

FIMISTON TAILINGS DAMS — SEEPAGE

6024. Hon Paul Llewellyn to the Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for the Environment

I refer to the Fimiston 1 tailings dam and the existing high unnatural ground water levels (unnecessary impacts) of approximately 5 — 6 metres below the surface caused by seepage on adjoining leases, question on notice No.s 2563 of 30 August 2005 and 3640 of 13 June 2006, and I ask —

- (1) Will the Minister reject the proposal to increase the height of the Fimiston 1 tailings dam given it has already caused ‘unnecessary impacts’ of unnatural groundwater levels to rise on adjoining leases by greater than 25 metres which is directly contrary to the Mining and *Mineral Processing Tailings Facilities Guidelines 2000* advocated by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and the Department of Industry and Resources (DoIR) and any extension to increase the height and life of the dam will only exacerbate what is already an ‘unnecessary impact’?
- (2) If no to (2), why not?
- (3) Will the Minister reject the proposal to increase the height of the Fimiston 1 dam given that this dam was built on the boundary of the leases adjoining the neighbouring leases which is directly contrary to the *Mining and Mineral Processing Tailings Facilities Guidelines 2000* advocated by the DEC and the DoIR so that the operator of this tailings dam and the DEC do not continue to make the excuses that they cannot contain the toxic seepage emissions within the premises, and that it is not practicable to do so which provides the perfect defence for any breaches of legislation as the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* overrides all other legislation?
- (4) If no to (3), why not?
- (5) Will the Minister reject the proposal to increase the height of the Fimiston 1 tailings dam given the dam has been built over several fresh water watercourses which feed into a major fresh water course, which allows the seepage to escape from the tailings facilities and contaminate the external environment and the operator has demonstrated over the last 17 years that it is incapable of containing the seepage emissions within its own premises without causing ‘unnecessary impacts’ and causing extensive pollution killing and stressing vegetation?
- (6) If no to (5), why not?
- (7) Can the Minister indicate in what year the adjacent tenement holders can expect not to have ‘unnecessary impacts’ of unnatural elevated groundwater levels containing cyanide, xanthate and other toxic chemicals caused by the Fimiston 1 tailings dam?
- (8) If no to (7), why not?

Hon SALLY TALBOT replied:

- (1) The recommendations of Environmental Protection Authority Bulletin 1273 concerning this proposal are under appeal. The Minister is awaiting the Appeals Convenor's advice before making a decision.
- (2) Not applicable.
- (3) See the answer to (1).
- (4) Not applicable.
- (5) See the answer to (1).
- (6) Not applicable.
- (7) No.
- (8) The rate of groundwater level decline will depend on factors such as groundwater recovery rates and the length of time the tailings dam is in use. It should be noted that the impact of a mining operation on an adjacent tenement is not an environmental issue. The Mining Regulations 1981 deal with this issue in regulation 98.