

**COMMITTEE REPORTS AND MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS - CONSIDERATION**

*Committee*

The Chairman of Committees (Hon George Cash) in the chair.

*Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges - Eighth Report - Matters Referred to the Committee and Other Miscellaneous Matters*

Resumed from 12 April.

**Consideration of the report postponed until the next sitting, on motion by Hon Kim Chance (Leader of the House).**

*Grain Industry Funded Skeleton Weed Program - Statement by Minister for Agriculture and Forestry*

Resumed from 25 May 2005.

*Motion*

**Hon BRUCE DONALDSON:** I move -

That the ministerial statement be noted.

On 25 May last year the Leader of the House, in his capacity as the then Minister for Agriculture and Forestry, gave the house an update on the grain industry funded skeleton weed program. It is interesting to note that since the 2002 review, the cost of the program has been contained, and the area searched each year for skeleton weed has increased considerably from 150 000 hectares to more than 500 000 hectares. As the minister pointed out on 25 May, 787 properties are now infested with skeleton weed in Western Australia. The minister was pleased to report also that during the 2004-05 summer search season, 99 per cent of landholders with infestations complied fully with the program requirements. The Skeleton Weed Committee has established 16 active local action groups in the regions. The establishment of these groups has led to increased ownership of the program in regional areas. The operational program budget for 2005-06 has been set at \$4 million. There is apparently no need at this stage to increase the levy on grain grown in the 2005-06 crop year. As this statement was made almost 12 months ago, I believe this would be a good opportunity for the minister to outline to the house how the program has progressed from that point.

**Hon KIM CHANCE:** I am happy to support the motion that the statement be noted. I take the point made by Hon Bruce Donaldson that a year has passed since the statement was made, and I therefore accept his invitation to review the current situation. I am happy to report that in the past month or so I have been briefed by the Agriculture Protection Board. The report from the APB was very encouraging. Since the change of direction in the way in which the skeleton weed program is being rolled out, improvements are continuing to be made in this area. The most important thing to note - these are the figures that Hon Bruce Donaldson picked up from the statement - is that the area searched each year for skeleton weed has increased from 150 000 to more than 500 000 hectares. That is still less than our target, because we are hoping to increase the search area to close to 750 000 hectares. However, it is a good start. I believe it has also justified the confidence in the program that was expressed so clearly by the Western Australian Farmers Federation in its minority report in response to the report that was prepared by our former colleague Hon Dexter Davies. The Western Australian Farmers Federation indicated in its report that it wanted to retain ownership of the program. It indicated also that it believed that to fall back on control rather than eradication was a step that it would rather not take. The Parliament needs to understand that the skeleton weed program is funded almost entirely by farmers. Only a limited amount of government money goes into the skeleton weed fund. Although there is quite a lot of in-kind support, the farmers are fundamentally funding their own eradication program. Therefore, because the Western Australian Farmers Federation represents the majority of the people who pay for this program, I took its report on board at the time. The argument put to me by the Western Australian Farmers Federation at the time was that it is the farmers' money; therefore, the farmers should be making the final decisions about how the money is spent. I accepted that argument and advice from the Western Australian Farmers Federation, particularly because it was indicated to me that if the farmers had a more direct say in the control program, the program would be more effective. I am happy to say that I believe my confidence in that advice has been more than amply rewarded.

There is something we must recognise about skeleton weed, as with almost any other weed threat before us. However, since this is only about skeleton weed we will concentrate on that. We have been able to show that skeleton weed is technically entirely eradicable. It is not a difficult weed to totally eradicate. Even though it has that seed type that can get up almost into the upper atmosphere and travel great distances, it is a controllable weed. There is no reason for us to be despondent about our capacity to eradicate skeleton weed, but in order to eradicate skeleton weed we need to know where it is, and when we locate it, it must come under a control

