

## **ALCOA**

### *Statement*

**HON DIANE EVERS (South West)** [9.15 pm]: First thing before I get on to my full member's statement, I want to say how pleased I was to hear that there is an advance in the use of freight on rail. I was delighted with the answer to one of the questions today, to know that that is being taken seriously and it is being worked on. Many people out in the regional areas will be very pleased to hear that that is going ahead, and I hope to see more of it.

Today I will first speak about Alcoa. I recognise that Alcoa presents a wicked problem for us. There is no answer because if we try to enforce the regulations and the rules that it is supposed to abide by, it will cry poor and at some point just say that it will leave. We cannot have that happen in the south west because Alcoa is a very significant employer there. But that does not lessen the fact that it is not acting as a responsible corporate citizen. The people who are gathering across the south west, for many different reasons, are going to raise this issue over and again until something is done. Currently, Alcoa is very price dependent and right now the price for aluminium is quite high, but just after COVID it dropped to about \$US1 500 a tonne.

Although the price has climbed back up and it is looking pretty good, which is making Alcoa ramp-up the speed at which it is trying to get bauxite out of its mines, the trajectory for that price was falling. As we start recycling more aluminium, the price will continue to fall because there is enough of it out there so that we can continue to re-use it. I recognise that Alcoa is going to cry poor. I recognise that the federal government just gave it \$150 million in Victoria to keep the smelter going there and that we are going to face the same issue, so what I would like to see eventually is more industry happening in the south west to make up for the fact that one day we may lose Alcoa. I have to say that it will not be a sorry day when that happens.

First off, just before the election, on 9 May, Alcoa had a spill of seven million litres of a toxic, caustic substance—a slurry. The maintenance on Alcoa's equipment has not been kept up to the level that it should, and I have heard this from people who currently work there. One piece of equipment was being worked on and people were switching it on and off to try to get it restarted. Half an hour later—luckily no-one was still in the area—one of the rakes from within the container that was holding the seven million litres of caustic substance burst through the bottom of it and the slurry spilled out. They say that the slurry was contained within the bunds. I heard about this the next morning and I passed on the information so that poisons control, Department of Water and Environmental Regulation and ABC news were informed about it, and all of a sudden Alcoa is trying to put everything in place. It is saying that there was no problem and the spill was contained within the area, except for some that spilled over and went into other areas. But it is all okay. It is cleaned it all up. There is no need to worry! There is nothing to see here!

I have not yet seen the report from DWER about what happened there, but what is most important is that maintenance is not up to scratch, people's lives are in danger and we are very lucky that no-one was injured or died in that accident. It was the worst accident in the last 30 or 40 years from what I have heard. I know that in 2005 there was a spill of 500 000 litres, and there were shockwaves around what was going to be done, whether there were going to be fines, whether it was cleaned up and what was happening. Here we are talking seven million litres and it could have even been more. At the time the liquid burst and spilt out, there was still more going into the top of that container. I would like to hear more.

That is in addition to the fact that there is a long history on this. I have been going through the papers at some of us here have been doing, and in my office I have papers on Alcoa going back to before 2000. The Greens have been supporting people there to try to hold Alcoa to account and it just has not got us very far, because every time we work out one issue and try to fix it, there are still several others that are still going wrong. There is very little incentive on either side of government to do anything about this, because we do not want to hurt the industry and the jobs. On the other hand, in addition to having employees' lives at risk there is also, as I have said many times here before, the trees—the area of jarrah that is being knocked down. The Forest Products Commission is given a couple of weeks' notice, and the FPC asks the people it deals with whether they want any firewood and to come and get some. The rest of the wood is bulldozed over, piled up and burnt. If we think our jarrah is worth something, why are we burning it in situ? It makes no sense whatsoever. Then Alcoa takes the bauxite from where the jarrah grows, because jarrah grows best in areas with high bauxite content. Alcoa takes it and then revegetates the area, but the jarrah is not going to grow as well. Alcoa always says it does best practice, but in the past it has been best practice with exotic species, then it was best practice by just throwing in as many seeds and seedlings as it possibly could. Now it is best practice by hilling the land, in a way, and creating bunds to try to keep the water near the trees that have been planted. We were just talking about firefighting. Imagine fighting a fire there when there is this completely corrugated landscape because it was what was built to try to keep the water there. It is changing everything. Alcoa is damaging our landscape; it is damaging our jarrah forest.

There are a lot of community groups. There is the Dwellingup Discovery Forest group and there is the Save Our Jarrah group. They are desperately trying to hold on to little pockets of beautiful jarrah forest near their towns that are good for tourism and the community. They are just trying to hold on to them. I really beg of this government to please listen to these people. Please try to work with the community groups to try to hold from making more and more damage that we just do not need.

On top of this there are noise issues. Alcoa consistently goes over the noise levels it is allowed. What does Alcoa tell people? It says, "Give us a call." Possibly, if a person gets through and tells someone that it is noisy and the noise is over the limit, Alcoa says it will do something about it. Maybe Alcoa will or will not shut down something for half an hour or an hour, but then it just starts it up again because that is what it does. Alcoa says it is just because the wind direction is going towards the people complaining. That is not working.

There is also dust. I have just been to Pinjarra visiting people who have dust. They have had samples done. The samples come out the same as they have at Alcoa's mudflats due to its processes. Pinjarra has been living with this dust coming in. We do not have very good health records, but some studies have been done to find rates of cancer. It appears that there is a link here, but it is very hard to get that information together. It would cost a considerable amount of money.

There are some dramas with Alcoa operating in the south west and it is not abiding by the conditions of its state agreement, because these issues just keep happening. We have a very difficult problem. We know Alcoa is a large employer and we know it provides royalties. Luckily, we have royalties coming from so many other things, so maybe this one is not so important. I think we need to prepare for the day when maybe we do not have Alcoa there. Even though there is a state agreement act, which I believe has got until around 2045 or so, we really need to keep an eye on this to make sure we hold Alcoa to account. As it stands, Alcoa is losing its social licence. It is putting profit ahead of safety, the communities it operates and the health of people and the environment. To make it even worse, it appears that the department, and I take this to be the government, cares little about holding Alcoa to account, to ensure it meets its responsibilities and that the environment is protected. Please listen to the people who would like to protect themselves, their environment and their homes, and recognise that Alcoa must be held accountable. The safety risk alone should cause something to occur to make sure that this does not get worse and that it is not allowed to continue in the state it is in.