WASTE MANAGEMENT

Motion

Resumed from 28 June on the following motion moved by Hon Jim Scott -

> 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.

HON J.A. SCOTT (South Metropolitan) [4.07 pm]: My doing a quick review of the issue may be worthwhile because it has been some time since this issue was last debated. I will reiterate some of the key issues.

The "Towards Zero Waste by 2020" vision has five interdependent goals. One of those goals is integration; that is, to establish effective frameworks and structures to coordinate and facilitate waste reduction, reuse, recycling, recovery of resources and the safe management of remaining waste. Strategies for those goals are outlined in the report and include the 43 key actions that are required to achieve the vision. The point I made previously is that, unfortunately, the implementation of any such strategy is a long way from putting in place right now a non-integrated system, and there will be no turning back unless we act quickly. Until now, local government has been largely responsible for waste management in this State. The State Government is responsible for the disposal of some of the more toxic waste in this State. For instance, the schedule wastes that go to Mt Walton are not the responsibility of local government. Other waste disposal units, such as the Bedminster plant in the south west of the metropolitan area, the chicken waste burning facility in the north of the city and the solid waste to energy recycling facility in Gosnells, are being put in place right now. By the time a strategy is implemented, it will be too late to provide an integrated system. We will end up with a large number of private enterprise and local government facilities competing against each other for the same waste, which will possibly create a demand for waste and encourage its production. That runs counter to some of the other aims in the WAste 2020 document. In particular, the document refers to progressing towards zero waste by 2020. That goal will not be reached unless there is an integrated system, under which the State Government has some control over the types of facilities that are sited in different parts of the metropolitan area and in regional areas. In the past, the tendency has been to dump the more toxic wastes in the regional areas because they seemed to be further away from the population. Many regional communities get angry about this issue. I remember meetings that I attended in Toodyay at which a proposal was put forward for a level 4 waste disposal facility in an area that would have exposed to contamination many of the waterways in that region.

A number of things that are not being done now must be done. The State Government must immediately assert some control over the integration, placement and number of waste facilities sites. We must look at the waste stream, examine how that can be reduced in the first place, and then consider how best to reuse that waste for other purposes, if it can be reused. If some control is not taken at the state level, the cheapest options will be used to attract waste to these facilities. For example, burning the waste would be a cheap option in many cases. Therefore, there must be an integrated, well thought-out position over which the State has some control. If we continue to slowly wend our way towards a strategy, without any powers to put it in place, very few outcomes will be achieved in an effort to have zero waste by 2020.

Members will probably pick up another aspect of this from my remarks about the regional areas; that is, I do not believe there is sufficient community involvement in the decision-making process on the siting of these facilities. Whenever they have been proposed in recent times, there have been great battles. There has been a great deal of debate about not only the siting of the Gosnells facility, but also the overall management of it. The community has gathered significant information about that type of facility. It seems that that information was not available to local government, because not all the information gathered about those types of facilities has been good information. The State Government must be able to step in and properly research these facilities. Certainly, an Environmental Protection Authority process must be gone through. However, as we know, the EPA has been rather run down over recent years, and its ability to assess these projects has suffered. The auditing branch, in particular, has been under-funded - that has been an ongoing process. Unless people in the department with sufficient expertise are available to properly examine whether the engineering and technical capabilities of these plants stand up to scrutiny, the community has no protection. There must be sufficient funding and expertise in our departments so that we can understand whether or not these facilities will work. I am not confident that that is the case at the moment.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: I thought you supported these facilities.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: I do. Most local governments are doing their best to do something about waste. They have a good attitude towards that issue. However, local governments that are located side by side should not compete with each other for the same waste stream. As I pointed out in previous debate on this matter, just one facility was proposing to take the whole metropolitan area's waste stream. It is no good having six such facilities in one

metropolitan area if none of them can operate efficiently. Furthermore, the level of transport needed to get to that one facility would be humungous, and there would be problems with greenhouse gas emissions.

