

BELLEVUE HAZARDOUS WASTE FIRE INQUIRY

Report

MR McRAE (Riverton) [9.15 am]: I present for tabling the first report of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee titled "The Bellevue Hazardous Waste Fire Inquiry", Volume 1.

[See paper No 1046.]

Mr McRAE: The Economics and Industry Standing Committee had its beginnings in the previous Parliament but was not formed and did not operate. Therefore, the Economics and Industry Standing Committee work on this inquiry is the first undertaken by a committee in the new committee structure.

The committee that I chair comprises the members for Darling Range, Eyre, Vasse and Collie, and is supported by committee staff. In May 2001 the committee was established under the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly. Broadly, the committee's terms reference are to review and report to the Assembly on the outcomes and administration of departments, annual reports, the adequacy of legislation and regulations, and other matters referred to it.

The Minister for the Environment and Heritage wrote to the Economics and Industry Standing Committee on 12 June 2001 requesting that it consider conducting an inquiry into the emergency fire incident on 15 February 2001 at Bulbey Street in Bellevue. The committee resolved on 13 June to undertake that inquiry with the following terms of reference -

That the Committee examine, report and make recommendations on -

1. the role relevant government agencies and relevant Ministers of the Crown in:
 - (a) approving the treatment and storage of waste at the site; and
 - (b) regulating waste treatment at the site, including monitoring and enforcement measures;
2. the nature and quantities of non-compliant materials stored at the site;
3. the response of relevant government agencies to the incident on 15 February 2001 and the post-crisis management;
4. the regulation, storage and disposal of hazardous waste in Western Australia, the extent of past and current operations and alternatives available; and
5. any other matters deemed relevant by the Committee.

I propose to read into *Hansard* much of the chairman's foreword because I believe that it will provide the House with an understanding of what the community, and indeed the State, faced as a result of the fire at the waste management facility in Bellevue.

The foreword states -

This report is based on the Committee's inquiry into a fire that occurred at Waste Control Pty Ltd hazardous waste and solvent recycling facility on Bulbey Street, Bellevue on 15 February 2001.

The hazardous nature and impact of the fire emergency was such that a request for an inquiry into the incident was referred to the Economics and Industry Standing Committee.

The fire at Waste Control was one of the largest hazardous waste materials fire experienced by the emergency services in Western Australia -

And possibly Australia -

Hazardous waste management and fires of this nature represent a problem for many countries in that modern governments are confronted with reconciling competing demands for industrial development and the protection of the natural and social environment. There exists no easy solution to this challenge.

In the incident at Bellevue, the combustion of stored toxic waste together with flammable material contributed to the creation of a toxic plume. The plume had the potential to cause a range of health impacts and a number of fire-fighters and residents exposed to the smoke plume experienced nausea, sickness and anxiety.

Activities to suppress the fire lasted for more than two days, and were taxing on both human and physical resources. Career and volunteer fire-fighters responded to the fire emergency and police evacuated approximately 50 local residents.

Many of the volunteer firefighters who entered that dangerous environment did so without fully understanding the associated risks. Given that this is the year of volunteers, I would like to pay tribute to all those volunteer fire fighters who were involved in dealing with this quite horrific incident. They certainly demonstrated the best of what it is to be a volunteer, putting the interests of their community ahead of their own self-interest. I commend and thank them for their work.

The foreword continues -

The ferocity of the fire destroyed the majority of chemicals stored on the site. The fire also burnt bushland down -

That was nearly to the banks of the Helena River. It continues -

Toxic fumes were discharged into the atmosphere. Residue from the fire landed in surrounding areas and covered buildings and vehicles in the vicinity that subsequently had to be decontaminated. Public health concerns were raised about a range of experiences of exposure to contaminants emanating from the fire.

Those concerns were directed towards the immediate exposure to the plume itself and, as I have just mentioned, the requirement to clean up particulates and solid matter that were a residue of the fire. The foreword continues -

This volume is the first resulting from the Committee's inquiry and deals specifically with the fire emergency and the health concerns arising from the incident.

