent on the council.

The CHAIRMAN: Would you like to make a statement to the committee?

Mr Down: Yes. I see no point in repeating what everyone else has said here, which has been detailed. One part that has not been expressed related to how the contract for the sewerage works came about. The Water Corporation called for tenders, and a couple of people tendered. The committee needs to understand about sewerage works. Basically, sewerage works make two products - liquids and solids. The solids can be removed in various ways. One way is to chemically douse the material, so that the solids drop out at a faster rate. That is purely to decrease the time it takes to extract the solids. The material cannot be reused once it has been chemically doused. Another way is to use a plant in which the material is not chemically doused. The chemical usually used is alum - aluminium sulphide. If the material is not doused, the product can be used as an organic fertiliser. It is particularly useful for a residential subdivision, because industrial waste and such things are not being shot down the drain. That provides a greater ability to use the solids as an organic fertiliser.

At the time, my investigations into this indicated that the Water Corporation had chosen a particular contractor to construct the plant. When I looked into this, I found that some of the other contractors had proposed non-chemical dousing plants, which were considerably more expensive to build, but cheaper to operate. I had a difficulty in understanding why a government department, which was not paying for that plant - the developer was paying and would hand it over to the government department - would choose a plant that over a 20-year period would cost more to run and would give it at least one product that it could not get rid of. The only way to get rid of the product would be to whip it out, take it up to the local council sullage works and dump it there.

The CHAIRMAN: The committee made a site visit this afternoon. We were led to understand that no chemicals were involved in the treatment process.

Mr Down: That was not the case when I was there. The plant was made to chemically douse the material. At the time the chemical to be used was alum, which negates its use as a fertiliser. That was the decision that the Water Corporation made at the time. Initially it would cost a lot less to build, but would cost more to run.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: Are you talking about stage 1 right at the beginning?

Mr Down: That is correct. They were transporting waste out of a pit that they put in closer to the belt, because they did not have the volume to operate the plant. The plant is not efficient at all, and will not function without a certain volume of material. When people first started to live in the area there was not the required volume, so they simply shipped it out to the local sullage works.

Hon FRANK HOUGH: I understood that stage 1 of the plant would also be non-chemical. Is that correct? Will it now be a totally non-chemical plant?

The CHAIRMAN: I am sure that the Water Corporation will be able to provide additional information to explain the change from the proposal that you were familiar with; that is, assuming that what we saw today is different from what you are describing. It is a good job that it is by the sound of it.

Mr Down: Yes, definitely. I wanted to raise the issue of a government department, which is not providing the initial works, taking on a long-term debt because it would cost more to run over time. I found that difficult to understand, and I expressed my view to the former Minister for Water Resources at one stage when he came to council. He sat in front of the council with his two minders, who made a nosedive for their briefcases when I explained the same situation to them.

The CHAIRMAN: It would appear that, perhaps, you had an influence.

Mr Down: Perhaps.

The CHAIRMAN: Would you like to add anything else?

Mr Down: Not really; everyone else has covered the issues quite thoroughly.