We must move on this issue much more quickly than we are moving at present. There not only must be a strategy, but also it must be possible to implement that strategy. To do that, the State Government must have some control over the building of these facilities. The Government should be able to determine not only whether a particular facility meets the technical and environmental standards, but also whether it is appropriate to place a facility in a particular location in accordance with the strategy. There is no provision for that in the current legislation. The Government must have that authority. That is very important.

Another aspect is that the community is not able to have genuine input into the management and running of waste disposal systems or the control of contaminated sites. There have been significant problems with a number of sites around the metropolitan area - some of them are historical. We probably should have known better than to locate those sites where they are currently. For example, at Minim Cove there has been a huge exercise to remediate the area. Some nasty products were dropped into the soil there by a variety of different industries that should never have been sited on the banks of a river. I hope we do not see too much of that happening again.

Hon Peter Foss: That always used to be done. Dairies used to wash all their detritus down the river.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: It does not always go down the Swan River; because it is a drowned river it sometimes goes up the river.

Hon Peter Foss: During most of man's existence rivers were an ideal place for industries to be located because of the ability to dispose of waste in the rivers.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: By the same token, because of where some of those industries were located, we knew of examples in other countries of rivers being polluted, and we should not have done it.

Hon Peter Foss: I agree. In hindsight, the member is absolutely right.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: Hopefully we know even more than we did then, and we should be more careful about where we site these industries. For instance, the facility that exploded recently in Bellevue was not on an appropriate site.

Hon Peter Foss: Until the Minimata Bay disaster not a lot of people understood the full implications of pollution.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: They certainly did not. The general tendency has been to put dirty industries in certain locations which have less value for urban development, rather than looking at the implications of the worst-case scenarios. When the previous Government was putting together the groundwater protection areas around Jandakot and Gnangara the community was able to pinpoint unofficial dumps all over the Jandakot mound that government agencies seemed to be unaware of. They were areas where slurry had been dumped and so on. That raises the importance of involving communities in decision-making processes. Communities can actually be watchdogs for government agencies and can help ensure that illegal dumping does not occur. Departments can have some involvement through community liaison committees or whatever. If the community has genuine access to information - not necessarily financial information but information on operational matters - it could provide a free source of information for these government agencies that would help them control contamination and waste management.

It is important that we put real controls in place over what is happening at the local government level, not in a way that will impede local governments that are trying to do the right thing, but to ensure for their sake as well as everyone else's that the facilities in which many of them are investing considerable sums of money will work properly in a technical sense and will not be white elephants because someone with a cheaper facility is operating three blocks away. Unless we do that we are failing as a state legislature to ensure the best management of waste.

A matter which is rarely dealt with in this State and which is dealt with differently in some European countries is the propagation of waste. I particularly like the German system by which they make the producers of any waste responsible for that waste from cradle to grave. That was originally aimed at excess packaging. Producers were made responsible for the proper disposal or recycling of that waste and the Germans quickly found that the amount of waste produced vastly diminished. In European shops in areas where this legislation is in place, packaging is not used wherever possible; it is kept to an absolute minimum. We should be moving down that path. I am not sure how we would do that at a state level as opposed to a national level, but if we put our minds to it we could achieve that outcome.

In this State we require a much better facility to dispose of wastes such as those dealt with by the solvent facility that blew up -

Hon Peter Foss: Class 4 or class 5?

Hon J.A. SCOTT: Both of those. It is clear that a lot of wastes could be recycled and re-used rather than be left to build up in waste control sites. Part of the problem with waste control sites is that the ability to recycle waste is hampered by economics as much as anything else.

Hon Peter Foss: Western Australia is definitely disadvantaged in that respect.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: We have to find ways for this waste disposal to be properly funded. If this means adding an extra cent to each litre of solvent products, it may be worthwhile. I am not saying that is the way to do it, but we have to look at ways to recycle that waste.

Hon Peter Foss: A lot of our waste has been disposed of by processors in the eastern States.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: I do not think sending waste over vast distances is a great idea.

Hon Peter Foss: If it is destroyed it is quite useful.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: The closer it can be done to where it is generated, the better. Wealthy countries have a tendency to send their waste to other countries which do not have the proper facilities to deal with that waste, and that is when terrible disasters happen. They are the sorts of disasters which end up causing people to come to our shores whom the One Nation people do not like. Those people are trying to get out of their own countries.