Those concerns were raised by emergency service personnel and local residents. It continues -

The short and long term health effects of the potential exposure have been assessed by State Government and independent public health experts. The development and maintenance of a public medical register is recommended by the Committee.

I will remark briefly on the extent of the committee's work to ensure that the best advice was available on the potential health impacts of this incident. In addition to taking advice from toxicologists and experts involved with the public sector agencies in Western Australia, including the Department of Health, committee staff contacted the National Health and Medical Research Centre and sought advice on available experts who could give the committee independent and highly qualified advice on the health implications of the incident. It is interesting to note that the National Health and Medical Research Council referred us back to a Western Australian expert, Professor Spickett, who is the Dean of Graduate Studies in the Division of Health Sciences at Curtin University of Technology. In addition to the advice sought and gained from public sector health experts, the role played and advice provided by Professor Spickett was highly valuable. On behalf of the committee and ultimately of the people of Western Australia, I place on the record our appreciation for the work done by Professor Spickett.

The report provides some detail of the chemicals stored at the Waste Control Pty Ltd site. At this point, the committee still has more work to do on conclusively establishing, if possible, the nature of all the chemicals stored on the site. Importantly, and fortunately for the people of Western Australia, the committee is satisfied that it does not appear that heavy metals were involved in the incineration process of the disaster. I regard that as the equivalent of Western Australia winning lotto. A substantial quantity of mercury was stored on that site in a weatherboard house, which was about 30 metres from the core of the fire. For some reason, that house did not go up in flames. Everything around it went up in flames. People who have seen television footage of that disaster have said that the intensity of the fire was very great. Drums exploded and were projected hundreds of metres away from the core of the fire. That gives an indication that the fire was, for a number of hours, out of control. Yet for some reason or other - I think in part due to later firefighting efforts - a weatherboard house, in which was stored a substantial quantity of mercury, did not incinerate. Western Australia has won lotto, because extraordinary luck was involved in that house and its contents not being incinerated, which in my view would have caused serious health implications not only for the firefighters, but also for immediate residents and anybody affected by the downwind plume. We were lucky.

The report describes the general sequence of agency response to the fire emergency. It is important for me to say to the House that this report does not go into the detail of how the fire emergency itself was handled. That will be done in volume 2 of the report. I will comment on that in a minute.

This report focuses on the short and longer-term health effects of the fire in the light of legitimate concerns among community members, firefighters and the general public. The report agrees with expert witness advice that the significance of toxicity of health effects is directly proportional to the length of exposure to a range of contaminants. The advice obtained from toxicologists is also observed in this report. In brief, the committee had two findings. Finding 1 of the committee's volume 1 report into the Bellevue waste facility fire was that -

there exists a degree of understandable concern amongst some members of the community and firefighters regarding potential health impacts associated with the fire emergency.

Finding two was that -

there exists a low probability of medium to long term serious or chronic health effects to the firefighters and residents exposed to the fire or plume.

The committee recognises the concern among community members, firefighters and others involved. It is absolutely imperative that this House understands the level of anxiety, and in the committee's view the legitimate anxiety, created in the minds of the people involved with or exposed to that incident. It was such a dangerous and toxic cocktail of chemicals that it legitimately caused anxiety to anybody exposed. We publicly acknowledge that. The committee is pleased to be able to say that it has concluded that the medium to long-term health implications for people who are anxious about them is very low. The long-term risk of health implications to those people is low. Taking those two findings into account, the committee recommends -

that the Health Department of Western Australia develops, implements and maintains a medical register of individuals who were exposed to the effects of the fire emergency. The register needs to:

- contain evidence of exposure to the effects of the fire emergency; and
- include any pre and post-incident exposure to potentially hazardous materials.

