Submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs of the Legislative Council

Deep Sewerage in the Cockburn Area

Prepared on behalf of the Uniting Church WA Synod, the Spearwood Uniting Church Congregation and other agencies of the Uniting Church.
Spearwood Uniting Church

Built in 1913 by voluntary labour, but still waiting for deep sewerage.
Executive Summary

The deferral of the Infill Sewerage Program has resulted in significant disruption to the proposed provision of integrated community services by the Uniting Church in the Cockburn area.

It has also further accentuated the shortage of available land for affordable housing which in turn continues to drive up rental costs.

1. Deep sewerage in the Cockburn area

Early Settlement

The Uniting Church in Western Australia acknowledges the Noongar people who cared for the land in the Cockburn area through untold generations and is in covenant with Uniting Aboriginal Islander & Christian Congress WA (Congress). Congress ministers to indigenous people through the Maaman "O" Miya Uniting Church at Coolbellup.

European settlement in the Cockburn area has gone through several stages since Thomas Peel's original settlement at Clarence on Cockburn Sound.

Although that settlement did not last long, isolated huts and homesteads were built for grazing and timber cutting. The very low density of population meant there was little need for specific provision for the disposal of human waste.

During the convict area the provision of roads allowed the development of market gardening, and the supply of limestone for capital works. Wells were sunk by settlers to water orchards and vineyards. A 'dunny' near the woodheap for the wood fired kitchen stove was emptied discreetly by a member of the household.

At the time, typhoid outbreaks killed unknown numbers of Aboriginal people. In 1895, 294 miners died from typhoid at Coolgardie. Statewide deaths (that is, non-Indigenous deaths) from typhoid peaked at 407 in 1898, but declined rapidly when 'more settled conditions of life combined with the increased and increasing sanitary conditions precautions taken in all parts of the State' (Stannage, 1981).1

Provision of safe, reliable water supplies and deep sewerage systems to major centres of population was recognised as an urgent task of the newly self-governing state, culminating in the Kalgoorlie pipeline.

Night cart services were introduced to dispose of human excrement from backyard dunnies. New subdivisions in the Perth metropolitan area had back lanes included as part of the planning process.

Market Gardens

The rapid expansion of Western Australia arising from the gold rush demanded intensification of market gardening in Spearwood through the provision of well based irrigation and associated dairying. The provision of a railway line to Fremantle for the supply of fresh produce from the

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1 Stannage, CT (1981), A New History of Western Australia, Intl Specialized Book Service.
Cockburn area also allowed tradesmen and others to live on suburban quarter acre blocks. Many of these people had lived and worked in the goldfields. There were no night cart service in Spearwood so the “dunny” continued to be located as far away from the kitchen as possible.

**Construction of the Spearwood Uniting Church**

The Spearwood Uniting Church was built in 1913 as a Methodist Sunday School by the Hyam brothers and other Methodists from Kent. The prime mover was a Mrs Straughair who also opened a post office at the time.

Where deep sewerage was not available, but water supplies were reliable, septic tank systems were introduced. These were most rigidly controlled by legislation. In Western Australia the Department of Public Health approved a standard tank slightly over a metre in diameter for a single water closet for use by up to seven people. Municipal health authorities monitored their installation.

Although septic tanks became the standard method of disposal of human excrement in the Cockburn area they were never considered satisfactory. They do not cope with sanitary pads, disposable nappies, or even an extended visit by the grandchildren; hence the demand for deep sewerage. Deep sewerage became at first a marketing feature, and eventually was a made a requirement for all new subdivisions, but large areas of the metropolitan area remained on septic tanks.

In households for whom there are cultural expectations of providing hospitality for extended families member, reliance on septic tanks can often be problematic.

Plaques on the walls of Spearwood Uniting Church mark the contribution of individuals to the Church in its early years.
The septic tank at the Spearwood Uniting Church overflowed on Saturday 26th September 2009 after an overnight retreat by the Karen community of refugees from Myanmar.

Despite careful monitoring by the youth workers and supplementary use of City of Cockburn beachside facilities, a further overflow occurred late on Wednesday 7th October while the premises were used for a Scripture Union school holiday program for students from Years 10, 11 and 12.

2. The Funding, Priorities and Progress of the State’s Infill Sewerage Program

Richard Court’s announcement of the 10 year Infill Sewerage Program in the mid-nineties was widely welcomed especially by those struggling with overloaded septic systems. This included churches and other institutions as well as individual households.

Under the program the Maaman “O” Miya Uniting Church was connected to deep sewerage in 2003 and its associated manse in Mamillius Street, Coolbellup in May 2007.