program. If both those things happen, a farm that has an infestation of skeleton weed can be cleared in a very short period. We have demonstrated that over and over again. However, we had considerable difficulty and also a lack of faith that we knew where it all was; in other words, we believed that people on a number of properties were turning a blind eye. What is happening now, particularly in the Shires of Narembeen and Yilgarn, is that people are coming forward, saying that they have the infestation and asking for help to deal with it. That is because they are dealing not with a government officer directly but with their own people; they are dealing with farmers. It is very encouraging to me. I am getting reports all the time that people are coming forward and asking whether they can be helped because they have a problem. Of course, a farmer could have a problem, but his neighbour could also have a problem because he had a problem. That is the way that skeleton weed and a number of other weeds work. It is encouraging to see what is happening.

Further to that, those changes that have occurred in the way in which the skeleton weed program is administered have allowed us to develop a model for plant and even feral animal control, which we have sought to incorporate in the Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Bill, which will shortly be before the Parliament but is already out as a green bill now and has been all summer. I think that is the way to control all threats to agriculture. I believe that when there is direct landholder involvement in management of the eradication process - I say landholder rather than farmer because this goes to a somewhat broader area than agriculture - frankly, we get better results. I am keen that the skeleton weed model be used as a model for the control of all weeds. I do not put down the spirit of optimism that I have given in respect of this, but there are serious concerns in my mind about a number of existing and potential weed threats from weeds that are potentially far more dangerous than skeleton weed. I do not rank bedstraw among those more serious weeds, although it certainly is a serious weed.

**Hon Murray Criddle:** There is the Noogoora burr.

**Hon KIM CHANCE:** The Noogoora burr is a very serious weed for the pastoral zone in particular. I do not know that we can apply all the same processes to it. For agriculture, the weed that really bothers me is that in Murray Bridge, South Australia, which is branched broomrape. It really concerns me. Although we have paid a lot of attention to skeleton weed, people inside and outside the department say that perhaps we have oversold the dangers of skeleton weed and have made people concentrate so much on skeleton weed that they do not regard other weeds as a threat. If that is the case, we need to get over that and at least rank some of those other weeds at the same level as skeleton weed. That is why I am really looking forward to getting the Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Bill before the house this year, so that we can make progress by putting weed and feral animal management on a much sounder footing than it is now. Having said that, I want to make it quite clear that in expressing my enthusiasm for the way in which skeleton weed has been managed, I am not suggesting for a moment that it should be a common rule that all programs be wholly funded by farmers, as is the skeleton weed program effectively. I believe there is a need for a partnership for funding and management, but the point I was trying to make with the skeleton weed fund and the influence it has had on my thinking on the Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Bill is that it has proved to me the benefit of having farmer management and control over programs of this nature.

**Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE:** I have obviously had a bit to do with this area, since I did the initial report. The minister mentioned the fact that skeleton weed is more manageable. That observation must be taken in the context of the technology we have in place now. The techniques of managing skeleton weed have certainly improved out of sight from 10 years ago, which has made an enormous difference to the way in which we manage skeleton weed with crop rotations and other methods. There have been some advantages. To a reasonable extent skeleton weed has been managed pretty well and is controlled pretty well. I am pleased to see that.

The funds of the farmers have been used for some work on searches and sensors for identifying the weed and so forth. Has the program for mobile broadacre machines progressed and is there any update on it? The minister said that he would have an update, but if he has not had the update, maybe we could get that information some other time. There has been a lot of expenditure in that area on sensors and so forth. Rather than having guys sitting on the outriggers, technological or mechanical means could be used for that role. Perhaps the minister could expand on that. Certainly the 16 active groups have done a great job. It is interesting to move towards farmers being used to look after their own, but I do not think that we need to get too far away from recognising that the Department of Agriculture and Food and the Agriculture Protection Board need to play a serious role. This goes back to the debate we were having this morning about pests and diseases coming into the state. The minister mentioned an infestation at Murray Bridge. We must be cognisant of that sort of thing and recognise that we do not want such weeds in this state. The best thing to do is to keep them out, rather than spray them or whatever we must do to control them once they arrive in this state. The Noogoora burr could well stay in the north of the state, which would help us enormously. I believe programs are in place to do that, but we need to make sure that there are no local infestations. There may be occasional outbreaks, but keeping on top of such

weeds would be of enormous advantage to broadacre farming in particular and the wool industry, of course, in the case of the Noogoora burr.