They are the core findings of this report. I will in a moment compliment the people who have worked extraordinarily hard to bring volume 1 of this report to the people of Western Australia. I will also make a couple of comments about what is not in the report. When we took on this task, I did not imagine that the issues would be as complex as they are. We are now sorting through more than 10 000 pages of written material and video and audio evidence. We have taken submissions from 40 people, agencies and organisations, and we have conducted hearings in which we have heard evidence from 54 witnesses. This has produced a picture of a complex history and a complex need for reform and rebuilding of the planning and environmental management processes in this State.

Volume 2 of the report, which I expect will be tabled early in the autumn session of 2002, will focus on the issues that we have not been able to deal with in the past three or four months. Volume 2 will deal with those issues that are probably more contentious, such as the original planning and environmental approval processes, and particularly the lack of a link between a planning approval process that was conditional upon environmental assessment, and subsequent changes to the environmental licensing and operational activities on that site that did not require the original planning approval to be reviewed. Volume 2 will look also at how Governments managed incremental change to the licensed operational scope of the facility; and at the regulatory inspection and compliance practices and the optimums for reform in these areas. Volume 2 will look also to some extent at the Court Government's responses to the breaches of licence conditions and requirements over a number of years. Volume 2 will deal also with the responses to the incident by emergency services and environmental and public health personnel.

This is a complex subject area. I am acutely aware of the parallels that are being drawn between the fire at the Bellevue site and the current assessment of the proposal to expand the Brookdale waste management facility. I can draw some comparison between the open public process for assessment and engagement at the Brookdale facility and the incremental changes that occurred at Bellevue but that were not subject to the same level of open public scrutiny and debate. I welcome that difference in approach, but I suggest that it draws the attention of this place to some serious deficiencies that have existed for some time in the environmental and planning law processes governing sometimes dangerous and certainly toxic waste management facilities in this State.

In addition to thanking the members of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee for maintaining a commitment to pursue the truth in the interests of the people of Western Australia, which has always been at the fore of people's minds, I give particular thanks to the staff of the committee, Melina Newnan, Elizabeth Kerr and Alf Opie, all of whom have been outstanding officers of this Parliament.

MR DAY (Darling Range) [9.33 am]: I am pleased to make a few brief comments about the report that has been presented by the Economics and Industry Standing Committee on our inquiry so far into the Bellevue hazardous waste fire. There is no doubt that the fire that occurred late on the night of Thursday, 15 February 2001 and that went well into the morning of Friday, 16 February was a serious event and was potentially dangerous to a large number of people - those who had to respond to the fire, and also residents in the surrounding area. However, through good fortune, and also through good management to a large extent, the danger did not eventuate in any long-term injury or serious incident to any individual.

This incident was described earlier this year by the then head of the Department of Environmental Protection as a disaster; and I do not disagree with that description. I recall that night very well, because I had spent several hours at the Western Australian Electoral Commission counting centre in Welshpool to find out my fate and whether I would be continuing in this Parliament as the member for Darling Range. The full recount for the Darling Range electorate and a number of other electorates took place that night and concluded at about 11.00 pm, at which time it was determined that I had won the seat by the rather slim majority of 137 votes. I then proceeded to my home, which is only about five kilometres from the site of this fire, but despite the fact that I live not far away and was in the general area at the time, I was not aware of the fire until I learnt about it from the news reports the following morning.

