



**SECOND SESSION OF THE THIRTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT**

**MINORITY REPORT OF  
HON CHRISTINE SHARP MLC AND HON JIM SCOTT MLC**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

**IN RELATION TO THE  
ALCOA REFINERY AT WAGERUP INQUIRY**

Report 11 - Minority  
October 2004



## MINORITY REPORT

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This minority report is written in regards to the position taken at paragraph 10.95.

The deliberations of this Committee inquiry are based, with one exception, on a consensus across the political spectrum.(1) When the Committee system of the Upper House works well, as it most often does, it permits Members of all party persuasions to work through issues together in a non-public arena, and its reports provide a unique source of neutral political guidance to assist the Government of the day to deal with difficult issues.

So it is with the inquiry into the environmental health problems that have plagued Alcoa's Wagerup Refinery. This report offers many considered insights and solutions to assist the Government, Alcoa, and the communities in Yarloop, Hamel and Waroona in managing these problems. It is regrettable that the Committee has not been in a position to complete this body of work by making findings and recommendations on the central question of whether the company should now be allowed to expand significantly its production at Wagerup Refinery.

Whilst it is understandable that Committee Members felt constrained from commenting on the expansion because of the initiation of a formal assessment by the Environmental Protection Authority, this referral has precluded useful input on the matter from our Parliamentary inquiry. The Government pre-empted the Committee report by announcing that it was encouraging Alcoa to progress to formal assessment under Part IV of the *Environmental Protection Act*. This unfortunate overlapping of Parliamentary and statutory processes was encouraged by the Minister for State Development, although we made him aware at a meeting with him on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2004 that the inquiry was near to completion and that our report would include, amongst other things, a section on the expansion issue. The haste of the developer and the Minister for State Development has fettered the content of the report, and shown considerable contempt for the role of the Legislative Council's committee system and the use of the public resources involved.

In fact the report provides a range of serious evidence that suggests that it would be grossly irresponsible to inflict any further stress and risk on the communities and workforce at Wagerup by allowing *any* expansion at this stage, let alone an increase of nearly double the current scale of production:

Chapter 10 has a section directly on the expansion issue at 10.86ff.

Chapter 6, (para. 6.205ff) explains that the topography and meteorology at Wagerup create unique problems with regard to the dispersal of emissions at this particular site, situated next to the Darling Scarp, which result in stack emissions lingering at ground level in certain weather conditions.

Chapter 10 (10.47-10.49) and Appendix 13 provide evidence about the significant quantities of toxic chemicals like formaldehyde (52.5 kilogram per average day) and benzene (4.7 kilogram per average day) and that are still being emitted from the refinery, and we learn from local MP John Bradshaw that serious pollution "events" continue to take place (10.60), despite the emission reductions achieved through the implementation of various expensive pollution control measures.

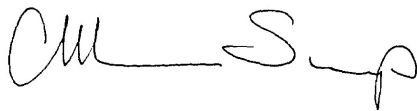
Chapters 7 and 8 that provide personal stories of the enormous social upheaval experienced by nearby residents who have found themselves living in the wrong place, and Chapter 4 provides a detailed account of the immediate health problems caused by the refinery. Of course no one yet knows what the long-term effects may prove to be, particularly the risk of developing cancer in the years ahead. However, evidence of a cancer cluster among employees at Alcoa's older refinery at Kwinana is under serious scrutiny at the current time.

Wagerup refinery already performs a colossal task of producing 2.35 million tonnes of alumina from over 9 billion tonnes of bauxite ore. This is mined each year from below the Jarrah forest, in the process removing thousands of hectares of natural forest over time as well as a massive requirement of fresh water and natural gas ~ and Alcoa already uses approximately half the capacity of the Dampier to Perth gas pipeline. Major expansions have already been very recently approved for Alcoa's Pinjarra refinery from 3.4 to 4.2 million tpa alumina output and similar expansion to 4.2 tpa at BHP's Worsley Refinery. The State's economic development is not missing out.

To proceed to inflict more stress and more toxic emissions on the people near Wagerup is a very serious matter. Many lives have already been deeply affected, some by economic stress or social instability, others by debilitating health problems. Professor D'Arcy Holman, Chair in Public Health at the University of Western Australia, and the Chairman of the Wagerup Medical Practitioners' Forum, told the Committee it was his view that, "Community life in the town of Yarloop and surrounding districts had been damaged severely by the controversy and that a lengthy period of stability and time for the rifts to heal was needed." (10.91) The Yarloop and Districts Concerned Residents Committee submitted, "What the community will not tolerate is ...an increase in impacts due to any expansion ...Nor should we be expected to."

These issues are now for the Environmental Protection Authority to consider. Their independence from Government provides some comfort. However they themselves are constrained by their Act from considering in depth the social problems and planning issues that have featured prominently in our inquiry. They must also be hampered from conclusive assessment of the potential health risks of greater production and residue disposal at Wagerup by WA's 1985 based air quality guidelines which do not even include Volatile Organic Chemicals, let alone provide relevant standards for exposure to multiple chemical emissions, of which there is a cocktail of some 261 released from the refinery into the receiving environment every day. Understanding the behaviour of the plume and the resultant environmental health issues at Wagerup is at the frontiers of current air emission science.

Of course all this begs the question of whether the Standing Committee would have been able to compose useful findings and recommendations with regard to the question of expansion, although there is no reason why we would not. Of course we will never know the answer because the question was never put. What we do know is that those people still remaining in the district, and who hope to keep their lives intact, must once again write submissions in the hope that the Government will eventually listen to their stories.



**Dr Chrissy Sharp MLC for the South West Region**  
**October 28 2004**

(1) Paras 9.248-250 and recommendations 27 & 28.