

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

**INQUIRY INTO MUNICIPAL WASTE MANAGEMENT IN WESTERN
AUSTRALIA**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT PERTH
THURSDAY, 26 MARCH 2009**

SESSION ONE

Members

**Hon Sheila Mills (Chair)
Hon Bruce Donaldson (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Kate Doust
Hon Paul Llewellyn
Hon Wendy Duncan**

Hearing commenced at 9.37 am

CARBON, MR BARRY
Chair, Waste Authority of WA,
sworn and examined:

GRIMOLDBY, MS JAN
Deputy Chair, Waste Authority of WA,
sworn and examined:

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

[Witnesses took the affirmation.]

The CHAIR: 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 and please be aware of the microphones and try to talk into them. Ensure that you do not cover them with papers or make a noise near them. 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 publication or disclosure of the uncorrected transcript of evidence may constitute a contempt of Parliament and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege.

Can you please give the committee a brief outline of the role of the Waste Authority.

Mr Carbon: The Waste Authority was created as part of the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act 2007, which became active as of 1 July last year. The Waste Authority has five members. They are charged with a series of powers under that act. They administer the waste levy, which is collected from landfills and generates about \$15 million a year. One of our major activities is to look after the expenditure of that in relation to waste. According to the act, we are also charged with advising the government on policy and implementing policy relating to waste in Western Australia. That will be one of our main items of discussion because that is being severely frustrated right now. We have a series of ancillary functions that are listed in the schedule at the back of the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act.

The CHAIR: What staff or resources does the authority have access to in carrying out its role?

Mr Carbon: The authority has no staff. The act provides a mechanism whereby the Minister for Environment is to supply appropriate staff who are to be deemed officers of the Waste Authority. That function is left to the chief executive of the Department of Environment and Conservation to fulfil. So far, despite significant negotiations and attempts over a nine-month period, there are zero staff of the authority who are deemed to be officers of the Waste Authority. That does not mean that the staff of the department do not answer any questions or provide the best advice that they can give to the authority, but none of them are directable by the authority and none of them represent the

authority at any meetings. Hence, we are largely unrepresented in activities around town. The Waste Authority itself is part time. I spend one day a week and my deputy spends half a day a week, and the others attend meetings one day a month.

The CHAIR: Can I just clear this up? It is not even seconded—the staff still sit in the department, so they are not actually designated to you?

Mr Carbon: The philosophy behind the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act and, indeed, similar provisions under the Environmental Protection Act which preceded it, was that the levy was to be collected on activities that were essentially run by local government. The agreement between local government and state government then, and as represented in successive second reading speeches, was that the money would not be used to substitute for ordinary state government expenditure but would be used for special things such as the activities I have talked about.

[9.45 am]

In fact when the Waste Authority came into existence on 1 July, we discovered there were 50 staff at the Department of Environment and Conservation who were paid for out of the waste levy. Indeed, all of the staff on waste staff activities at the Department of Environment and Conservation are still nominally paid for by the waste levy fund. None of those staff represent the authority. I need to say, in case I do not get the opportunity to say it, that I think the staff are hardworking, well-intentioned and honourable people. I think they find themselves in a totally untenable position.

The CHAIR: The whole of the \$15 million, does it all go to pay the 50 staff?

Mr Carbon: No. In our submission we actually did attach a budget that shows what money has been allocated for this year. In round figures, the authority has indicated it would like to spend about half of its annual income on operational things—like grants, studies and promotional activities—and the other half it would like to set aside for major activities. That might be the building of infrastructure or whatever. With money that we carried over from the previous waste board, we are at a stage where we have perhaps \$20 million in the bank. There is an estimate from the department, orally given, of about a \$5 million ticket for salaries for this year, but the Waste Authority six months ago, at its monthly meeting—and at every monthly meeting since—has asked the department for a statement of staff numbers and staff expenditure. To this date that has not been delivered. Three months ago, the Minister for Environment asked for that and for a prediction of staff expenditure next year. That has not been delivered. Indeed, I wrote to the chief executive of the department asking for a meeting to discuss a proposal to settle this issue of staff and costs—that was over a month ago—and that has not been responded to.