**Hon KIM CHANCE:** I will get back to Hon Murray Criddle in more detail on the issue that he has raised of automation, and the investment that has been made in the automation of detection and eradication of skeleton weed. As Hon Murray Criddle has indicated, considerable expenditure from funds managed by the Skeleton Weed Committee, rather than the Agriculture Protection Board, has been made to support the proponents of equipment aimed at an automated response to not only skeleton weed, although it was designed for skeleton weed. We were certainly hoping for a practical outcome. Indeed, we were hoping for a machine that could be put into operation. I am not sure that we have achieved that objective yet, but we have certainly learnt a great deal in the process of designing equipment that can not only detect skeleton weed automatically, but also apply a chemical to that weed once it is found. I think we have probably been more successful in detecting and GPS-plotting the location of plants. The equipment that has been developed by the proponents at this stage is probably commercial to the extent that it can quite rapidly traverse a paddock and GPS-plot the locations of any known or even suspected locations. Some weeds do look rather like skeleton weed. A GPS is very accurate, depending on the system, and can plot locations to within a few millimetres. This accuracy, even in this underdeveloped state, is already several times more accurate than the human eye.

Going beyond that to the next stage of being able to cover the paddock and deal with the weed is another matter. By far the more important of the two functions is the accurate location of the weed. Even if a machine were built that could locate and apply chemical to the weed, we would still need the GPS plot to know where to go back to for second and subsequent applications of chemical or to monitor whether there had been a strike of new plants from seeds set the previous year. I am reasonably happy with the investment that we have made. I know it has been expensive. It was that search for a technological answer to the weed that encouraged me to accept the advice that we needed to press on in our bid to eradicate the weed rather than control it.

**Hon Murray Criddle:** I wouldn't argue in any way with that.

**Hon KIM CHANCE:** I appreciate the honourable member's support. There were two views that influenced me. The first was that even if we do not have the means of eradication now - it was certainly argued by some that we did not - we could at least hold the expanding rate of skeleton weed so that when we get a technological answer, we can then deal with the weed. The proposal was to take a holding pattern and spend a lot of money - perhaps even spend it in an unsustainable way - for a short period until new technology is developed that will enable us to do that. That was a powerful argument.

We have had skeleton weed in this state for 33 years. We had the first outbreak in 1973. Now the total area in the state that has or is suspected of having skeleton weed is only 3 500 hectares. Given that we farm 19 or 20 million hectares of agricultural land in Western Australia, that is pretty good. When people were inclined to say that it has failed and that we should give up, I thought that I could accept that kind of failure if, out of 19 million or 20 million hectares, all that was infested was 3 500 hectares, the size of one medium wheat farm. Had we let it go, we would have been where South Australia is now. I was flying over the South Australian wheatbelt the other day. Even from the air it is possible to see what skeleton weed has done in that area and how it has added to the cost of producing wheat. That is unacceptable. The profit margin in wheat growing is so fine that to add another \$25 a hectare minimum simply as a result of skeleton weed would be unacceptable.

Farmers now pay 45 cents for each tonne of wheat they deliver for skeleton weed control. For the vast bulk of the campaign, they have been paying only 15 cents a tonne of wheat they deliver. It is not a huge cost, even though it is a substantial cost when we add it up. Farmers have been polled on a number of occasions about their willingness to continue contributing. The last poll was conducted by Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd on behalf of the industry. I think it is the only time I have ever seen a poll of farmers that says that not only are they willing to continue paying the levy but also they would like to pay a bit more. I thought that was quite remarkable. I will refrain from quoting the figures because I would not recall them accurately, but a very considerable proportion of farmers who supported the levy, about 87 per cent, said they would pay more if it did the job. They just wanted proof that it would work. Ultimately, that is what it comes down to. If we show landowners that we are not there to take money off them and play around with when controlling noxious substances but that we are able to fix the problem, they will quite happily pay the levy because they can see an end to it, or at least see that they are getting some protection.

