

EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO THE CAUSE AND EXTENT OF LEAD POLLUTION IN THE ESPERANCE AREA

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN AT ESPERANCE THURSDAY, 3 MAY 2007

SESSION ONE

Members

Dr K.D. Hames (Acting Chairman)

Mr T.G. Stephens

Mrs D.J. Guise

Mr T.K. Waldron

Mr M.P. Whitely

Dr G.G. Jacobs

Mr P. Papalia

Hearing commenced at 9.00 am**WOODHOUSE, MRS MAXINE MARY****Private individual, examined:****WOODHOUSE, MR JACK FREDERICK****Private individual, examined:****WOODHOUSE, MS NATASHA LOUISE****Private individual, examined:**

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Welcome to the hearing today. We certainly appreciate people coming along to witness this event. I will repeat for those who were not here yesterday that this is a committee of the Parliament and operates in a similar way to the Parliament and to councils. Members of the public are welcome to be here but are not able to participate. I ask members of the public to refrain from engaging in conversations or clapping - although quiet cheering is okay - and I ask that all mobile phones be turned off. We have before us the Woodhouse family, who will make a submission. I welcome them.

The committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the house itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of Parliament. You must speak directly into the microphone to be heard. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read an information for witnesses briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before parliamentary committees?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions regarding your appearance before the committee today?

The Witnesses: No.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: We have received an initial submission from you, but you have subsequently provided another form that is in two parts. The first is corrections and additions to the J.&M. Woodhouse submission, and the second is a separate submission from Natasha Woodhouse. It would be best if you spoke to your submissions. We have looked at government departments and have visited the mine site and the port, and we have met with the Esperance Port Authority and Magellan Metals. We are now very keen to hear from members of the public who have been affected in some way by the lead pollution. It would be best if we first understood your story before hearing about any ideas you might have about the cause of the pollution or the consequences and management of it.

Mrs Woodhouse: Thank you. I have a document for the Standing Committee on Education and Health titled "corrections and additions to the J. and M. Woodhouse submission". Paragraph 7 on page 2 states -

Report re birds dying was in March/April 2006 and sighted at the port authority public car park near the ocean.

Paragraph 3 on page three states -

We were away from Esperance for three weeks and then it was just over six weeks before we had our blood tested and in that time we did not use the rainwater and the lead had stopped being loaded at the port. Therefore, lead exposure would have been just residual dust after that time. The health department took swabs from ledges outside the home and we have not been given any information regarding those swabs.

Paragraph 6 on page 4 states -

We received written confirmation of our lead levels after the submission was faxed to you, because I requested them. A copy of one of the letters is attached. Note the safe range from the World Health Organization and the result of the blood test and the statement that your result falls within this safe range.

It was actually over the safe range. Paragraph 3 on page 5 states -

Building commenced in December 2005, not October 2005.

On page 6 it says -

Nickel levels in the rainwater tanks, 500 metres -

That is approximately -

from the port were 0.012 milligrams a litre. The guidelines state 0.02.

Paragraph 4 should read that the thunderstorms were in November 2006, and not October 2006. The last paragraph on page 6 says -

The port phoned early yesterday morning and said that they would empty our rainwater tanks. The health department told them that they could empty them onto the garden. The port phoned late yesterday afternoon and they would be at our home at 3.30 pm to discuss the emptying of the rainwater tanks.

I am just saying that something has been done. Thank you.

[9.10 am]

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I am happy that you have made amendments to the original but are there any words that you want to say about the original and its contents and your concerns?

Mrs Woodhouse: Jack has -

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: The point is the public here are probably interested in hearing what you have had to say and it would be good to get it. We do not make these public but if you are happy for the public to be aware of what you said, now is a good opportunity for you to do that and then it will be on the record.

Mrs Woodhouse: Jack has that information.