The CHAIR: Not even an acknowledgement of receipt of the letter?

Mr Carbon: No, that is not quite true. There were two parts to that letter. One was a request for a nomination—something to do with bushfires—and that was responded to.

The CHAIR: But the other part was not?

Mr Carbon: No.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: If you had staff and resources allocated to you, what precisely would be the product that you are producing and the outcomes that you would deliver as an authority, given that there is already some capacity within all the agencies and so on?

Mr Carbon: There are things at about three or four different levels that would be delivered that are not now. Firstly, the changes in the WARR act removed any responsibility from the environment department for any activities relating to policy associated with waste. It would allow the Waste Authority to pick up, as stated in the act, policies about things such as extended producer responsibility, and about things such as whether there should be container deposit schemes, and, if so, how they should operate—all the implementation things that sit underneath that. For example, there is a very acute situation right now in the waste industry with the global downturn. That is a

really severe impact, something like a drop of to 40 per cent off the previous value for most recyclables. The Waste Authority wished to undertake an exercise that looked at how we could be involved, and the department specifically said, “No, that’s our responsibility. We are going to do that.” There is a whole series of activities right through from interaction across industry and the community by way of meetings. There are working groups being set up—for example, as recently as last week—which we do not get to attend; we do not have staff. However, DEC does go, wearing its hat that it has chosen to wear, despite the fact that the act specifically says that it is the regulator, and it behaves as a regulator. A recent example is that the Kwinana Industries Council, which is looking hard at trying to find ways of using its waste products as a source material for other industries, is complaining to me on a regular basis that there is not an avenue into government to which it can say, “We would like help to make this happen”, as opposed to dealing with somebody who says, “Our job is to regulate you and put constraints on what you want to do.” I have absolutely no doubt in saying that the Waste Authority is not fulfilling the charter that is described in the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act and, indeed, is not capable of doing that in the absence of having any staff at all. It is just a joke.

The CHAIR: Is the role of the authority different to that of DEC? You are responsible for policy development; DEC is the regulator. Are there any other roles?

Mr Carbon: In our submission, we quoted from the explanatory memo that went with the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act. It specifically says that the intention of the act is to produce a model whereby—would you like me to read it for you? I am on page 26 of the memo. It states that the bill establishes a clear separation of the regulatory compliance and enforcement functions to be undertaken by DEC, and the policy and program delivery functions to be undertaken by the Waste Authority.

[9.50 pm]

There are a series of others. It allows a clear separation of waste policy and program delivery from the functions undertaken by the Department of Environment and Conservation. It is appropriate that you have an agency whose job is to regulate and take coercive action. It is just that it is in direct conflict to having the role of assisting, encouraging and making things happen.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: The WARR bill basically sets out some architecture, but it is fundamentally driven by regulation. Without regulation, the machinery does not run. How effective has the Waste Authority been in naming the regulations that need to be put in place and giving effect to those regulations and what are the performance indicators that you are measuring on the ground?

Mr Carbon: The only regulation that we have had any activity in has been the regulation that was required at the start of the act; that is, the regulation relating to the levy.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: That is money hypothecated to the Waste Authority.

Mr Carbon: To the fund—not the authority. The act says that it is hypothecated to the authority, but a clause at the back of the act says that either way under the Financial Management Act it is an accountability.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: The only regulation that you have had some discussion about is the level of the levy. Can you advise what other policies you have been developing and what capacity you have to develop effective policy. If there are five members working part time, where is the capacity to do this?