Some comments have been made that highly toxic chemicals were involved in this fire. There is no doubt that the fire involved toxic chemicals that in the right circumstances would be potentially threatening to animal life in particular and also to plant life. However, whether it is right to describe those chemicals as highly toxic is perhaps another matter. For example, the committee has been presented with no evidence that substances such as polychlorinated biphenyls and other very dangerous chemicals were located on the site. There was a quantity of mercury on the site, and it is true that had that been involved in the fire, it would have produced a highly toxic situation. However, there is no evidence that that mercury was caught up in the fire. The response to the fire from the emergency services is well documented in the report, and, as the chairman mentioned, further consideration will be given to that issue in our subsequent report. As indicated at page 16 of the report, the first brigade to respond to the fire was the Midland Fire and Rescue Service, a career brigade. Later in the evening, volunteer bush fire brigades were called in to deal with what we now know were consequent bushfire outbreaks around the general site. The Darlington Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade was the first to attend, and that was followed by the Glen Forest, Mt Helena and Stoneville volunteer bush fire brigades. The committee has been presented with comments and submissions from the Stoneville volunteer brigade that it was not informed that it was a so-called chemical fire and thought it was attending only to a bushfire. It is correct that it was tasked to respond to a bushfire in the surrounding area and the link was not made that the fire also involved potentially dangerous chemicals; and I will return to that issue in a moment. Substantial concern was also expressed by some of the members of the Stoneville brigade that their concerns about exposure to chemicals and so on were not adequately followed up, and one of the submissions that we received suggested that there had been somewhat of a cover-up by officers of the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of WA. The members of the Stoneville brigade said also that they have major concerns about the risk of long-term health problems.

I make no criticism of members of the Stoneville Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade or any other community groups for raising these concerns. One of the main purposes for holding the inquiry was to ensure that the concerns genuinely held by people had been adequately responded to. However, the committee did not find any evidence of any cover-up by anybody, in particular by anybody in the Fire and Emergency Services Authority in its response to the concerns raised. On the contrary, officers of FESA went to great lengths to ensure the welfare of all of their emergency service volunteers and career officers during the Bellevue fire incident. The concerns expressed by the members of the Stoneville fire brigade do not appear to have been shared by other volunteer brigades. The responses to these types of emergencies and how they are handled can always be improved with the benefit of hindsight. I doubt whether any emergency service involved after any major emergency that had occurred in this State or anywhere else in the world would not have learnt from their experiences about how things might be done better in the future. That is a reality of life. Whether it be an incident as tragic and catastrophic as the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in September this year, the Bellevue fire or other emergencies, the organisations involved can always learn from their experiences. My observations have lead me to conclude that the response from FESA and its officers was a professional response to this fire and was in accordance with its general response to emergency situations. I endorse the comments of the chairman of the committee relating to the contribution made by the volunteer emergency service members in our State; they do a fantastic job. I know that having been a former Minister for Emergency Services and also as a member who represents a hills electorate, which depends very much on the services of emergency services volunteers.

The health issues following the fire are well dealt with in chapter 5 of the report. Some individuals and organisations expressed substantial concerns about the potential for long-term health problems. There is no doubt there have been some short-term health problems, which are detailed on pages 33 and 34 of the report. Those problems include mucosal irritation, nausea, shortness of breath and headache. The Director of Environmental Health at the Department of Health, Michael Jackson, explained some of that. Dr Peter Di Marco from the Health Department, Dr Frank Daly, who is an occupational health physician at the Royal Perth Hospital and who is retained by FESA to provide advice to that organisation and its officers, and Professor Jeffery Spickett from Curtin University gave evidence about the long-term health issues. All of those people provided the committee with advice that it is unlikely that there will be any long-term adverse health effects as a result of exposure to any substances that arose from the fire.

I briefly comment on a related issue on Radio National's "Background Briefing" program on the ABC last Sunday that dealt with this general issue. It is valid that the issue was raised on the program. However, I do not agree with comments made by the chairman of the committee - I do not agree that there is evidence to back up his comments - that the problem at Bellevue has the potential to be replicated at many other sites around Australia. The reality is that the committee has not given any consideration to these issues in other States of Australia because the committee has no jurisdiction to do so. It is possible that the committee may consider the situation in other States so that it can learn how these issues can be managed better in Australia. No evidence has been given to the committee at this stage that similar problems exist in other parts of Australia, or indeed in other sites in Western Australia. To the contrary, the other sites we visited in Maddington and Brookdale gave the committee reason to believe that things are being managed well at those sites. As did the chairman of the committee, I thank all members of staff, those who made submissions to the committee and my fellow committee members for their contributions.