Mr Woodhouse: I just have a short summary of the submission that we have put in. We farmed in the Esperance shire for 40 years and moved to Esperance in April 2004. We moved into our new home, which is 500 metres approximately from the port on 13 December 2006. Our 27 000-litre capacity new rainwater tanks were dry until the storm that started on 4 January. We used the rainwater for the entire house, including drinking, from 6 January until 26 February, which is approximately seven weeks. The water in the rainwater tank tested at 0.3 milligrams per litre of lead, which is 30 times above the World Health Organization's safe limit, and only 0.012 milligrams per litre of nickel. I was staggered at the results. The roof was washed twice in

November 2006 from quite heavy downpours from thunderstorms before the tanks were connected. The much lower nickel levels suggest the lead carbonate is very readily moved by the wind and maybe the dust cloud that killed the birds in mid-December contaminated our roof. We had another shock when our blood levels were above 10, registering 11 for me and 13 for Maxine. The Department of Environment and Conservation has taken dust samples from the exterior of our house and has also re-tested the rainwater of all our tanks. We still do not have the results. I would like to add that we did not know that lead was going through the port until the bird deaths were attributed to lead poisoning. We did hear that lead would be exported in the future, the same as we have heard about rare earths and woodchips. We do normally get the twice-weekly *Esperance Express* but never noticed anything that stated that lead was going through the port. I do not remember seeing an advertisement for the port open day on 18 December 2004, but at only one week prior to Christmas, we would have had other priorities. We did attend the opening of one of the iron ore sheds but were away when the new sulfur shed was on display. I feel that our high blood levels are attributable mainly to dust inhalation as we spent a lot of time in 2006 sweeping and cleaning up after the builders. We only drank the rainwater for seven weeks. I had a note in here: friends of ours noticed several dead and dying birds in the car park next to the port in March and April 2006. They notified the DEC, but mid-December 2006 was when they died in the thousands, and they are still dying. Had we been notified of the dangers of excessive lead carbonate dust, we could have taken precautions, such as worn dust masks when we were cleaning and sweeping, and certainly would not have drunk the rainwater, and maybe our blood levels would be much lower.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Did you want to make a comment, Natasha?

Ms N. Woodhouse: Yes. I will just give my experiences, what has happened. I am a mother of two children who had elevated blood levels, so their blood lead levels were six and nine micrograms per decilitre. We live about three kilometres from the port. When I received the news about my children's elevated blood levels, I was told, "Don't worry about it." All I did was I wanted to research. I tried to think about situations where my children would have picked up lead contamination. Was it at home, breathing in the dust, or in the adventureland park right near the port, where they played on the equipment and also sometimes ate the dirt? Was it caused by drinking the rainwater at my parents' house or even drinking the rainwater at our house? So we stopped drinking the rainwater, we stopped going to the parks and we tried to keep as far away from the port as possible. When I found out the results of my children, I was also told that the half-life for lead in the blood is 21 days. It was more than 21 days since my children had been drinking the rainwater and also more than 21 days since the previous lead shipment, where a lot of fine dust would have been in the air around town. The worry for me is that my children were most likely higher than 10 micrograms per decilitre 21 days prior to the test being carried out. I have been told that the measurement for lead in blood has an error level of two, so with my older child having nine, he could be above 10 or he could be seven, with which I would feel a lot more relieved. But if it was above 10, maybe I would have got a little bit more recognition. When finding out the results for my children, I was also told that the blood cell dies and that the body excretes the lead when it dies, because it is attached to the blood cell. But I have since found out that it can easily travel to the tissues, particularly the kidneys, the brain, or even to the bone, and essentially it can affect every system in the human body. The lead can come out of the bone when the body is stressed and later in life when going through menopause or when getting older, or when pregnant even; the lead that is in us will always affect us. I am worried about how much it is going to be affecting my children and my parents. When it involves my two children, it is impossible not to worry about it, particularly when you read the studies that say that subtle levels below 10 micrograms per decilitre are extremely harmful. There are studies in the United States that have concluded that subtle levels of lead above two micrograms per decilitre can increase the likelihood of death in later years by heart attack or stroke. When speaking to other parents, some are too scared to speak out because it

may affect their businesses or it may affect their incomes, or their business dealings with the port, and they do not want that relationship to be upset. It is a very sad thing that in these cases money has become more important than the health and wellbeing of not only adults, but also children. The difficult thing with lead is the invisible nature of it. It is medically invisible. You do not see people dying in the street. It has more long-term effects than that, more subtle effects like lowered IQ, abnormal cognitive development and behaviour, as well as learning difficulties. There are neurological deficits associated with exposure to lead in early childhood that may persist into later adolescence. At the meeting at the Civic Centre held by government departments about three weeks ago, we asked the Department of Environment and Conservation why there were no signs at the beaches near the port telling tourists not to go to the beach or in the water. Why were there no signs in the playground right near the port for the children not to play there, for the locals and also for tourists? Children are always eating the dirt and playing at ground level where the lead dust would have settled. The DEC told us, "That's not our department; go and ask the Department of Health." We went over to the Health Department representatives and they told us, "That's not our department; ask the DEC."