Mr Carbon: I would expect an authority, board or whatever to have five major accountabilities—governance, risk management, strategies, financial oversight and getting things legally right. It operates at that level. The staff delivers those things. We have no staff. Most of the Waste Authority meetings are consumed with administrative minutia and you get submissions like this that are handwritten by me and my deputy. We do not get to discuss the big question of how we will make

extended producer responsibility work, although we have general discussions about it. We put our minutes on public record. The act required us to have in place a statewide strategy by 1 July this year. With the valued assistance of some of the staff from the department, we have produced a draft, which has taken us longer than we thought to do. Underneath that there are all the things that fall out. I would not be honest if I said that we thought we could deliver on lots of the big things or even be partakers in the national discussions that are taking place now to work out the Australian position on extended producer responsibility towards resource recovery.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I asked about the performance at the ground level. You are responsible not only for municipal waste streams, but also industrial, commercial, construction and demolition. By far the higher volumes are from the industrial and commercial areas. Therefore, you have to come up with policies for all those areas.

Mr Carbon: Yes.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: How do you describe your working relationship with the department on policy development? Do you have any interaction in actually getting effective policy and mechanisms in place to achieve outcomes?

Ms Grimoldby: I will commence to answer that. One of the difficulties we have is the requirement for a Western Australian waste strategy before we can do a great deal of implementation. We have taken the view that without that strategic framework, which has been endorsed by government and the community, to embark on a specific strategy or policy exercise is perhaps developing policy in a vacuum. We have spent certainly the last three months developing the draft waste strategy. We have identified areas in which we believe we need to expend energy, particularly in the area of construction and demolition waste and C and I waste.

In terms of any actions in the past 12 months, there has been virtually nil. The difficulty continues to be that the staff are in such an invidious position of reporting essentially to two masters. Without that dedicated staff and without resolving those issues it is extremely difficult to proceed. What we may consider to be a policy priority is not necessarily what the department considers as a priority. Staff are leaving and that is a real concern. With the few staff we have access to, the numbers are being reduced. We actually have no arms or legs.

The issue that Barry raised about the Waste Authority not having access to input into the national discussions on things as important as extended producer responsibility are critical.

The CHAIR: In a couple of submissions to the committee it has been suggested that the authority and the department are too closely aligned and there is a presumption there is advice towards regulation rather than strategic planning. From what you said, you really have no show, do you?

Mr Carbon: I can understand that presumption because in the previous model, the model that existed before the WARR act, it was difficult to distinguish what were the functions of the department versus the functions of an advisory board. There was supposed to be a whole change of function and the department has continued, as it did previously, being the voice of government and government advice.

The very real issue is that there is an actual and perceived conflict between the regulator and being there to make the waste function work. Any of the department's websites specifically state that their job is not to expect the regulator to be their adviser. That is what you would expect from what is essentially a police function. That is okay, but there is a big void as a consequence of the impotence of the authority right now.

Hon KATE DOUST: What will it take, Mr Carbon, to try to provide some relief for this issue?

Mr Carbon: There are several questions in front of us. The first is that it is perfectly possible—there are models around like it—to provide for that money from the levy to be used to pay staff who are administratively members of either DEC or another department, but they are called officers of

the Waste Authority and represent the Waste Authority. That is not a difficult thing to do and that is what the act says should happen. In the absence of that happening the Waste Authority has to make decisions about whether it is prepared to sign off on money for those staff, because right now they are not doing what they should.

Hon KATE DOUST: Why do you think they are not doing that?

Mr Carbon: They are not doing that because they are officers of DEC. There are alternatives at a legislative level. The Zoo is a very good example of where the chief executive of the Zoo staff answers to a board for most things but is also directed by the minister. The staff serves the board and represents them. It is a different model to, dare I say it, the clever model in the WARR act. It is not essential to go that way because there are other more cooperative mechanisms around it. Those cooperative mechanisms are absolutely failing to deliver.

Hon KATE DOUST: Have any representations been made directly to the minister seeking assistance to move through so that you are not as frustrated?

[10.00 am]

Mr Carbon: Yes. The minister has indicated to me and to the chief executive of the department that she would like the issue to be managed—and managed quickly. I suppose those representations have been made three or four times and the same message comes back. It is a very, very difficult issue for a minister to manage at that level. I do not believe it should be something that a minister should have to sort out, to be honest.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Can I just ask another question with regard to resourcing? You have come up with a waste strategy. It is very clear that there is a lot of good thinking in the community and in industry and so on about the technologies.