MR BOWLER (Eyre) [9.44 am]: I thank the staff involved who helped the committee prepare the report including Melina Newnan, Liz Kerr and Alf Opie. I also thank the chairperson of the committee, the member for Riverton, who has led the committee capably and has helped me, given that I have had no experience in anything of this type before. He helped me through some periods when I did not know where the committee was going or what it would do. I also thank the member for Vasse who took extra time to conduct research that he made available to the other members of the committee, which meant that a lot of the work we had to do, of which there was a lot, was dramatically reduced.

At the outset, when I was told we would investigate the Bellevue fire, I asked, "The Bellevue what?" It occurred on 15 February, five days after the State election. At that stage, the fire was the last thing about which I was thinking. However, I did recall that there was a fire at Perth near Midland and I found out that it was called the Bellevue fire. I was worried that I was taking no prior knowledge into this inquiry. However, in the end that proved to help because I had no preconceived ideas, misconceptions or prejudices. I examined the issue in a fresh light. In that regard, I did not go into it with the idea of holding a witch-hunt. If people were culpable and agencies had neglected their duties, they should be brought to justice in the fullness of time. My main concern from the start was, and still is, that the committee produces outcomes that will benefit the long-term issues regarding firefighting and the storage and treatment of hazardous waste in Western Australia so that a second Bellevue fire does not occur. If there is a second Bellevue fire, I hope it is fought better. I hope that the committee has laid the groundwork to prevent this type of thing happening again. I did not know much about the fire other than what I remembered of the news reports and watching on television the spectacular flames that went high into the air. I was also unaware of the level of community concern that existed. The depth of the submissions showed that there was a great deal of community concern, particularly in Midland and the surrounding suburbs. There was no doubt that people were concerned for themselves, their children and the long-term health impacts of those who may have been affected by the plume of the fire, including the FESA firefighters and the volunteers who were called to the site. Some of the volunteers were called hours later and there were still concerns that they would be affected by not only the plume but also contact with the Helena River water that may have been contaminated. Many of those issues will be dealt with in the committee's second report. Our investigations grew like Topsy. I thought it would investigate just a fire but as the committee made further investigations, it realised that the issue involved more than just a fire; it concerned the future of the storage and management of waste in Western Australia. Therefore, in many ways this report is a minor part of our investigations. The second stage of our report will be far more detailed and will have far greater ramifications. I take slight exception to what the member for Darling Range said about the fact that there was no cover-up. In some ways, those issues will be dealt with in the second report and perhaps he is pre-empting that section of the report.

Mr Day: I said there had been no cover-up by FESA.

Mr BOWLER: The members for Darling Range and Riverton said that the committee's report may be coming at an opportune time because of the concerns shared by the community about the waste site at Brookdale. The members for Southern River and Roleystone also share those concerns, because the site is located in the vicinity of their electorates. Hopefully our stage 2 report will give some consolation or some assurances to the residents in that area, and will not only provide answers for Brookdale but also long-term answers for waste management in Western Australia.

As I said previously, there was concern in the Midland area about the health impacts of the fire. The member for Riverton mentioned that it was almost an act of God that the mercury which was stored in a hut only 30 metres from the base of the fire did not go up. It was more than an act of God; it occurred because of the excellent work of the firefighters who arrived at the scene, assessed the situation and realised that they could not stop the fire, but that they needed to contain the flames and save the surrounding buildings. They prevented the office where

all the mercury was stored from going up in flames. If it had gone up, the impact of the fire could have been far greater and the report would have taken on a whole new meaning.

I notice that representatives of the Midland community, who have been involved in our investigations, are in the gallery. Obviously they are still concerned about our recommendations on the health impacts. I will read out one recommendation which covers the medium to long-term impacts on the health of the people in the plume area. The finding is -

The Committee finds there exists a low probability of medium to long term serious or chronic health effects to the fire-fighters and residents exposed to the fire or the plume.