[9.20 am]

Another point that I want to put across is that there has been a large focus on the transportation of the lead into the town and unloading it onto the conveyor belt, which was not fully enclosed, but there has been very little focus on the exiting of the kibbles that were holding the lead from town. After the kibbles were emptied, there would be dust residue left. How much dust flew over the town when the kibbles were moving away from the port and back to the mine? Even if water was sprayed over them, by the time the train left the port, the fine dust residue would be blowing out of the kibble due to a vacuum effect.

I have been told by a scientist in Melbourne, Aaron Gingis, that most atmospheric measurement devices measure dust levels above 10 microns particulate matter. Even if it had been measured at the port, it might not have got those finer particles of lead so our body's natural defence systems - the nose and mouth - can detect larger particles of dust, those above 10 microns, and they can be seen by us. It is those finer lead particles that cannot be seen and can be as low as 2.5 microns particulate matter that bypass our body's natural defence systems and enter the respiratory system directly.

Even when the port was loading lead in offshore winds - it was blowing away from town and across the water - it may have affected us. There have been studies on dust movement in offshore winds. I have been told that the turbulence in the air will hold the dust and it may drop it down somewhere, not far away from where its journey started. This again highlights the invisible nature of lead where, in this case, it is environmentally invisible. We have not been able to see the toxic dust that has entered our bodies and gone directly into our respiratory systems. I think the invisible nature of lead makes it almost easy for some residents to become blasé and say things like, "I've got more to worry about than a little bit of lead." The sorts of comments that I have heard show that some people have switched off from researching or listening any more about the effects of lead. Their coping mechanism is to become ignorant, which I find very sad as adults and children will be affected for the rest of their lives.

In conclusion, I have some thought-provoking comments. When the port had its lead spills and high levels of lead were recorded in its dust monitoring equipment, it did not report this or ensure that the townspeople were safe from it. How can we trust the port in anything that it does now? I still have brown dust on my washing line and thick brown sludge in the bottom of my rainwater tank. That is the dust that we can see. I would like to know how much dust is blowing around that we cannot see. I will never know how much my children are affected by the lead but I will have to work very hard to ensure that they do not have learning difficulties. I will not be able to prevent the possibility of their health being affected, leading to heart attack or stroke.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Natasha. That was an excellent submission. You covered some very important areas. Your submission encapsulated all the areas that we are particularly concerned about as a committee, particularly on the medical side. We have also been looking at the research coming out of the US about levels from zero to 10 micrograms per decilitre. We will investigate that further. There are levels higher than that in other towns around Australia that are still exporting lead and levels like that are almost regarded as a matter of course. We certainly do not intend to do that. We intend to investigate that with great seriousness. The issue of invisible dust is one that we have raised, particularly yesterday when talking to the port authority. It has a licence requirement to ensure that no visible dust gets out of the port. To my mind, that is an easy out for companies where invisible dust, particularly from lead and a low micron size that you are discussing, is more dangerous than the visible, which will tend to settle.

All those things are particularly important to us. I was interested in your comments about the wind blowing dust offshore. It is not something that we have given any thought to before but it is a very interesting comment. The reality is that whatever way it is done, that dust is out there and we need to find out and make sure that the DEC and the health department are working properly together to make sure that everyone is fully aware of the dust - where it is, where it has gone, whether it has gone or whether it is still present, what can be done to clean it up and coordinate health assessments for those people who have been affected by it, not just the lead but also the nickel. Thank you for that. A few members have questions.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: Natasha, who spoke to you about the lead levels of your family? Some of the advice given, such as, "Don't worry about it," concerns me greatly. Can you give us a bit more information about who has spoken to you about your family's situation?