Mr Carbon: Yes.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I do not want to pre-empt the WA waste strategy, but what kind of model are you proposing for WA? More specifically, how many officers would you need, and for how long, to complete the task of getting a complete waste strategy for Western Australia?

Ms Grimoldby: Thank you. The legislation requires that a draft waste strategy is presented and signed off by the minister, and then there is a three-month public consultation process during which time all the stakeholders have the opportunity to have input. We are pretty well at the point now at which the minister has signed off on it, and we are about to embark on the three-month consultation. We are employing consultants to run that, because it is a better option in terms of that separation, rather than using very limited staff time trying to be involved in a very extensive consultation.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Were consultants engaged also to put the strategy together?

Ms Grimoldby: To assist, yes. The consultants undertook some preliminary work and prepared an initial draft, and the Waste Authority then actually rewrote it, with assistance from two of the staff members from DEC.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Okay.

Ms Grimoldby: Following the three-month consultation, the Waste Authority will have the opportunity to review and revise it, and then to seek another month's consultation on those amendments, at which point we will then provide it to the minister for signing off. Once it is signed off, we can develop a business plan for implementation. The draft, at the moment, has not undergone that three-month consultation.

In answer to your question about how long would it take, I do not believe that we are in a position to answer that now. I also think that it is fine to have a strategy, but it is a 10-year strategy. It will be reviewed after five years, and it will be an ongoing program. To consider that all waste will be dealt

with effectively within 10 years, or that there would be no waste in 10 years, is probably not realistic. This particular draft strategy does not deal with some of the wastes that are covered in the Waste Authority's remit under the act. It does not deal with nuclear waste or agricultural waste.

In the draft at the moment there are a number of key dates that we believe will have a significant impact—particularly on construction, demolition and household organics—and that would be by 2014. That is the same date, I think, for a real shift in non-metropolitan waste management. While that is a very minor portion of the waste, we do have vast numbers of landfills in the non-metropolitan area that are no longer acceptable in terms of community standards. Dealing with that will be expensive, and it will be slow, and it will require bringing the local governments and the community with us.

Hon KATE DOUST: I note that some of your other functions are to act as an advocate and to advise and make recommendations to the minister. The issue that prompted this was the problems at the SMRC. Given that the number of these types of facilities in our various areas is growing, where issues arise and where there are constant complaints from ratepayers who are not getting any satisfaction, would the Waste Authority have the capacity to become involved and perhaps act as an advocate on behalf of community with those organisations to take those matters up or to make recommendations to the minister or to the department about how to address those matters, or do you take more of a hands-off approach to those sorts of matters?

Mr Carbon: In the absence of staff, it is pretty well hands-off.

Hon KATE DOUST: I should frame that differently. If you had the full operating capacity with staff—a fully functioning staff complement—would you be able to perform those functions?

Mr Carbon: We would be able to give general advice, but the situation now is that the Environmental Protection Act, which has been added on to and added on to, provides about six or seven different mechanisms that the department can choose to use for coercive control, without any guidance. Then there is the WARR act, which again says this is the mechanism. Of course, under the WARR act, for a waste facility the expectation is that the coercive part of the department seeks advice from the Waste Authority on managing these issues. The department has not chosen to use that route for the SMRC, but that avenue sits there as a possibility. One of the recommendations in our report is that there is such a plethora of options—without, we think, an appropriate system of checks and balances—that we think that guidance on that point would be helpful.

There is also another body, the Environmental Protection Authority. In the case of the SMRC, the Environmental Protection Authority recommended to the minister the conditions that should apply to it. The minister set legally-binding conditions, and those conditions had within them a mechanism that sets out what should happen if something goes wrong. Those conditions have not been followed either. It has been chosen to go another way. It is a question of whether your objective is to set yourself up for a prosecution, or whether your objective is something different.