Hon Simon O'Brien interjected.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: A perfect example of that at one stage was New York City. Waste was piling up in the streets because it was not recycled; it was simply used for landfill. There was very little recycling.

Hon Simon O'Brien: There was a colossal landfill site up the Hudson River.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: New York City was going to pay the people of the Marshall Islands $8 a ton to fill in the atoll; it said that it would provide all this extra land mass for the Marshall Islands.

Hon Peter Foss: When I was living in New York they took it out to sea.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: That is not an appropriate answer in this day and age. It is an appalling thing to do. Neither is it any good sending it to the Marshall Islands to be disposed of there. The areas to which the waste is sent have the least ability to deal with the problems that arise. It would be much better to deal with waste in situ. Of course, the production of waste is the major issue. I suggest that more than half of the surplus solvents in this State go down waste water drains. Clearly, we must establish a proper auditing trail. How we do that without creating another level of red tape as bad as the goods and services tax, I do not know.

Hon Peter Foss: Someone has been marking the stormwater drains that empty into the river with three fish or the words "drains to river". That is very effective.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: We had a recent example in my electorate of inappropriately discarded waste. Unfortunately, that was not the first instance of such activity at the Canning Vale industrial estate. The catchment management groups have had to do a great deal of work dealing with inappropriately dumped waste. People indulge in that activity primarily to avoid the cost of dealing with waste properly. We must ensure that products that have the potential to harm our rivers, air and land are audited so that any surplus is disposed of properly. That is a key point in any waste reduction strategy. In establishing such a process, we must fund proper recycling and collection systems.

Hon Peter Foss: Local government has resisted providing appropriate funding. The waste management levy has not been popular.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: These measures always face resistance. However, a disaster costing millions -

Hon Peter Foss: Perhaps the Government could appoint you to persuade these local government authorities.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: I might even do it free of charge.

Hon Peter Foss: You would have to or you would lose your seat.

Hon J.A. SCOTT: It is important to have a structured system to deal with these toxic and intractable wastes. Such a system must include auditing. I am sure it can be done. For example, one could assess the average output of a paint shop. If the proprietor purchases an amount of solvent and a certain amount of work is done, he should have a surplus. If the average paint shop had a three per cent waste component, and a business was not putting three per cent of its waste into a proper disposal system, a government agency could undertake an

investigation to ensure that the waste was being dealt with properly. Such a business could be required to explain where the waste had gone and surrounding drains could be checked. That could be done without incurring enormous expense.

At the end of the day, contamination and ill health must be dealt with and someone must pay for it. The users of these products should pay. If people sell a product, but they are not handling it properly, they will probably go out of business because compliance costs imposed on them because they have not done the right thing will force up the price.

The main issues are the need to move quickly to ensure genuine control of the integration of waste management disposal units proposed around Perth to ensure we get the end products we want, better planning and management that includes a community overview and the establishment of a good system to prevent the propagation of waste, and the collection of toxic and intractable waste to ensure its minimisation. The best way to prevent waste is to minimise its production in the first place.

HON PETER FOSS (East Metropolitan) [4.35 pm]: I am the Opposition's lead speaker in this debate. I have considerable sympathy for many of Hon Jim Scott's and the Greens' motions, and I agree with their underlying philosophy. The points the member has raised are valid, and waste management control is very valid.

However, I have concerns about some of the arguments that he weaves to support his propositions. Rather than having a seamless argument, the Greens (WA) present a ragbag of propositions. I have always wondered what a "ragbag" meant. We have been presented with a ragbag of concepts, supposed facts and events. It is as though Hon Jim Scott reaches into a bag of rags and pulls something out to make a quilt. He pulls out pieces of cloth, some of which are totally inconsistent in style and some of which he weaves back to front. The net result is an aesthetically attractive argument, but not one that stands up to proper examination.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Hon Robin Chapple wore one of his creations into this Chamber.

Hon PETER FOSS: That is true. It has a certain aesthetic appeal, but some of the material used is transparent and some is back to front.

