

KALTAILS TAILINGS DAM — SEEPAGE OF HYPERSALINE WATER

5964. Hon Paul Llewellyn to the Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for the Environment

I refer to Kalgoorlie Consolidated Gold Mines Pty Ltd (KCGM) on behalf of Newmont Australia and Barrick Gold proposal to restart the Kaltails tailings dam and to minutes of a meeting held 19 December 1991 at the offices of State Development titled 'Kaltails Tailings Dam- Seepage of Hypersaline Water' in which Mr Harvey Johnstone from the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) attended along with others from the Mines Department, Water Authority of Western Australia (WAWA) and the Department of Conservation and Land Management(CALM), and I ask -

- (1) Is it correct that the minutes dated 19 December 1991 in part state 'The consensus of the meeting was that the report submitted by Kaltails Management Services Pty Ltd in accordance with the *Tailings Treatment (Kalgoorlie) Agreement Act*, clause 9/(2) was not a satisfactory document. There was general disappointment that the report did not address the root cause of the problem. This was perceived to be the poor handling of tailings, which had resulted in the decant pond sitting on the ground surface for an extended period. The intended self sealing status of the dam was thus delayed. The seepage of hypersaline water had caused vegetation loss for a distance of over 500 metres from the tailings wall.'?
- (2) If no to (1), will the Minister quote the full text from these minutes dated 19 December 1991?
- (3) Is it correct that the minutes dated 19 December 1991 under the heading of 'Siting of Tailings Dam' in part state 'It was agreed that the site selection of the tailings dam was poor. The dam was constructed on sloping ground and this has prevented the entire area being coated with the tailings that would set and make an impervious layer to resist seepage of hypersaline water. This had not occurred and this can be attributed to poor site selection and dam design, and inadequate tailings management.'?
- (4) If no to (3), will the Minister quote the full text from these minutes dated 19 December 1991?
- (5) Will the Minister table a copy of the minutes dated 19 December 1991?
- (6) If no to (5), why not?
- (7) Can the Minister explain why the EPA, Department of Environmental Protection allowed the operator of the Kaltails tailings dam to cause extensive pollution, killing and stressing vegetation some 500 metres from the tailings dam wall, breaching the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* and licence conditions for the period from 1990 through to 2000 without facing serious enforcement and prosecution action to prevent ongoing breaches of the legislation?
- (8) If no to (7), why not?

Hon SALLY TALBOT replied:

- (1) The Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) has advised that the Kaltails Tailings facility has not been active for some years and the records relating to this facility have been archived and stored off-site. The period in question is more than fifteen years ago, and I do not support the substantial amount of time and resources it would take DEC to locate this information. There is also no evidence to suggest that there are any current impacts as a result of this facility and there are no active investigations into Newmont Kaltails in regard to seepage and/or impacts relating to the facility.
- (2)-(8) See the answer to (1).