Hon KATE DOUST: Given that a range of different types of facilities are being established here, and given that you were fully staffed and able to do this, would part of your task be, perhaps, to provide guidance on the appropriate type of facility that could operate in Western Australia —

Mr Carbon: Yes.

Hon KATE DOUST: — rather than different types of setups being dropped in because that is the latest thing that is happening somewhere else? I would imagine that what might work well in Western Australia might work differently in New South Wales or Queensland.

Mr Carbon: Or in different parts of the world. I have a suspicion that Western Australians—indeed, all Australians—have shown a reticence towards waste-to-energy schemes that involve an incinerator, not necessarily because of technical reasons, but just because they do not like them. There is no doubt that since the 1995 inquiry into waste, with all the recommendations that this, this and this needs to be done, the first thing it said was that we need to start diverting green waste. That

is happening extremely well, but unfortunately in the case of the SMRC I believe that the source of the most recent odours—or that is what they tell me—was not the actual resource recovery plant, but the green waste. The secondary treatment of waste is something that we are looking at as an objective for all of the metro regions as part of the strategy going forward. What is actually meant by secondary treatment keeps improving with all the developing technologies around the place. It is my experience that both industry and local government actually do better at doing the technology than an advisory body that comes in says do this and do this. We can help, we can facilitate and we can provide seed money—as we do—for people to study things, but it is usually the doers who know more about how to do these things than we advisers.

Ms Grimoldby: If I could just add that while there are currently three waste treatment facilities in metropolitan Perth, there is another one that is in the process of being constructed, and there are at least two more, possibly three, where sites have been identified and the regional councils concerned are in the process of either developing tenders or tender documents, or investigating the preferred options.

[10.10 am]

The site selection process that has been undertaken in the past four or five years for resource recovery facilities has been extensive, arduous and detailed and has involved substantial consultation. The difficulty those resource recovery facilities will face is where their buffer zones, or their separation distances, are eroded through decisions made by external bodies such as the WAPC.

Hon KATE DOUST: We noted that in a couple of other states they are finding that a long-term waste recovery centre is now being encroached on by development, and they are waiting to see the impact of that. I note in your submission that you talk about buffer zones, and I think you make specific comment on the buffer zone area around the SMRC. I think the residential area, or part of it, was probably there prior to that facility going up anyway.

Ms Grimoldby: I am sure the SMRC submission can speak on that in more detail. That facility was basically built on a landfill, so the buffer zones have obviously changed. Similarly, in Armadale the Rivers Regional Council looked at putting a resource recovery facility on the Hopkinson Road landfill. There is housing well and truly within 200 metres of the tip face of existing landfill, but that land was reclassified to urban infill.

The CHAIR: It is spreading too.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: These technologies by their nature are dirty and smelly to some extent. A range of technology platforms are available to clean up the waste stream and to downstream process. What is your view about the difference between having regional councils own and operate them off their own bat or having industry build and operate these things as a mechanism with the knowledge and skills that they bring to it?

Mr Carbon: I think both models have strength. If you compare the situation today to that in the 1995-96 inquiry, the regional councils are now real and effective. Instead of everyone having their own little tip we have landfills and we have sufficient money to have resources —

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: They are learning by doing and to some extent that might be seen to be the problem at the SMRC.

Mr Carbon: Most of the western world is learning about this. We as a society have put an expectation on local governments that they change from throwing rubbish into a rubbish dump through to having a facility that does better. It is inevitable that there is a learning process, and there is no doubt that the SMRC has been a pioneer in doing that and in the diversion of waste and CO₂ capture. There are issues. I am not conceding that the odour issues necessarily come from the treatment plant, by the way. I have a fairly strong expectation that the current odours come from managing green waste in a pile next door to it, but that is something other people can deal with. In

New Zealand, where I do have experience, prior to either people or local government doing it, they had efficiencies and expertise from private people doing it. But when they got to the stage of wanting to change some of their approaches, because society changed or there were infills, they found they were heavily constrained by long-term contracts. There are plusses and minuses. There is greater flexibility with a local government that is more answerable to its people. If you ask a private contractor to spend \$100 million—that is what you are looking at—you need to lock yourself into an ironclad long-term contract.