The recommendation that came out of that was -

The Committee recommends that the Health Department of Western Australia develops, implements and maintains a medical register of individuals who were exposed to the effects of the fire emergency. The register needs to:

- . contain evidence of exposure to the effects of the fire emergency; and
- . include any pre and post-incident exposure to potentially hazardous materials.

That may seem to be a contradiction. We are saying that we do not believe there will be any medium to long-term health impacts. I suppose people could have said that about the situation at Wittenoom Gorge 50 years ago when people did not think that asbestos fibres would cause health impacts. We do not think there will be any health impacts, but to make sure no problems occur in the long term, if that recommendation is adopted by the Department of Health it will ensure an early check takes place. If there is a problem, the public of Western Australia will know about it as soon as it occurs.

Having thanked the staff members, I also thank my fellow committee members for helping to guide me through what has been not a difficult, but an interesting three or four months of investigations.

MR MASTERS (Vasse) [9.55 am]: In hindsight, it is clear that the fire that occurred on 15 February at the facility operated by Waste Control Pty Ltd at Bellevue was a serious and potentially catastrophic incident. There is no doubt that it caused environmental pollution. The short-term pollution related to air quality and was caused by a toxic plume being blown in a west-south-west direction towards the central business district of Perth. There was also some pollution of ground water and potential for pollution of soil and other aspects of the environment. It was a major test of our emergency services, and the committee's recommendations and deliberations on that aspect will form the basis of a volume 2 report. However, the focus of this report is the human health and safety issues.

If the wind had been blowing in a different direction on the night of 15 February, we could have had a very serious incident at Bellevue. The strong wind blew the fumes away from the site and the fumes were quickly diluted with a large volume of clean air. As a result, some kilometres to the west-south-west of the site the air quality was not particularly unacceptable, and we need to be very grateful for that. If the wind had been significantly weaker, two possibilities could have resulted: first, the plume may not have been sufficiently strong to break through an inversion layer, which was apparent meteorologically at that time in that part of Perth. Therefore, the contaminated air would have gone up to the base of the inversion layer, moved sideways and then come back down again. The lack of wind strength would have resulted in the air quality being significantly worse than it was. Secondly, even if there were no inversion layer, on a still, windless night the plume could have gone a long way up into the atmosphere and then come back down to earth undiluted. The air quality in that situation would have been most unacceptable. But for that serendipity of favourable weather conditions, this could have been a catastrophic incident.

The fire posed risks to residents, career firefighters and volunteer firefighters. For various reasons, during the incident the career firefighters appear to have been adequately equipped to protect themselves against contamination. They wore breathing apparatus and were covered from head to toe in appropriate material that ensured that any liquid that settled on them as a result of their exposure to the fire did not touch their skin. The same cannot be said for residents and volunteer firefighters. The residents within an 800 metre or larger buffer zone around the fire should have been evacuated, and volume 2 of the report will address why only a limited number of people were evacuated from only a small distance around the site.

Residents should have been excluded from the fire scene for a much longer period than they were. My understanding is that they were allowed back into their homes while the fire was still under way. That issue will be further addressed in volume 2.

Finally, residents should have received a greater degree of information and advice, interactive and otherwise, about the risks to their personal health from their exposure to gases and other forms of potential contamination from the fire. The committee's recommendation addresses the issue of greater information and advice being given to the residents surrounding the Bellevue site, and that recommendation relates to the Department of Health being requested to establish a health register.

I also wish to address the issue of the volunteer firefighters. Without going into detail, the bottom line is that they should not have been sent into the fire plume. As other members of the committee have said, no-one told them that this was not just a grass fire caused by a factory fire, but that it was a chemical, hazardous material fire that was generating toxic plumes which were going into the atmosphere, so that when the volunteer firefighters went into nearby areas to put out grass fires they were exposed to toxic fumes.