Ms N. Woodhouse: The health department rang me with the results. They were going to come to my house because the children's levels were above five.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: Is this the team that came down to Esperance to do the testing?

Ms N. Woodhouse: Yes. When they said they were going to come around, they rang me and said, "Your children's levels are above five but don't worry about it."

Mrs D.J. GUISE: So you were given no advice about anything concerning your environment, things you could do to be a bit proactive about adding protection to your family? Was any advice like that given to you?

Ms N. Woodhouse: When they came to the house, they did an assessment of how the children may have got such high levels. They asked me whether I fished and whether I made lead sinkers. They asked me about the age of the house, if it had lead paint. It was a newer house than those built in the 1950s. They asked a range of questions. They said the obvious, like, "Don't drink your rainwater."

Mrs D.J. GUISE: Was there an investigation of the outside area where the children might play, toys that are outside and those sorts of things?

Ms N. Woodhouse: They wanted to look in the sandpit but that was covered most of the time so they did take samples. A person came a few days later to take samples of where the children play inside the house, outside the house and in the garden. I do not know those results.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: How long ago were those tests done?

Ms N. Woodhouse: Probably about three weeks. They do have the results, because I rang Perth yesterday. I spoke to somebody who said she had seen them but somebody had to ring me back to tell me what they were. I have not had much luck. I have to do all the phoning to get my results.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I was concerned that you had not been offered the services of a toxicologist or someone to analyse whether there was another source of lead, firstly, and then give you advice

about removing any further exposure. Were you given any advice on filtration as a means of utilising the water supply from your tanks?

Ms N. Woodhouse: No, they just told us to stop drinking the rainwater.

Mr P. PAPALIA: There are filtration devices that filter out heavy metals.

Ms N. Woodhouse: There is no way that I wanted to use that. If it was just me, I might think about it but not with the kids. I filter the town water off my own back.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: This is a question that you can all answer but I would like Maxine and Jack to respond first so we share it out. We have been advised by a number of people in the community that they have knowledge of spills. I notice that Natasha referred to it as well. Do you have any advice of any spills that have occurred when loading the lead carbonate? If you do, can you give us an indication of how that knowledge came to you and when those spills occurred? If you have that knowledge at all, we would appreciate it.

[9.30 am]

Mr Woodhouse: I do not have any knowledge of any spills because I did not know that lead was being exported until after the birds died. Since then we have heard different stories come from the port originally - I guess port employees - but it is probably third or fourth-hand by the time we hear it.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: So no direct knowledge?

Mr Woodhouse: No.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: What about you, Natasha? You refer to it in your submission. Have you direct knowledge of a spill in the harbour of the port? Maxine, I will go to you first and then Natasha.

Mrs Woodhouse: I just have to find it.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: It is on page 3, the third paragraph from the bottom.

Mrs Woodhouse: No, once again that was just hearsay. I did not read that particular thing in the paper at all.

Mr M.P. WHITELY: I have a question about the cleaning of the rainwater tanks. Natasha, you said there was a sludge left in the bottom. Jack, you make mention, I think, to the cleaning process. Was that simply emptying the rainwater tanks or did they get there and flush the tanks out? From what you have said, Natasha, obviously they did not. I would like you to elaborate.

Mr Woodhouse: No, they have not commenced cleaning the water tanks yet. Yesterday morning we had a phone call from the port and they said they were going to start with our tank towards the end of the week. We have an appointment at 3.30 this afternoon and they are going to come and have a look at our situation to see how they can empty them. I was told yesterday morning that the port authority had permission from the Department of Health that they could empty it onto the garden. We are in a new house and we do not have a garden yet. We have mainly brick paving.

Mr M.P. WHITELY: Natasha, you mentioned it being empty, I think, and having sludge at the bottom.

Ms N. Woodhouse: Yes, when we lived at the Esplanade - it is down right close to the port - you just empty it as you normally do with the water first and at the bottom there was a brownie - just thick like mud. That had been left on the bottom of the tank.

Mr M.P. WHITELY: Not government agencies - you actually emptied it? Is that right?

Ms N. Woodhouse: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Did you get that tested, perchance?