Hon WENDY DUNCAN: In New South Wales we saw that the state government was very actively involved in waste management. Do you think that perhaps waste management needs to be managed at a higher level than at the local government level; that perhaps a more overall strategic approach would be better, or do regional councils have sufficient resources and expertise?

Mr Carbon: I think there is a role for state government through the Waste Authority to be strategic about looking at the long-term issues of planning for waste five, 10 or 20 years out. I strongly believe, however, that regional governments, supported by their respective local governments, are miles in front of us in state government on all the how-to things. I think they do it well. It is unfortunate that we are having this discussion in the shadow of an odour issue because I think that waste management in Western Australia has come a long way, and that most of the credit for it should go to local government and regional government in particular.

Hon WENDY DUNCAN: It was noted when we were in NSW that Western Australia is doing extremely well, especially considering our levy is so low compared with their levies, and it is because of the proactive nature of our local councils.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: There are the economies of scale from forming regional alliances.

Mr Carbon: It is also the approach. There has been collectivism towards managing the issue, which is admired elsewhere. In an early part of our submission we say that the management of waste has been managed so well in most cases that it is taken for granted. We think that is pretty important because one of our recommendations is that waste should be collected and that the management of waste should be deemed to be an essential service. It is something that is as bread and butter to us as good health.

Hon WENDY DUNCAN: What are the implications of saying it should be deemed as an essential service; does that involve legislative change?

Mr Carbon: Yes; in the opinion of the authority, it needs recognition somewhere. For example, the Waste Authority believes that—this specifically relates to the SMRC—the capacity to turn off an essential service is something that should be done with an appropriate system of checks and balances.

Hon WENDY DUNCAN: Quite a few of the submissions we received talked about inconsistencies between areas and how they actually manage waste at the back gate and that we should bring in standardised rubbish bin identification and so on. What are your feelings about that and, if that is desirable, how do we achieve it with the various regional councils managing waste?

Mr Carbon: I think that the most outstanding inconsistency people talk about is that the City of Stirling chooses to have a one-bin system. It is probably the only significant shire in Australia that does that. There are lots of views about whether that is doable or not. It is probably locked into its long-term contract in the treatment plant that it set up there. There are divergent views about whether it should be made to do this. As for the rest of them, I think we have amazing uniformity in Western Australia. Although some of the how-to bits are different because of the different geography, just about everyone has the capacity to separate the waste at the source. There are questions about whether we should have two or three bins, but they have the capacity to separate the waste at the source. All the regional governments are moving towards a secondary treatment of waste and all of them are facing the same sort of problem. Again, I think this brings it back to the

Waste Authority. But there are problem wastes out there that we are not managing well. The waste management of glass is appalling in Western Australia.

Hon WENDY DUNCAN: And of batteries.

Mr Carbon: Batteries and tyres. Oil was an acute problem two years ago. It may be under control now but we need to keep watch on it. There is a series of problem wastes where it is appropriate for the system to get together led, I think, by the Waste Authority to say, "Let's see how we're going to manage that". To get back to Hon Paul Llewellyn's question earlier about which we do first, I do not think it matters much whether it is oil, batteries or glass. It is the approach you take to one of those and the expectation in the WARR act is that it enables a mechanism that is associated with some form of up-front charge that is then used either as a deposit system, an investment system or whatever in order to manage that. But right now the reality is that most of the packaging that comes into Western Australia is imported. Our chances of managing that are very little. Maybe the federal government can have some input, but having got to that there is not likely to be a return to the time when we reuse glass bottles. It will not happen. Health concerns will stop us doing that. There are a whole series of other things for which we will not have a domestic market. Therefore, I do not think it is reasonable to tell regional government to manage those sorts of things. I think, at our level, the state seems to be looking at those sorts of things collectively.

[10.20 am]

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: You talked about effectively picking the difficult waste streams. It seems that there is a consensus in the industry that e-waste—electronic waste—should be treated. Do the strategies make specific recommendations about extended product liability mechanisms and implementing specific measurable and achievable time frames?