I would like to see the opportunities continue for investment in new technology, even in some more blue-sky fields. There are a number of areas where we need more blue-sky investment. I think particularly of feral animal control and more specifically the area of pheromone attractants, which could allow us to deal with dogs and cats much more efficiently and effectively in an environmental sense. I think pheromones are the way to do that. There are opportunities to control insects, for example, that are pests. Insect repellent chemicals may well be a much more acceptable alternative to the use of insecticides on live animals. We use insecticides widely on

live animals to protect them from insect predation. We would rather not use insecticides on an animal that is going to be eaten. The idea of using insect repellents to protect the animal in the same way as we spray insect repellents on ourselves may be a much better alternative. I would like to see more blue-sky science and ways in which we can attract investors into that field because I think it is not only a desirable field but also a highly commercial field.

**Question put and passed.**

*Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs - Eleventh Report - Alcoa Refinery at Wagerup Inquiry - Motion*

Resumed from 12 April on the following motion moved by Hon Bruce Donaldson -

That the report be noted.

**Hon BRUCE DONALDSON:** This report is 513 pages long. I do not intend going through it page by page. We have only 55 minutes to consider this report. We made 29 recommendations. We received 72 submissions and had 21 sessions of witnesses. We also conducted onsite visits and held public meetings in Yarloop and Waroona while investigating the problem with the emissions and the reports of sickness amongst a lot of people who live in close proximity to the Wagerup refinery. It was a very comprehensive overview, sprinkled with a lot of emotive responses. We could liken it to some women being allergic to and unable to wear certain perfumes, for argument's sake. So certain people were sensitive to multichemical emissions. It became a saga.

In 1978 the Environmental Protection Authority approved Alcoa's proposal for the construction of an alumina refinery at Wagerup, subject to certain conditions being met. That refinery was commissioned in 1984. In 1988 the first liquor burner facility in Western Australia was installed at Alcoa's Kwinana refinery. In 1989 Alcoa received approval to increase its production from 0.94 million tonnes to 1.53 million tonnes. A Healthwise project commenced in 1994. In 1995 noise levels were monitored, and at the same time the EPA approved the expansion of alumina production at Alcoa's Wagerup refinery to 3.3 million tonnes. In October 1996 a liquor burner facility was commissioned to reduce total organic carbon in the caustic liquor stream. Members have to understand that the quality of our bauxite, which is the feedstock for alumina, is contaminated compared with other deposits around the world. It may be asked why Alcoa would continue refining poor quality bauxite. The answer is political stability. That is a simple fact of life. I believe that there are excellent deposits of bauxite in Papua New Guinea - but would anyone invest \$1.5 billion in a bauxite project there? The answer is no.

**Hon Kim Chance:** Bauxite tends to select politically unstable locations. Nobody really knows why.

**Hon BRUCE DONALDSON:** That is a fact. There were inherent problems upfront. One of the other problems was the site. There are katabatic winds off the Darling escarpment. Members who have lived close to that escarpment will be aware that the easterly wind that roars down, and the inversion layers that occur at certain times of the year, cause problems. If Alcoa were to start all over again, the refinery would probably not be built at its current site. That is a fact of life; but it is there.