Ms N. Woodhouse: That was another thing. They were not actually interested in testing the sludge. Because I had had a filter on my rainwater tank they were not interested in testing that because they said to me that there will probably be lead in it anyway and they cannot tell how many days there was water running through it to compare that against how much lead is in the filter.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Nonetheless, it would have been very interesting, would it not, to know how much lead was actually in the sludge? We suspect a fair bit but nobody knows.

Ms N. Woodhouse: Yes. With the rainwater tank, that was probably like a year and a half or two years ago that it was emptied. This time we have not emptied it because we were just waiting for our results and what would happen from that.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: You are about to have your tank emptied, are you not?

Mr Woodhouse: Yes, towards the end of the week they have told me.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Can you ensure that they test whatever is in the bottom of that tank? You cannot force them to but I would certainly appreciate you making a strong request that they do so.

Mr Woodhouse: They do what - test?

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Whatever is in the bottom of the tank - if there is any sludge in the bottom of your tank. Your tank has only been connected since November so I would be particularly interested to know if there are high lead levels in the bottom of your tank. I expect there would be.

Mr Woodhouse: We can arrange for samples to be taken.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Firstly, I just wanted to say thank you very much for your submission. I am sure, along with all the other members of the committee, that we all found it an extremely powerful submission that you have put together for us and the effort you have taken. I am convinced it will be of value to your community. I wanted to clarify a point, which is the point about the emptying of the tanks. Can you tell me who did the emptying of the tank or is proposing to do the emptying of the tank? In your case it was yourself emptying it but in discussions with an agency?

Ms N. Woodhouse: When we emptied our tank was when we lived down on the Esplanade and we did that before we heard about what was happening with lead. The rainwater tank that we have now is still sitting there.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: So, for Jack and Maxine, is it the port authority that is organising for the emptying of your tank?

Mr Woodhouse: Yes, it is. They have got a contractor. The contractor phoned me last night that he wanted a meeting with me this afternoon so they could view the tank and see how they were going to get the water out.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Right. I reiterate the comments of the chair that it is important that the evidence that is contained within the tanks be available for analysis and that it is not just simply discharged into a garden. This is important evidence about the nature of the contamination of your own assets and the contamination of the wider community. It is important. I am sure there will be people listening to what you have had to say to me now who I expect will relay very quickly to the people involved in this that this is important evidence of the extent of the contamination in the town. Understanding the sludge at the bottom of the tank is a vital piece of the jigsaw.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Thanks. Can I just reiterate that if there are any complications along the way and there are suggestions that it has not been tested, if you could perhaps just collect a sample yourself and let us know. We will make sure that that is sorted out.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: Jack, just two questions to you. You mentioned that the Department of Environment and Conservation had taken dust samples for testing and you have not got those results back. Did they indicate they are going to advise you of those results and when did they take those tests?

Mr Woodhouse: They took the swabs at different areas outside the house. It was the same day that we had the meeting at the civic centre here. It was a PR meeting, I guess. It was that afternoon when they took the swabs. I do not think they intended to send us the results but I think we should have them because we are the ones who have to live with it.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: Just another thing. You mentioned about the possibility of putting the water on your garden if you had a garden - you have a new house and have not got one yet. If you had a garden, would you be comfortable with that?

Mr Woodhouse: Certainly not.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I thank Natasha, Maxine and Jack. Because of your interest in this, once they pump the water out of your tank and take the sludge out of it, from a community point of view, have you any knowledge of what they are going to do with that product? In your dealings with this have you, perhaps, found out or asked a question about what is done with this product once it is pumped out of your tank - and the sludge - from the community's point of view?

Mr Woodhouse: Yes, I did. It was the environmental officer from the port who spoke to me yesterday. I did ask her what they were going to do with the water from the tanks. She said that they had permission from the Department of Health to put it on the garden. I said that we do not have a garden to put it on and asked where they were going to put it. Jokingly, I said over there onto the wharf, I guess. I have no idea where they are going to put it.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: If anyone is listening, there is obviously an appropriate place to put it and that is over the piles of drying out dust within the shed because those water levels are going down. It is becoming more dusty and it contains lead. That would be the logical place to put it, I would imagine. Those organisations will sort that out, I am sure.