Mr Carbon: Yes. E-waste sits high on the priority list.

Ms Grimoldby: It must be remembered that this is a draft that requires community consultation. The community might say that our time frames are too long. For example, I think the community is fed up with the inaction regarding container deposit systems. Discussion and work has been undertaken on container deposits on and off over the past 10 years in Western Australia. That requires regulation and government support. Similarly, with extended producer responsibility or product stewardship, e-waste certainly is identified as a priority product. It is a requirement under the act that we identify priority products.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Are you saying that by putting an up-front price on a waste stream, be it deposits for fridges or televisions, that at the back end we will see higher levels of responsibility and recycling?

Mr Carbon: That is the proposal in the draft strategy.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: That is what you would imagine would happen?

Mr Carbon: Yes. An up-front deposit could be a collectable thing, which is a container deposit system, or a source of money, or an exemption for a company that is doing things properly. All of those suggestions are in the draft but it is necessary to regulate the system so that all the players play in the same sandpit. More than 100 people supply electronics in Western Australia. It is no good saying to the four or five that supply 60 per cent of electronics that they must play properly while the rest do not. There must be a cap to make sure that everybody plays the same game.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I will ask a final question. Did you look at the tradable landfill certificate type of arrangements that have been used in other countries to ensure there is a market for —

Mr Carbon: We have not looked at that.

Ms Grimoldby: The metropolitan area has 15 years of landfill left. Our approach is about reusing rather than filling up landfills.

Hon KATE DOUST: On page 16 of your submission you make a number of recommendations to the committee that you would like us to take on board as part of our inquiry. Most of them are fairly self-explanatory but you might want to go through a couple of them in more detail so that we will have a better understanding of the outcomes you would like to achieve.

Mr Carbon: I thank you for giving me this opportunity. There are recommendations at three places in the submission. The recommendations on page 16 relates to some general issues that we have highlighted; for example, the buffer area. This is the first opportunity for the Parliament to recognise the significant progress that has happened to date. A lot of actions that have taken place were a response to the questions asked during the 1996 inquiry. Tasks were set then and they have now been achieved. We are suggesting that Parliament could recognise those achievements. The next recommendation relates to issues from the SMRC. I add the caveat that the authority believes that if someone causes pollution, the appropriate action to take is prosecution. The court system provides checks and balances. By happenstance, people can take a plethora of activities for coercive control, some of which are of significant moment. The authority is recommending that consideration be given to all of those mechanisms so that the appropriate checks and balances can be put in place according to the consequences of the action.

Ms Grimoldby: The recommendations on page 31 go to the heart of whether the Waste Authority can deliver on the expectations. The authority would seek your support for that.

Hon KATE DOUST: Given the level of frustration you have experienced to date with getting that assistance put in place, how much longer will the authority continue if it cannot get that support?

Mr Carbon: I believe it would be untenable to go into the new financial year without sorting out this situation. That is three months away.

Hon KATE DOUST: Does this have anything to do with the three per cent efficiency cuts?

Mr Carbon: No; quite the contrary.

Hon KATE DOUST: I just thought I would ask.

Mr Carbon: The authority offered to take all the activities and costs of the department and to relocate it to a separate building and register it as an efficiency cut. That was a letter to which I have not yet had a response.

The CHAIR: Mr Carbon, I thank you for your attendance today. We have a series of hearings today and a series of questions that we did not have time to ask you. Would you mind if we put them on notice to you so that you could provide the committee with your response?

Mr Carbon: We can certainly do that and I promise that the turnaround time will be virtually immediate. There is a typo in our submission that might be of moment if you are trying to chase it up. On page 21 under paragraph 3.4.4, the SMRC licence approval, the third sentence reads “the RRRC approved by the minister” but it should read “approval”. It is a legal document.

The CHAIR: Mr Carbon, would you be available to appear before the committee at a later date after we have conducted a number of other hearings?

Mr Carbon: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 10.27 am