Certain things have overtaken this report - the report was tabled in October 2004 - because Alcoa has been given approval to lift its production, but it has put that on hold simply because the acceleration of costs of projects makes it a financially unviable proposition to increase tonnage at Wagerup when it would not come close to repaying the high capital outlay. However, it seems that the liquor burner was shut down in November 1997. Alcoa installed appropriate emission control equipment at the same time. In 1998 a catalytic thermal oxidiser was installed on the liquor burner facility to reduce emissions, and the facility was recommissioned. At the same time, the Alcoa Wagerup Community Health Awareness Working Group (Inc) was established. There followed cases of people's health being affected. I do not doubt the doctors and others who were saying that there was a flow-on effect to a number of the people who lived in and around the area - in Hamel and Yarloop.

Alcoa then commenced buying up farmland as a buffer strip. There was no requirement for a buffer strip when the refinery was first established. In this day and age, with a project involving this sort of refinery, a substantial buffer zone would be required. Alcoa then extended an opportunity to those people who had sold up to go back and lease those properties, or it would operate the properties as a beef production venture itself. In fact, the Alcoa Farmlands pastoral cattle enterprise is now regarded as one of the most successful beef herds in Western Australia, and attracts a tremendous number of inquiries when it holds sales. However, others who lived in the area said that they had problems because some of their livestock were not able to reproduce. There was a withering of their condition and problems with some of the poultry.

Alcoa then went ahead and made sure air emission controls were put into place. There is no doubt amongst members of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs that it was this very inquiry that triggered off a greater emphasis on emissions and air quality. Issues of health were generated for the simple reason that this committee of inquiry was happening. It did change attitudes.

When Mr Wayne Osborn took over as managing director of Alcoa Australia, he came to the committee and apologised to the community because Alcoa had not really realised the depth of the problem. Although it had sent over one of its top people, an eminent doctor from the United States, who made certain recommendations, the problem was nevertheless not considered a real priority at that time. Mr Osborn also apologised to the committee for not having taken the problem more seriously at the time. To Alcoa's credit, Mr Osborn was certainly very upfront and made a number of apologies. Alcoa did not want to have a refinery that would divide and create havoc amongst the community. This is evident in the conclusion of Mr Osborn's opening statement to the committee -

Looking back in conclusion, it is clear that Alcoa stumbled 7 years ago in not addressing emission issues and health concerns. We were not responsive, and as a result we lost the trust and confidence of some in our workforce and our community.

Since then, we have worked hard to reduce emissions and address employee and community concerns.

We have invested around \$36.5 million to significantly reduce emissions at Wagerup. Emissions are well below levels prior to the installation of the Liquor Burner. Production has increased and complaints have fallen significantly.

Wagerup Refinery emissions are subject to the most stringent and comprehensive monitoring for any comparable industrial plant in Australia.

We have developed unparalleled knowledge on the composition and nature of refinery emissions. The Wagerup Refinery is now, in my view, one of the lowest emitting refineries in the world.

While we have significantly reduced emissions and addressed employee problems, we recognise that resolving the community issues will require long-term planning and commitment by all stakeholders.

...

Alcoa understands the Yarloop community needs time to heal and it will take time for us to regain a constructive relationship.

We will continue to work closely with government and residents, and to support the community as we look to the future together.

There was a guaranteed buy-back, either straightaway or in the future, in what Alcoa called plan area A. The boundary went through the centre of Yarloop. Alcoa gave people on one side of the road who were fearful of those emissions a guarantee against any increase in emissions. Those home owners were given a guarantee that they would not suffer, that they would be able to move and that they would receive a guaranteed price for their property if other factors came into being. The trouble was that that guarantee was not given to home owners on the other side of the road. We put forward a strong suggestion because we cannot tell a private business what to do. We suggested that the company look very closely at its residential program and increase that to at least allow people in the town of Yarloop to meet those requirements.

