

## **WASTE MANAGEMENT**

### *Motion*

**HON J.A. SCOTT** (South Metropolitan) [4.41 pm]: I move -

That this House notes the significant problems arising in the area of waste management including the impacts on health, remediation of sites contaminated by inappropriate disposal of waste and the siting of waste facilities.

I have moved this motion on behalf of Hon Giz Watson, who has had to leave the House on urgent parliamentary business. During the recess of Parliament leading up to the election this issue came to a head. In Western Australia - in the city of Perth in particular, but also in rural areas - a raft of proposals has come forward for waste management schemes to deal with all manner of waste produced in this State. I will refer to a number of those schemes.

Global Olivine Western Australia Pty Ltd proposes to build a massive plant in Kwinana. At full capacity this plant would handle over one million tonnes of waste a year. The facility would handle more than the current total waste produced in the city of Perth. Initially, it is intended to develop half the project and then add to it later on. Brightstar Environmental proposes to build a solid waste energy plant in Gosnells. I understand that the tender process has been finalised with the City of Gosnells. Another proposal is to burn chook manure from the north metropolitan area and country areas beyond to produce energy. The idea behind that project is to offset the problems with house flies in the area. In the south metropolitan area a group of councils have come together to put in place a plant using a Bedminster composting system that produces compost and separates out all the other waste.

A project in Subiaco will produce oil from waste products. Another project proposes to utilise bacteria to produce a gas that would drive turbines and produce energy. A number of these projects are planned for Perth. If members were listening, they would understand that the first project I mentioned would have the capacity to utilise all of the waste produced in Perth. The Global Olivine project could handle 1.4 million tonnes of waste. It is clear that all of these projects cannot get up, as they would be competing against one another for waste.

It is clear that we have no overall strategy for handling the waste from this city. We have not sat down and said what the waste is made up of, or what we would like to see come out the other end after it has been processed. For instance, do we want compost to improve our soils that are not good at holding water, or do we want to conserve petrochemical products like plastics, so that we can reuse them rather than burn them as some plants do. That produces some level of pollution, although I understand most of them claim to be relatively clean processes. Do we really want to burn chicken manure? Would that not be better used as compost, because burning it would produce high levels of nitrous oxide gases which have harmful impacts on asthmatics and can cause respiratory disease.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: It is not the manure they are going to burn, but the litter.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: We can use other processes such as pyrolysis, which can greatly reduce, or eliminate almost entirely, noxious gases. We have not sat down and produced a strategic overview of how this will be put together in the city of Perth.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Are these all commercial ventures undertaken by the private sector, without any public support?

Hon J.A. SCOTT: No. A group of south west councils came together to build a Bedminster composting system plant. Most are commercial enterprises and most of them are waste-to-energy plants. Waste-to-energy plants are a darn good idea. However, we also need other outputs from refuse. We need composting in Perth. We have terrible problems resulting from the retention of water in the upper level of the soil and with nutrients escaping into our water supply. Compost is effective in holding the nutrients at the surface and retaining the water.

We are experiencing problems as a result of the rising cost of petroleum and other hydrocarbon-based fuels. We will also confront problems with plastics, which are made from hydrocarbons. We must look at conserving hydrocarbons and reusing plastics where possible.

We need a strategic overview for these plants. Local authorities have the very best interests of their communities at heart and are entering into agreements to install these up-to-date recycling plants. However, if we do not have a strategic overview, half of them will fail; they will go down the gurgler because they will not have enough waste to treat. How will Global Olivine be able to take all of Perth's waste while these other plants are operating? It will not operate efficiently if it does not get sufficient waste material. We must also ensure that

these plants have an integrated approach. If one plant is producing energy and no compost, that must be counteracted by other plants producing compost. We cannot have suburbs completely free of compost but producing energy by recycling waste.

Not all of these plants engage in traditional burning. Some use high-temperature chambers from which oxygen is excluded. The gas produced can be collected and used to drive turbines. I think the term used to describe it is "biogas". Those facilities do not produce huge amounts of smoke. Apparently, they are very efficient and would be an excellent choice for local government authorities.

If all these operators are competing against each other, a number of things will happen. Those involved will fight to attract waste streams from different areas and, as a result, the company offering the cheapest service will win the contracts. We may end up with local authorities sending trucks of waste all over the city to access the cheapest service. The systems that burn waste might be favoured because they are cheaper than those offering a range of services. We cannot leave it to local authorities to set up these plants and systems. If we do, we will create an economic and environmental fiasco. At the end of the day, that will not lead to the efficient use of the plants and we will not reduce our waste production. If the operators are competing to get sufficient waste, they will be encouraging the production of waste. The most efficient way to reduce waste is not to produce it in the first place. We must address that issue in this place rather than in disposal plants in the suburbs.

In Germany, companies that package their products are responsible for that packaging from cradle to grave. In other words, they must pay for it to be dealt with or they must collect it at disposal points at shopping centres and dispose of it themselves. As a result, European companies provide far less packaging than Australian companies. We have wonderful, glossy packaging around tiny items to attract attention. In Germany and other European countries, that type of packaging is almost nonexistent.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: That is a good thing.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: They do not have cereal packets four times the size of the material inside. In fact, European companies are now investigating compact packaging methods to reduce their waste disposal bills.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Porridge is good like that, because you put a little bit in a bowl and it expands.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: Especially if you have it with fruit.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: Exactly.

Allowing this sort of competitive system to grow will create problems. These companies will work against each other and encourage us to produce as much waste as possible so they can collect and recycle it.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Did you see that a clean-up has been done on Mt Everest?

Hon J.A. SCOTT: Yes, I did see that. I dare say that when those undertaking the task reached India they did not have access to the type of waste disposal methods that we have. People living in the streets reuse everything; they turn everything into something else. They make things out of plastic bags and so on.

Hon Paddy Embry: They sell it if given the chance.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: Yes, they do. The Indians do not face the same problems we face. However, I understand the situation there is deteriorating; even there the spread of plastic bags is getting out of control.

Waste management in Western Australia in the past has been simply a matter of digging or finding a hole in the ground and filling it with rubbish. That process has caused pollution of waterways and underground aquifers and the production of large quantities of methane, which is a by-product of dumping rubbish in tips. At least one plant in Perth converts methane to energy. Other plants have been set up, such as the controversial plant at the Mirrabooka tip in the northern suburbs, which was a complete failure. That has been the subject of a great controversy over a long period, because the community living near it was subjected to -

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Rotten egg smells.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: Yes, heavy doses of not-so-good odours. Some people have claimed that they have developed multiple chemical sensitivity from living next to that disposal site.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.