The Infill Sewerage Program was, and is, an essential part of the co-ordinated planning for the development of the Perth Metropolitan area, not only for government institutions, but also for families and institutions.

A report on strategy and extension prepared for the Uniting Church made the following observations:

The Outer suburbs of Perth represent the most dynamic region of change and challenge to the Uniting Church. There need to be more parishes planned and provided, existing parishes need support as they are struggling with enormous debt (compared with other regions) yet the new communities in these suburbs do not have the high level of disposable income of the older, more affluent communities of the inner and middle suburbs. Additional church facilities are scarce.

Innovative strategies to supplement and replace conventional parish facilities and services could include greater use of communication technology, sharing and integration of facilities, and joint ventures with other agencies. This will require earlier planning and co-ordination of programmes and facilities with other service providers.

These comments are most relevant to Cockburn.
Apart from the Spearwood Uniting Church and Maaman "O" Miya Uniting Church the only other public Uniting Church building in the City of Cockburn is the Beth Shalom Tongan Congregation in South Lake, whose site is at full capacity.

The expanding Spearwood Congregation has become part of the Fremante Wesley Mission and due to its ready accessibility is increasingly used for a variety of Mission functions including its Annual General Meeting.

With the prospect of sewerage being available, planning had commenced for a large fully accessible building for use by other Uniting Church agencies as well as the local community. Preliminary discussions had been held with City of Cockburn planners for a scheme on the adjacent block.

Through its WesAssist Financial Counselling Service, the Fremantle Wesley Mission is acutely aware of the shortage of affordable housing, particularly for elderly women. Fremantle Wesley Mission ran the Wynn Carr Women's Refuge and the Wilf Sargent hostel for single men and couples for many years. The Spearwood manse was also used as a halfway house for women from the Wynn Carr Women's Refuge. Anticipating major upgrading works, including connections to deep sewerage, in July 2006 Fremantle Wesley Mission handed over its residential facilities to the management of Uniting Care West. Today, the two organisations maintain a close working relationship.

Consultation in planning for possible joint development of the Spearwood site to provide supported residential accommodation and take advantage of the higher residential zoning allowed under the Phoenix Revitalisation Planning Scheme had commenced. Advice that the deep sewerage would be available in 2009 was received by the Uniting Church from the Water Corporation in July 2008 (Appendix 1).

These consultations were put on hold as a result of receiving notification on 12th June 2009 from the Water Corporation that the Infill Sewerage Program had been delayed. The letter implied that the delay may be as long as four years (Appendix 2).

3. Delay in progressing the Infill Sewerage Program

In July 2009, the Church Council of the Fremantle Wesley Mission wrote to the Minister expressing its concerns (Appendix 3).

The reply from the Minister for Water (Appendix 4) is considered by Church Council members as unsatisfactory on three counts.

- Discussions with City of Cockburn health officials have made very clear that the residential component would not be allowed.
- The recent experience of users listed above suggests that even a large septic tank system would not be able to cope with the intensive use that is experienced by large church facilities which are increasingly used for a wide range of activities besides Sunday Services.
• Spending large amount of money on a facility that has an unpredictable life is poor stewardship of limited Uniting Church resources.

4. Similar sewerage issues in other areas.

The Uniting Church Property Manager is not aware of similar sewerage issues in other areas of the State other than in the Cockburn area.

5. Other relevant matters

Homelessness is a major concern throughout Australia due to not enough houses being built. The delay of the Infill Sewerage Program further exacerbates the shortage of affordable housing in the Fremantle and Cockburn areas.

6. Conclusion

The deferral of the Infill Sewerage Program has resulted in significant disruption to the proposed provision of integrated community services by the Uniting Church in the Cockburn area. It has also further accentuated the shortage of available land for affordable housing which in turn continues to drive up rental costs.

The abrupt decision to defer indefinitely the Infill Sewerage Program is a failure of the State Government to provide essential infrastructure work to a key metropolitan area. These works have been known to be required for over 100 years. Both Lord Forrest and CY O'Connor would be appalled by the decision of the current government to defer action on this matter.

Rosemary Hudson Miller
Acting General Secretary
16th October 2009
Dear Sir/Madam

SEWERAGE RETICULATION AREA

SPEARWOOD 16AB

The Water Corporation proposes to construct the above works which are further described in the Notice and shown on the Plan enclosed.

Generally the area to be sewered is unsuitable for long term on-site disposal of septic tank effluent into the ground. A sewerage scheme provides safeguards to the community and the environment. When your property is connected to the scheme, disposal of sewage from your property will be virtually maintenance free.

If any damage occurs to your property during construction of the works, it will be reinstated at the Water Corporation's cost to a condition as near as practicable to the condition in which it was prior to commencement of the works.

