

ALCOA WAGERUP - COMMUNITY HEALTH ISSUES

Statement

HON PAUL LLEWELLYN (South West) [9.58 pm]: I visited a community living in the shadow of Alcoa's Wagerup occupation on the weekend. That community has been living in fear, but also in the hope that it will receive fair compensation from both Alcoa and the government as a result of the government's decision to approve an expansion of Alcoa's refinery at Wagerup from 2.5 million tonnes a year to 4.7 million tonnes a year. The communities living in the Wagerup, Cookernup, Hamel and, to some extent, Waroona and Harvey areas have been experiencing health issues that are the result of emissions from the Wagerup refinery. They have been experiencing these health impacts for many years.

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Finally, as a result of the approval of the expansion of the Wagerup refinery, both Alcoa and the government have acknowledged that there is a case for compensation for the people and communities that have been impacted on. The government claims that even with an expansion from 2.5 million to 4.7 million tonnes per annum there will be no increase in emissions from the Wagerup refinery. Get real! It is simply impossible and unreasonable to expect that emissions will actually be reduced if the capacity of the refinery is almost doubled. Certainly, greenhouse gas emissions cannot be reduced. Put in the words of Merv, one of the blokes from Yarloop, if one V8 is idling at the lights and producing a certain amount of noise and emissions, when two V8s are there, it cannot be said that there will not be more noise, more emissions and more pollution. That is a simple and compelling analogy of what the government has just done at Wagerup. It is quite true that it is possible to manage some of the emissions of the volatile organic compounds coming out of the stacks, but it is the cocktail of emissions that is causing the problem. It is not the average emission that is causing the problem. A plume of toxic emissions with more than 600 chemicals in it emitted out of Alcoa's stacks on a cold winter's morning rises into the sky, gets blocked by an inversion layer and comes down and can strike any area in its path. It is therefore not the average emission that is the problem; it is the toxic plume that rises into the sky, comes down and gets caught in the local area. People can walk out of their doors in the morning and be struck down by these very strong emissions in this toxic plume because it has landed across their backyard, across their house, across their neighbour's house and, in fact, could be just on the outskirts of a small town. That is what is happening. Although the government might be able to claim that on average it has reduced emissions of toxic chemicals, that is not the problem. The problem is that there is a very unfortunate air shadow operating around the Swan coastal plain at the bottom of the scarp that is causing environmental and health problems for a community of people who have been there for a long time, certainly longer than Alcoa has been operating there.

The Community Alliance for Positive Solutions comprises a group of residents from Yarloop whose only claim is that they get a fair go in the resolution of this problem. Their only claim is that they get fairly compensated and moved out of the shadow of this refinery so that they can get on with their lives. The fact is that the Yarloop community has already been decimated. Alcoa now owns most of the houses in the area, and it rents those houses to unsuspecting home renters with the condition that they cannot make a complaint against Alcoa for any noise, odour or emission. Therefore, people have been bought out of Wagerup by Alcoa because the people had to leave

the area. Now unsuspecting residents who move in must sign these kinds of agreements. Where is the justice in that?

The Community Alliance for Positive Solutions wants an acknowledgement that the residents have a serious problem and that they get a fair procedure for the removal of all those people who are affected by the Wagerup refinery to a new location, preferably a new town out of the shadow of the refinery, and for people who wish to completely move to another town nearby to be fully compensated. They want that acknowledgement so much that they wrote a letter to the Premier, Alan Carpenter, regarding the approval of the Wagerup operations and expansion that states -

Dear Mr Carpenter

We thank the Government for acknowledging that there is a legitimate claim for compensation in relation to Alcoa's Wagerup operations and proposed expansion.

The Community Alliance for Positive Solutions Inc, being the major stakeholder representing the impacted communities, calls on the Government to support an open and transparent process to facilitate and expedite the claims resulting from the operations of the Wagerup refinery and the proposed expansion.

We call for a full and independent arbitration process, fully funded by the State Government, to resolve all claims for damages by members of the community as a result of the Government's decision to allow the continued operation and expansion.

CAPS -

That is the Community Alliance for Positive Solutions -

have a long history of representing the interests of the community. We consider it vital that we be involved in defining the terms and procedures for resolving damages and compensation claims.

We urgently seek a meeting with you to discuss these matters.

The letter is signed by Vince Puccio and Merv McDonald, AFSM, the co-chairs of the community group. They are not asking for a lot. They are living in the shadow of this major refinery. One of their requests is that they be moved to a place outside of this shadow; that they can recreate the community of Yarloop in a place almost like a housing subdivision or a small town where people who have been impacted by this refinery over the years and now will be impacted more, not less, can be moved and recreate their community and their lives. That is not a big request. They request that the people who wish to move away from the refinery to another place are fully compensated on a new-for-old basis so that they can restart their lives, and that the costs associated with moving and the damages associated with their long-term health impacts are recoverable. What could be fairer, as a consequence of making a major decision that will land Alcoa billions of dollars in revenue and billions of dollars in profit and the state millions of dollars in economic activity and millions of dollars in royalties, than compensating the people who have been impacted most by the government's decision to continue the Wagerup refinery and to continue to emit pollutants onto that community?