

COMMUNITY ALLIANCE FOR



POSITIVE SOLUTIONS INC. (CAPS)

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Professor Tarun Weeramanthri
Executive Director
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Environmental Health Directorate
PO Box 8172,
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27th April 2015

Dear Professor Weeramanthri.

Please see attached our submission prepared in consultation with the Environmental Defenders Office, W.A., for presentation at our meeting on 8th May 2015. This document provides detail on a range of health-related concerns, which - whilst ignored for some time - need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Yet as early as 2002 local evidence was being gathered by a University research team which was contracted to assist in understanding the socio-health and economic impacts of Alcoa's operations in the Yarloop area. Further and confoundingly, Alcoa's own Chief Medical Officer, Dr Mark Cullen, made a claim which made a false separation between environmental concerns and human health risks.

A research study reports that at the time Dr Cullen:

'advised the company to accept full responsibility for complete and effective remediation of environmental problems at Wagerup ... at the same time [he] denied there was any threat of serious illness from the refinery ... and deemed cases of Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) to be related to psychosomatic, not physical causes.' (Brueckner & Ross, 2010, p. 47).

It should be noted that this claim was made without Alcoa undertaking any research into the issue locally. That research has now been done by a range of comparative, reputable, independent researchers across the world.

The submission adopts the World Health Organisation's (1974) definition of health as: 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. Further, it holds the internationally understood position of the inseparable link between the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainability (Ross, 2013a). Thus, health is as much a social matter as a physical condition and unsustainability in the environment will impact social sustainability and vice versa. In turn, social unsustainability can be linked to issues of social justice (Ross, 2013a; 2013b, p. 303; Young, 1990) and matters of social and environmental rights (Ife, 2008, p. 30). Another aspect of our positioning in this submission is that human health cannot and should not be separated from animal and ecosystem health (Dylan, 2013, p. 62). At this time however, the main focus is given to research relating to human physical health in the short-term, observable health effects of pollution from Alcoa's Wagerup refinery. The case is not yet presented regarding the medium to longer term and intergenerational health issues that may be involved.

Yarloop
Waroona
Hamel
Harvey
Cookernup
Wagerup
Other
Impacted
Areas

Although all of the issues raised are in need of long overdue attention, of particular interest is the progress made by the DoH in regard to the CRC CARE 2009 Report. In this regard could you please advise where discussions at government level are at and whether copies of the minutes of any meetings could be made available? Further, could you please advise whether the CRC CARE report was peer-reviewed, and if so, by whom and whether copies of the review could be made available? Finally, given the data gaps in the report, we would kindly request that the DoH undertake a follow-up study to address these shortcomings.

Given the very serious nature of the issues raised, we feel it is now time for the DoH to commit to fully addressing them, establishing a formal industrial buffer zone, compensating the people affected and moving them out of harm's way. Additionally, the pre-cautionary principle should be activated until independent research shows irrefutable evidence of no harm to people and the environment (Weier & Loke, 2007, p. 5).

We strongly suggest that an apparent ethical logic of 'the greatest good for the greatest number' has been the Government's approach to date. This approach though can cover the health and other costs to local people who will always be a relatively small number of people. An ethic of social justice would defer to the most vulnerable and enact the aforementioned pre-cautionary principle where this would be for the greatest good of all citizens, including inter-generational well-being, not just the un-impacted majority (Brueckner & Ross, 2010, p. 242; Weier & Loke, 2007).

We thank you for your attention and in anticipation of a favourable outcome at our meeting.

Yours sincerely

Vince Puccio
Co-Chairs: Community Alliance for Positive Solutions Inc.

Merv McDonald, AFSM

Cc: Hon. Colin Barnett MLA Premier, Hon. Terry Redman MLA, Hon. John Day MLA, Hon. Albert Jacob MLA, Mr Jason Banks DG, Hon. Mia Davis MLA,, Mr Vincent Catania MLA, Mr Murray Cowper MLA, Hon. Donna Faragher MLC, Hon. Mark McGowan MLA, Hon. Alannah MacTiernan MP, Mr Roger Cook MLA, Hon. Robin Chapple MLC, Hon. Kate Doust MLC, Hon. Adele Farina MLC, Hon. Barry House MLC, Hon. Lynn MacLaren MLC, Hon. Robin McSweeney MLC, Hon. Dr Sally Talbot MLC, Mr Don Randall MP, Hon. Anthony Albanese MP, Hon. Susan Ley MP, Hon. Gregory Hunt MP, Hon Catherine King MP, Hon. Larissa Waters MLC, Hon. Rachel Siewert MLC, Hon Scott Ludlam MLC, Mick Murray MLA, Human Rights Law Centre, Professor Anne Kelso AO (CEO)National Health and Medical Research, Commonwealth Veterinary Association, Office of the Appeals Convener, Shire of Harvey, Shire of Waroona.

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