[9.40 am]

Mrs Woodhouse: Can I make a comment?

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Yes, please.

Mrs Woodhouse: I thought I had it written down on the additions, but I would also like to say that we received in the mail some information from Dr Jacobs - for which we thank him - regarding how to deal with the lead. That came just in the last week, after the submission was put in.

Ms N. Woodhouse: The member for Wanneroo was asking about the spills. I just wanted to say that my partner works very close to the port, and he has seen what is happening there. He saw them put a new piece of bitumen over there and take away the gravel. He did not know where they were taking it to. It was just in one section of the port, and they put in bitumen over the top. He did not know why they were doing that, but it makes me wonder what actually happened where that gravel was, and why they were taking it away and putting new bitumen on top.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: Thank you.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: I had a question put to me about pools. Natasha, I ask if your children use a paddle pool at home or play with the hose.

Ms N. Woodhouse: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Is that a common occurrence?

Ms N. Woodhouse: Over summer they play in the paddle pool.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: The water they use - would that be from the tank?

Ms N. Woodhouse: No.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Scheme water?

Ms N. Woodhouse: Yes, town water.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: Natasha, how often would you go down to the park with the children, near the port? Do you frequent that quite often?

Ms N. Woodhouse: I have been there quite a lot, because we go to the tearooms quite a lot, so it is probably once a week. My older child, particularly, he would eat just a lot of dirt.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: Kids will be kids.

Ms N. Woodhouse: Yes, that is right. A good sample for the environment, I think. That is a big worry of mine.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: I have to say that it is certainly not medically proven, by any means, but there is some suggestion that children who are particularly low in iron will eat dirt, and, of course, anaemic children are much more likely to absorb lead as a substitute for iron. I have another question. Other than the contact you have had from Dr Jacobs, what other information has been made generally available to the community?

Ms N. Woodhouse: The health department has given us information on what is nickel and what is lead - I do not know, like a couple of sheets about it - when we went to get the blood tests.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Have you had any information about potential health effects of lead and zinc, other than what you have got yourself from the Internet?

Ms N. Woodhouse: When they came to my house I said to them what I had found, and they did not want to tell me anything about any sort of health effects below 10. Their stance seemed to be more trying to pacify me, because I had read a lot, I had looked a lot on the Internet and I told them straight out that I know it has certain effects below 10.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: As I said, we will be investigating that more, but you have received any other information, such as letters.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: I wanted to know whether the community had been sent a mail-out, if you like, from the Department of Health or the Department of Environment and Conservation, giving you advice. Other than the day that was held recently for information, have any of you received any letters giving you advice, from either of those departments of environment and health?

Mrs Woodhouse: We had the results of the Department of Health's rainwater sampling.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: No generic letter sent to the community at large that you would have received?

Mrs Woodhouse: It would not be the community at large; it would just be to the people who had their rainwater tanks tested, I presume, and there is nothing in there.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: But no other broad advice given to the community where you would have received one of those letters as a matter of course?

Mrs Woodhouse: No. The blood testing results - I gave you a letter - told us what to avoid, all sources of lead contamination, which was fairly basic; other than that -.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: What about any letters for you particularly, with higher levels, or for the general community that you are aware of, for cleaning up dust and reducing the risk? If someone does not have a high lead level but has dust in their house and perhaps has not vacuumed for a while; obviously, you would not want to vacuum if you are next to a house where there are frequent high lead levels. Has there been any general instruction about trying to reduce that risk for the general population?

Mrs Woodhouse: To my knowledge, absolutely none.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: Can I also ask the three of you: you have mentioned getting the local newspaper. Have there been any flyers in that local paper or any adverts that are giving similar sort of advice to what we are talking about, in terms of an advert or a leaflet for general consumption - anything like that that you have seen for the community?

Mrs Woodhouse: There has been nothing from the port authority; no advertisement from the port authority telling us what to do.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: Nothing from health or environment that you are aware of? We will ask everybody today probably.