When the works are completed, owners of land within the area will be required to pay Water Corporation sewerage rates whether or not they connect to the sewer. For eligible pensioners, concessional rates are available or payment may be deferred until eligibility ceases.

The connection to the sewer is arranged and paid for by the owner and will be required within five years of the service becoming available. This work must be carried out by a licensed plumber.
Objections to the proposed works will be considered if lodged in writing to the PROJECT MANAGER, Mr TONY D'ASCANIO, WATER CORPORATION, PO BOX 100, LEEDERVILLE, WA 6902, before the close of business on 25 JULY, 2008.

For further information please contact Mr Jim Ridgewell on Ph. (08) 9420 2634 during office hours.

The works are provisionally programmed to commence construction during 2008/2009 financial year.

Yours faithfully

[Signature]

MANAGER
PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Monday, 30 June 2008
Appendix 2
Dear Sir/Madam

SUBJECT: WATER CORPORATION WORKS IN YOUR AREA

I write in relation to the Infill Sewerage Program, specifically a Notice of Proposal sent to your property in June 2008, Spearwood 28A, 3N & 16AB.

In its recent Budget announcement the State Government confirmed that about $3 billion in capital savings would be required over the next four years. The Water Corporation will contribute to this saving by deferring or reprioritising approximately $560 million in Capital projects.

As a result of these changes the Infill Sewerage Program has been deferred, and therefore we regret to inform you the installation of Infill Sewerage in your area will not proceed at this time.

In determining which projects were to be deferred, the Corporation reviewed its capital program. The highest priority was given to those projects that ensure all Western Australian communities have adequate, high quality drinking water. Infill sewerage works currently underway will be completed, however no new work on infill sewerage will begin.

The infill sewerage work will be reconsidered once the current financial environment improves, and if necessary we will be in contact with you again with details.

Further information on the infill sewerage program can be found by visiting the Water Corporation website www.watercorporation.com.au or by calling 13 13 85.

Yours faithfully

Tony D'Ascanio
PROJECT MANAGER
Dear Minister,

Thank you for agreeing to speak with our Mission Minister, the Rev Raymond Cleary, during your visit to Spearwood on Tuesday 21st July.

As you noted, our plans to develop the facilities of our Spearwood Uniting Church Congregation cannot now proceed due to the absence of deep sewerage.

Health and safety concerns were rightly the immediate focus of your visit, but the indefinite delay of the Infill Sewerage Program has other social consequences.

Many of the elderly residents, including some of our church members, are finding that the large properties suitable for septic tanks are beyond their current physical and financial resources to maintain. They therefore supported the rezoning of the area to allow higher densities under the Phoenix Central Revitalisation Scheme which was approved by the City of Cockburn in May. It is expected to be gazetted by the State Planning Commission in 2010. The properties which are already connected will then be able to be developed to provide much needed additional housing, but those which are not connected to deep sewerage will not be able to take advantage of the rezoning.

The Spearwood Uniting Church was built in 1913. The building retains its timber interior which is listed on the Heritage Register. The Congregation is expanding and we had hoped to provide a fully accessible modern building to complement the historic Sunday School in time for the 100th anniversary in 2013.

This building would not only have allowed the congregation to continue to grow, but also to provide for a range of services to the wider community by the Fremantle Wesley Mission and other Uniting Church agencies. Since the proposed sewerage works scheduled for later this year have now been deferred indefinitely as a result of the budget decisions, our careful planning for future of this strategic site cannot proceed.

Yours faithfully,

Paul Howard
Chairman, Fremantle Wesley Mission Church Council
Our ref: 37-04212

Mr Paul Howard
Chairman
Fremantle Wesley Mission Church Council
PO Box 105
FREMANTLE WA 6959

Dear Mr Howard

Thank you for your letter of 26 July 2009 regarding plans to expand facilities at the Spearwood Uniting Church.

There has been an emphasis on health and safety concerns in regard to the deferment of the infill sewerage program and it is appropriate that we are reminded the social consequences. With this in mind, I sought advice from the Water Corporation on the planned development of the Uniting Church facilities.

I have been informed that the facilities could be designed with an on-site treatment and disposal system. The wastewater flows from the development may be of a nature and volume that the proposal is not seriously impacted by the deferral of the infill sewerage program. It is suggested that you discussed the possibility of this option to the City of Cockburn.

It is with regret I note that the deferral of the infill sewerage program is impacting on the Phoenix Central Revitalisation scheme but I can assure you that the deferral will be reviewed annually as part of normal budget processes.

Yours sincerely

DR GRAHAM JACOBS MLA
MINISTER FOR WATER; MENTAL HEALTH

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