

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

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

THIRD 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**

**HOUSE, HON BARRY,
Member of the Legislative Council,
examined:**

Hon Barry House: I welcome the committee to Margaret River. Thank you for the opportunity to make a statement. As members are probably aware the Gnarabup area has been a local war zone for a decade or more. This is just one of the battlefronts. The siting of the waste water treatment plant so close to the coast - virtually on a primary dune - and to a major tourist area is completely inappropriate. Having said that, I do not want to criticise, firstly, the Water Corporation, which operates the plant in an efficient manner. I understand that the plant is a technically efficient plant. Secondly, I do not want to lay any criticism on the developers, who met their obligations at the time. However, the planning processes that allowed it to happen are a mystery to me, and, I am sure, to a lot of other people. If nothing else, it will provide a good case study for years to come on how not to go about things.

I have represented my electorate in Margaret River for five years. I took a direct interest in this in 1999, nearly three years ago, when there was obvious community concern when clearing was occurring to allow for the upgrade of the treatment plant. I convened a meeting of the major stakeholders - the Water Corporation, the Prevelly Wilderness Association, the developers, the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River and the Margaret River Golf Club. From that meeting we reached an in-principle agreement about certain things. First, that no real short-term solution existed other than that which was happening at the time to expand the treatment ponds, because the growth of Gnarabup demanded extra capacity, which could not be met at that stage. Second, there was a need, ultimately, to do something about the plant to change it from a treatment plant to a transfer-pumping station, and move the effluent somewhere else either through a re-use scheme with the golf club or by pumping it to the new treatment plant just east of Margaret River.

The Water Corporation agreed to investigate and report back on those alternatives and options. It came back early this year - as the committee has already heard - with a series of proposals and comment on the feasibility of the design and the cost of the various options. The option that most people hoped would succeed was the use of treated waste water by the Margaret River Golf Club. That did not happen, which is unfortunate. I would like to think that is not the end of the story, and that it might still happen. We can debate the fairness of this, but the Water Corporation has ended up with the problem, which it must fix on behalf of the community. They did a good job sourcing \$250 000 of federal funds. I hope they are not lost to the proposals for the future. They put a proposal to the local community, principally the golf club. The weakness in that was that although the Water Corporation was to project manage it, it did not seem to contribute any resources to the project. The Water Corporation may not have had resources available. However, the project did not succeed because the Water Corporation was asking too much of the local community. The Margaret River Golf Club was in a position to provide an enormous amount of in-kind support for the project. The Augusta-Margaret River Shire also committed a small amount of funding. That alone was not enough. There needed to be a major injection of funds by the Water Corporation. That was not obvious to me or the golf club at the time. The Water Corporation's asking price for the water was too high. At the end of the day the Water Corporation - it is debatable whether it is fair - has a community obligation to fix the situation, and that will require money. The only source that I can see is a channel that may be available to the Water Corporation.

The CHAIRMAN: How much did the Water Corporation offer to contribute?

Hon Barry House: I understand that it was prepared to contribute very little other than the expertise and the project management. The project may well still succeed if those dollars can be found from a source within the Water Corporation or another source within government. That is the

golf club's hope. Although the club is not specifically relying on the water, it would be a major boost for the golf club. In any long-term solution, Prevelly must be included. The ground water in Prevelly has already been affected and there is some evidence of seepage into the dunes and the ocean. Prevelly must be included in the medium rather than long term.

Hon LOUISE PRATT: You referred to the transition between stages 1 and 2. Obviously that was in response to an urgent crisis. Are you aware of an attempt to find an alternative site before another major injection of capital was made to the present site?

Hon Barry House: I do not believe so. It was a reaction to the demand. An assessment was made of an alternative. There may have been ongoing assessments of the sites. However, as has been already stated, there was an efficiently functioning plant and the Water Corporation was probably not in a position to source another site. It probably did not do that at that stage.