Mr Woodhouse: I do remember seeing a leaflet - I do not know who it was put out by - about information on lead and also nickel, but there was no information on how to clean it up.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: That might be the port authority. We will check. Thank you very much.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: The health department has been running advertisements at the cost of about \$500 000 a year in all of the local community newspapers, letting us know how wonderful our current health system is. Have there been any of those sorts of ads in your local papers previously? These are full-page ads. Has there been anything in the local paper from the health department, using these full-page ads to talk about the issue of lead and nickel dust in Esperance?

Mrs Woodhouse: Not that I am aware of.

Mr Woodhouse: There could possibly have been. We do not look at all the advertisements. We generally look at letters to the editor, especially since the lead crisis in Esperance.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: I want to ask about what now for the future. Obviously, there is lots of work that needs to be done, and interest has been expressed by various members of the community about ongoing health study in Esperance and about the need for such a study that would particularly look at the long-term health effects on children who have had high lead and/or zinc levels. If such a study was to be started, would you be keen to be involved with your children, Natasha, and do you think that would be one thing that could be done to help track, I guess, children into the future to see what health effects there are?

Ms N. Woodhouse: I think that would be a fantastic idea and I would definitely be involved in that study. There was one thing I was reading, actually doing my submission, and it was a study from -

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Not the Busselton study?

Ms N. Woodhouse: No, it was a study from New South Wales - Broken Hill. It was looking at social effects, and the levels were higher, so it would be really interesting to find out for children with generally lower levels and what will be the outcomes of that.

[9.50 am]

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: I think there is a bit of warmth for such a study. People may not be aware that a world-famous study that started years ago in Busselton, Western Australia, is continuing. That study measures all sorts of baseline, normal things in normal children. It has tracked and is continuing to track them through. I forget how long ago it started, member for Roe, but it was a number of years ago - about 30 years. That study has provided baseline information that is now used worldwide in terms of the effects of cholesterol, blood pressure, weight and so on. They have tracked all those things. There is a view that this might be an opportunity for a study, particularly on children, to be commenced here in Esperance.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: Mr Woodhouse, you said - I think in your submission, and I will clarify that - and other people have also said that they did not know that lead was actually going through the port. Do you think that is general in the community, that a lot of the community did not know that lead was actually going through the port? I know there were opportunities to know, but it

seems to me I have heard that said quite a bit. Do you find that quite general amongst the people you know locally?

Mr Woodhouse: Yes, most people I know. I would say that 90 per cent of the population did not know. Naturally, the port workers would have known and, I guess, their friends knew, but we certainly did not know. When they found out that the birds died of lead poisoning we were overseas with a group of Esperance people and none of them knew that lead was being exported through the port.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: The Magellan mine changed its plans in 2004 and proposed to export lead through Esperance instead of Geraldton, as you have probably heard since. A decision was made at that time not to go through the full environmental impact process, including community consultation. The reason given was that it was seen as an insignificant variation to the proposal, because the safeguards required to prevent pollution in Geraldton were the same as those required in Esperance. Would you like to comment on that procedure?

Mr Woodhouse: I do not know whether I can comment.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: You said that you did not have knowledge of lead going through the port of Esperance until later. I guess that means that you had no knowledge of any community consultation process prior to the lead going through that port?

Mr Woodhouse: We did not know about the lead. We did hear, or I read somewhere, that lead might in the future be exported through Esperance. That could have been two or three years ago. We have also heard that maybe rare earth and woodchips are going through Esperance too. I just thought I hope it never happens. We did not know it had started.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Does anyone have any further questions? Thank you very much for taking the time to come here and for your excellent submissions. They will certainly help us a lot.

I am required to read something to you before we finish. As you are aware, the Hansard reporters have been recording everything that has been said today. A copy of the transcript will be sent to you to give you the opportunity to make minor corrections. You cannot change the substance of what you said if you are not quite happy with it. However, if you find slight errors and you think the words are different to the way you said them, then you are free change them. Occasionally we find that when speaking we say a sentence incorrectly and Hansard is very good at making it look right. You have 10 days to get the transcript back, otherwise it will assumed that you are satisfied with the transcript. You do not have to return the transcript if you are satisfied that everything in it is correct. Thanks once again for coming before us today.

Mrs Woodhouse: Thank you.

Mr Woodhouse: Thanks for the opportunity.

Hearing concluded at 9.54 am