Many people sold to Alcoa and then leased back their houses. Therefore, some of us on the committee asked why people would remain living in an area that they felt was putting their health at risk. It was understood that some of them wanted to remain in Yarloop, and they have remained there. Alcoa has had some significant impacts on the surrounding districts including Harvey, Waroona and Yarloop, and even Mandurah. Many in the work force live in Pinjarra, and I think the operation at Pinjarra employs over 600 employees. The company has also been very generous to the shires of the districts surrounding their operations and some of the money provided to the local governments has been substantial. It has helped establish infrastructure in the towns. In that sense, Alcoa has always been a very good corporate citizen. The committee also found that the company was open and up-front with it. It responded very quickly to questions, queries or inquiries from the committee. Many of the hearings were open hearings with the press present, and not once did the company try to do anything other than cooperate with the committee. However, I also think it recognised that the committee was not going to go away and it, like the committee, wanted to get to the bottom of some of these problems because it was important for the area and it was also important for the economy of the state and particularly that region.

Hon Barry House is on urgent parliamentary business at the moment. However, we thought we had put together a fairly big report of some 514 pages. His committee, the Standing Committee on Public Administration, put together a report of over 700 pages. Therefore, ours was like a *Readers' Digest* version compared with that report.

I know there are others who wish to speak to this committee report, and so I will not go on much longer. However, before I close I acknowledge the work of the committee staff. These hearings led to some very robust debates around the committee table. They became very emotive at times. My very good friend Hon Jim Scott and I disagreed on many occasions, and I am sure that the rest of the committee got sick and tired of our arguing

across the table. However, we managed to reach some compromises. A minority report was written, but it only concerned a couple of issues relating to expansion. Generally, the committee agreed with all of the 29 recommendations. It was to the credit of the staff that it had to sift through, sort out and listen to the debate and then write up reports. Our deliberations took two or three days in a row, but the staff was able to put together an excellent report from that at times very heated argument. Alcoa indicated to the committee that it was very impressed with the professionalism and standard of the report. It felt it was unbiased and that it spelt out the evidence given to the committee, either orally or through submissions, in a fair way.

I will not go into the information provided to the committee on the different toxins and chemicals or the chemical sensitivity problems, because there are pages and pages of evidence in that regard. Members would have to spend a day going through it in detail to understand it. However, Alcoa has now stepped back, not because of its concerns or fears of additional emissions from the greater volume throughput, but because of the high capital cost of expanding the project or developing a new project. The costs have risen dramatically and many of Alcoa's and other new projects that have been announced are now on hold because of the cost blow-outs. It therefore makes the projects unviable for the amount of tonnages that will be produced.

It was a most interesting and informative report with which to be involved. I feel we are now better informed, and we now understand the difficulties that many people down there faced. The unions have indicated that they are going fairly well and that they are not now getting any of the complaints that the town committee was given. The unions were fairly comfortable with that, which was a surprise to us in one way and yet, not in another, because we felt that if the unions had grievances, they would have made them very clear to us. The complaints did not come from the work force. The main complainants seemed to be the people in the surrounding districts. They were concerned about the emissions that were transported to their areas by wind. Some of those people had a very low resistance to certain chemicals. As I said at the start, many women are allergic to certain perfumes.

I am happy to have been a contributor to this report. Hon Chrissy Sharp, who was the chairman of the committee, had a very difficult job at times watching Hon Jim Scott and me going into orbit. However, at the end of the day, the report was put together and we walked out of the committee still friends.

**Hon LOUISE PRATT:** I thank the committee for its indulgence in placing the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs' report on the notice paper for consideration. This report was tabled in Parliament in October 2004; nonetheless, it has considerable relevance to ongoing community debates today. Some debate has occurred among members about the scale and nature of this inquiry to the effect that the practices of parliamentary committees must be sustainable; they should be able to address terms of reference while managing their workloads. This report of almost 500 pages represents an inquiry that took place over more than two years and required a considerable effort by the committee. I endorse the committee's deliberations. The government generally supported 28 of the 29 recommendations, and has already implemented a great many of them. The government has also responded on an ongoing basis, as did Alcoa to the issues that the committee heard about during the couple of years of its inquiry.

