

REGIONAL RESOURCE RECOVERY CENTRE — COMPOSTING

Grievance

DR G.G. JACOBS (Roe) [9.18 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for the Environment. As the shadow Minister for the Environment, I am concerned about the three components of the Regional Resource Recovery Centre that operates on the Bannister Road site in Canning Vale. The first is the recycling of refuse plastic bottles etc from the yellow-top bins; the second is the green waste; and the third is the general kitchen and household waste, which is the composting component of the recycling facility. That is the subject of my grievance. When this household waste is taken to the Regional Resource Recovery Centre, 57 per cent of it is separated out and taken to landfill because it is not appropriate for composting. The rest of the waste—about 40 per cent—is then processed using the Bedminster system. There are two parts to the waste material. The first part is biosolid manure, if we like, which is added to compost the product. The product is screened and, after a three-day process in big drums, the compost is aerated in wind rows in large aerating sheds for 28 days. It is screened again after this process and the final product constitutes about 18 per cent of weight for volume of the raw rubbish product that was initially taken to the facility. A custom compost company is paid to take this product off site. It is used for the treatment of contaminated sites and, indeed, a lot of the compost still finds its way back into landfill.

Like me, the Minister for the Environment and other members have received many emails about the residents' significant issue with the facility; that is, the obnoxious odours with, perhaps, the potential for noxious odours. In recent times more than 560 complaints have been made, many in the past three months. Such is the concern in the community in the Willetton-Riverton-Canning Vale region that a Canning-Melville Community Odour Action Group has been formed. During the Regional Resource Recovery Centre's history, the Department of Environment and Conservation has issued two prevention notices. One notice was issued in June 2006 because there was an inadequate exhaust system, which was supposedly upgraded, with \$2.5 million being spent on it. In early 2007 the DEC issued another prevention notice because of the emanation of fumes and odours into the atmosphere and, consequently, a biofilter rebuild was performed. A number of ministerial conditions were placed on the facility when it was built in 2001 and most of these conditions concerned flora and fauna issues. However, the important operating relevant environmental conditions were about odours outside the facility's 200-metre buffer zone.

In my grievance today I raise the major concern that the facility is, essentially, stinking out the residents in Leeming when the easterly wind blows, in Willetton when the sea breeze blows, and in Canning Vale when the north wind blows. The essence of my grievance is: does the Minister for the Environment concede that odours outside the 200-metre buffer region are in breach of the facility's environmental conditions? Is the minister sure that the monitoring processes for the Regional Resource Recovery Centre, which were laid down as part of its environmental conditions, are being adhered to? Can the minister explain some of the science of odour monitoring? In the Esperance lead experience, the ministerial conditions and monitoring conditions were set but never followed up, and I suspect that is happening in this case. What is the minister's action plan to address the environmental concerns? What is the wisdom of creating a sizeable carbon footprint to produce a non-saleable compost? The compost produced by the Regional Resource Recovery Centre is not a saleable product and in reality it does not reduce landfill in any significant way. The minister needs to answer these questions because the residents' complaints have been ongoing for the past five years. The facility is stinking out the residents and it really is important that the minister and the Department of Environment and Conservation account for whether this facility adheres to its environmental conditions. What is the minister's action plan for these residents? As I said in my contribution to the budget debate when I briefly mentioned this issue, the member for Riverton, who has been involved in this process for almost five years, said that in his view, the facility is in the wrong place. Does the minister share the member for Riverton's view? What is the minister's action plan to address the residents' many concerns and the potential environmental breaches?

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for the Environment) [9.25 am]: I thank the member for Roe for his grievance. This is an important issue and I want to acknowledge the concern I have about the complaints regarding the Regional Resource Recovery Centre in Bannister Road, Canning Vale, and particularly the more recent complaints made this year.

As the member for Roe highlighted, the Southern Metropolitan Regional Council's facility is licensed by the Department of Environment and Conservation under part V of the Environmental Protection Act. As the member articulated, the facility takes municipal waste collected from the kerbside in a number of councils in that region.

Like the member for Roe and other members, over time concerns about the facility have been highlighted to me, both in my capacity as the Minister for the Environment in the past year or so and, indeed, as a member of this place. These concerns have also been very strongly highlighted by the local member, the member for Riverton,

who I know has taken a particular interest in and is concerned about this facility. I am also aware that a public meeting was held last week, which, I think, the member for Roe attended, along with Hon Kate Doust and other concerned community members.

The Regional Resource Recovery Centre was approved by the previous government and the facility commenced operation in 2002. Obviously, it was designed to appropriately deal with that municipal waste and to ensure that the resulting product can be reused, if we like, in a variety of ways. However, fundamental to that—and according to the licence conditions—is that the facility would be operated in a way that would not have a negative impact on the community. The member for Roe outlined some of the Department of Environment and Conservation's actions over the past few years, which culminated in the requirement for an upgrade at the facility towards the end of 2006. The facility was shut down while that upgrade occurred.

I think the member for Roe is correct that in the past three or so months a significant number of people have highlighted, again, their concerns about odour and the potential for those odours to be of a noxious nature. The department's responsibility is, of course, to respond to those concerns. I will very quickly go through the department's current plan of action, if we like, that the member asked about.

In April this year the department completed a series of comprehensive odour surveys to substantiate the odour complaints and also to identify the source of the odours at the facility itself. The results of these surveys are expected at the end of this month. The department also requires the Southern Metropolitan Regional Council to undertake a health risk assessment using a consultant agreed to by the Department of Health. The Department of Health is assessing the health risk report and is expected to provide this advice in early June, which is an important part of the action plan.

Dr G.G. Jacobs: I hope that this is not another stalling process bogged down in bureaucracy. This has been going on for five years!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will talk about some further actions.

The Department of Environment and Conservation will also undertake a detailed community survey within the next month to determine the level of concern. I am sure that survey will confirm a number of the individual complaints that we have received. These three focused investigations will be used for the department to determine the best actions required to move forward.

We have to understand that this is a major concern and we have to act on it. These sorts of facilities are important facilities. They are supported by the government and by the community in terms of what can be delivered if a system or a facility of this nature delivers what it is intended to deliver, but also addresses issues of concern that have been highlighted. It is important that we encourage initiatives that reduce waste to landfill; that we encourage facilities or the innovation of facilities that will deliver positive outcomes for the environment and reduce the greenhouse gas emissions which these facilities can make a great contribution towards. The problem, of course, is that poor planning decisions in the past have led us to this situation. There is no doubt about that.

Dr G.G. Jacobs: So the minister agrees with the member for Riverton that the facility is in the wrong place?

Mr A.D. McRae: The former member for Riverton is the one who put the thing there!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am not going to get involved in the debate about who put it there, but it is salient to be reminded of that. It is interesting that the former member for Riverton himself, Hon Graham Kierath, approved the development. We are left with the problem and we will deal with it.

I understand the member for Roe's concern and I understand the concerns of the current member for Riverton. We will deal with this problem that has been left by the former government and we will make sure that everything is done that is possibly able to be done and, ultimately, if that facility is not able to operate as it was approved to operate and as it was intended, we will have to seriously consider the most drastic action, which would be ultimately to close the facility. I hope that we can work through the issues that we face because there has been significant investment by the local governments involved, but we can work to address these.

Ultimately, if, at the end of the day, science and supporting data shows that we have a major problem there, we would have to reluctantly consider the most serious of decisions, which would be to close that facility. I do not want that to happen at this stage. I want us to work through these issues and deal with them effectively to the betterment and satisfaction of the local community and also to ensure that we can deliver positive outcomes for the environment as well.