Today we find ourselves in the situation where residents and firefighters have been exposed to a toxic plume and to toxic and flammable chemicals of various sorts. It is important that I emphasise the committee's recommendation for the setting up of a health register. I urge all volunteer firefighters, residents and anyone else who believes he or she may suffer health impacts from the Bellevue fire on 15 February, to contact the Department of Health as soon as this register is established.

I acknowledge the presence in the public gallery of at least one of the volunteer firefighters. It is important that I use this opportunity to state that I, the committee and expert witnesses, believe that the health risk to those volunteer firefighters is low. I have a science background, and when I was employed in the mining industry I had some responsibility for occupational health and safety. I believe that the risk is very low; in fact, I go so far as to say it is virtually nil. I say that in spite of a certain degree of scaremongering and dishonest dealings on this issue, of which I accuse certain community groups - not firefighters. No PCBs were ever stored on the site, nor were any consumed in the fire. There was mercury on the site, but it was not consumed in the fire, and therefore not present in the toxic plume the volunteer firefighters entered. No evidence presented to the committee showed that nickel, cadmium or any other toxic metal or seriously toxic liquid material was consumed in the fire.

Based on the evidence given to us, there was no pollution of the Helena River. I mention that specifically, because some of the volunteer firefighters who tried to get a bogged vehicle out of the river came into contact with mud - for want of a better word - in the bed of the river, which they believed was heavily contaminated material. No evidence was presented that showed that the Helena River carried anything other than a black organic mud rich in natural biological chemicals. The evidence provided to us showed that the river contained nothing toxic at all. The video evidence given to the committee did not show contaminated water from the fire site flowing into the Helena River. The video stopped after showing water moving down a steep incline, and then resumed footage of the Helena River. However, no water was flowing into it and, therefore, no contamination occurred.

It is important that I and the committee try to give some peace of mind to the volunteer firefighters in particular and residents in general by saying that their longer term health is likely to be totally unaffected by the incident. There is no doubt that some people have been affected by psychological impacts rising from the incident, and I believe that the best community service I can give is to stand in this place and say that in my view, those affected are very unlikely to suffer any medium or long-term health consequences as a result of the fire. I hope that those comments go some way towards overcoming people's psychological concerns.

MR MURRAY (Collie) [10.03 am]: I also speak on this report, although very briefly as the previous speakers have gone into some detail. I thank the witnesses who gave evidence to the inquiry. I thought that, in the main, their evidence was excellent, and certainly sorted out the facts from the rumours, of which there were many. The fire was an absolute disaster for that area at the time. I believe we have taken many steps towards making sure that a similar tragedy does not happen in Western Australia. I know this is only the first half of the committee's report, but it certainly goes some way to allaying the fears of people in the community that this might happen again. We must be very vigilant about where and how we store such chemicals. The report contains a table of the 30 or 40 chemicals that were on site. It is no wonder that the people in those areas were concerned. The chemicals and other materials listed included acetone, acrylic thinners, ammonia, batteries, low-level radioactive trace materials, nitric acid, copper sulfate and degreaser. The people in that region should speak up about this, and they should be protected from this type of thing happening again.

I also thank the parliamentary staff for their work, and the public servants who gave evidence, some of whom came in their own time to assist the committee in compiling this report.

As the member for Eyre said, the inquiry opened our eyes. We all saw the news flashes that showed drums flying into the air, and we thought it was an impressive sight, but we did not realise what the fallout contained. Some of these details still have not been confirmed. Both the professional and volunteer firefighters did a good job. I am certain that, as a result of this report, we will see better coordination between all those groups. In

hindsight, many things would have been done differently, but we are all pretty good in hindsight. I also thank the professional people behind the scenes who analysed the soil and water for their reports. I reiterate that the support given by parliamentary staff was excellent.

I have been brief, and simply following on from the previous speakers, who have done an excellent job in explaining the report. I commend it to the House.