The history of this issue should be acknowledged. It first came to light a number of years ago in the 1990s when liquor-burning technology was installed at the refinery, as Hon Bruce Donaldson stated, to take account of the changing nature of the bauxite. As the nature of the bauxite became dirtier, new cleaning technology had to be installed. That involved the installation of liquor-burning technology imported from Japan. That happened at the same time as considerable expansion occurred at the Wagerup refinery. As a result, the complaints from the local community about odours and emissions increased dramatically. It took Alcoa some time to acknowledge that it had a problem with its relationship with the local community.

In addition, a number of industrial incidents occurred at the refinery site. A number of workers' concerns were raised after they had been exposed to emissions and had complained of multiple chemical sensitivity symptoms. Members are aware of the considerable value of the alumina industry to the state's economy and the role of the refinery in providing employment, for example, for small communities such as Waroona and Yarloop. Although the community was very upset with its loss of amenity, the odours and the health impacts, there was also a great deal of community support for Alcoa in light of the key role the company played in local employment. That is a significant issue that must be acknowledged.

The standing committee's report investigated the bauxite mining and processing facility extensively. The committee needed to understand the emission process and the source of the community impacts from that process to come to grips with the issue. Members may have questions about how that was done. It was quite a scientific exercise for members of the committee, as lay people, and involved studying a lot of data to understand the technical processes.

The community lodged a considerable number of complaints in the 1990s, which peaked, I think, in early 2001. The complaints covered adverse health effects, noise emissions and an unpleasant odour. There were also

community concerns about the company's land management strategy. Initially, the complaints process was not adequately handled by either Alcoa or the Department of Environmental Protection, with accusations that the department was not managing the complaints well, while Alcoa was not tracking the complaints properly. That caused a dramatic community response that led to the community compiling its own complaints record. As a result, complaints mechanisms were installed all over the place. Consequently, the number of complaints leapt from a minimal number to many hundreds.

People complained of headaches and nausea associated with emissions and unpleasant smells. Indeed, both residents in the community and employees reported significant long-term health impacts. The Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs undertook some research into multiple chemical sensitivities, which is a significant issue in modern society whereby people live with health conditions that are not detected by an epidemiological diagnosis. In other words, it is not possible to specifically diagnose the chemical or other causes of a person's health condition. In some cases, people who complain of multiple chemical sensitivity symptoms are accused of having psychosomatic illnesses or of effecting symptoms in some way. Alcoa initially claimed that people's irritations and complaints were psychological reactions to the unpleasant odours, which led to a self-fulfilling effect. They were accused of attaching the odours to other health issues from which they were suffering.

However, as a result of the inquiry, Alcoa eventually acknowledged that the community was suffering real health impacts and it acknowledged responsibility for them. However, complexities around multiple chemical sensitivity remain; for example, it is not recognised within WorkCover as a compensable disease because its cause and diagnosis cannot be recognised by a medical practitioner. It is important to note that, as a result of the efforts of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, a number of employees from the Alcoa work force won compensation for their suffering and for injuries that resulted from exposure to emissions at the Alcoa Wagerup facility. However, the problem of lack of compensation remains for a great many workers in Western Australia suffering from multiple chemical sensitivity because of the lack of recognition of this condition. That issue has remained outstanding since the committee reported. Further work must be done within the health profession - and probably some legal solutions sought - on how compensation can be provided to people whose illness stems from unspecified causes. As a result of the level of complaints, a comprehensive review is being undertaken of the local population's health, including statistics on the rates of cancer. I think the term for that process is a community health audit. Those processes are ongoing for the population living around the refinery.

The committee reported also on a number of environmental impacts the refinery has had. However, in light of their technical and complex nature, I will not discuss them now. I endorse Hon Bruce Donaldson's comments about the significance of dispersion modelling for refineries. Indeed, the Alcoa Wagerup refinery is not well located for a facility of that type. That brings me to chapter 7 of the committee's report.

**Progress reported and leave granted to sit again, pursuant to sessional orders.**

*Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.30 pm*