Nonetheless, I support the motion, even though I cannot support some of the arguments and supposed facts offered. I take issue with some of the matters the member raised because I have first-hand information about them. I do not blame Hon Jim Scott, but he has second or third-hand information. This might be an appropriate time for these matters to be placed on the record.

The important aspect of waste management is that, like so many environmental problems, it comes back to the one underlying cause - people. We had a very interesting debate about greenhouse gases. The latest protocol from Bonn is available on the Internet and I recommend it to members who followed that debate with interest. Given the interest shown in the debate, I am sure many members will find the latest developments fascinating.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: My Internet access is down, so can you give us a summary?

Hon PETER FOSS: I will save that for the final hour of my address. I feel that I am in the presence of a master because Hon Jim Scott spoke for well over two and a half hours on this subject. He raised so many points that it will take some time for me to address them. When I have done that, I will return, if necessary, to the Kyoto Protocol.

Environmental matters so often boil down to the single issue of people - the pressure of people throughout the world and in local places. For thousands of years this country was inhabited by Aborigines. In their early days on this land, although they made a significant impact on the forests and other areas through burning - they probably eliminated the larger marsupials - waste was not a problem. Everything they consumed was either biodegradable or taken from nature. When waste was returned to nature it did not appear to be harmful. As itinerant people, they travelled and therefore the health hazards that come from continued human occupation of an area were not a problem. When they moved on, nature dealt with the by-products of human excreta and that was the end of it. It now poses a problem to the Aboriginal people who do not dispose of their rubbish. I do not know whether anyone has seen any of the communities in which they do not dispose of their rubbish, never having done so in the past. Discarded modern plastics, paper and metal do not disappear. If they stay in one place, severe health problems occur.

We have become very interested in waste management because in modern times, due to the industrial revolution and the "health revolution", massive increases in population have led to situations in which waste can no longer be ignored. As I said by interjection, the standard method of waste disposal for almost the entire history of man has been to live next to rivers where everything is disposed of. There is no doubt that to a certain degree, rivers have an amazing capacity to carry away things we need to get rid of.

Hon J.A. Scott interjected.

Hon PETER FOSS: Exactly. However, cities disposed of more than just rainwater. I referred earlier by interjection to dairy farmers, who had to farm by a river. How else would they have drawn sufficient water to clean out the dairy and the milking parlour and where would it all have gone? It was washed out of the parlour into the river, and out to sea and that was the end of it. There is no doubt that an oxygenated river contains a certain degree of curative power. Most tourists who visit Thailand go to the canals where people can be seen washing their hair, but about three metres further upstream, somebody is excreting into the river. Somehow they all survive, partly due to the flora in their stomachs and to the capacity of an aerated river to affect the matter disposed of.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Flotation would be an important aspect!

Hon PETER FOSS: Yes, although I did not wish to go into quite that much detail. In a primitive society, rivers were a very effective place near which people could live permanently without suffering the problems from which Aboriginal people suffer due to being permanently located in the desert where human waste accumulates. We are not talking about only the disposal of industrial waste but also human waste.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Why are rivers contaminated?

Hon PETER FOSS: I will get to that. With the industrial age, cities were located preferably alongside rivers because most industrial processes use water. Some of the early processes used water as power. Large industrial processes required large quantities of water. Only recently the scouring plants were moved away from the Jandakot mound. Why were they there? Because of the ready availability of water. The scouring process requires huge quantities of water so industry was placed where water could be easily obtained for the industrial process and easily pumped away to dispose of the waste. That was the given technology. People understood that was how waste was disposed of.

In Toledo, Spain, the entire banks of Toledo's incredibly fast flowing river are covered in rubbish. I saw it many years ago, so perhaps something has been done about it since then. I was astounded to see along the banks of the very fast flowing river, which is in one of the most beautiful towns in Spain, a cascade of tins and plastic bags and every other piece of household rubbish. People used to tip their rubbish over the edge of the banks. While the population was sufficiently small it worked. The river carried it away and the sea disposed of it. Various things have occurred since then.

People did not appreciate the capacity of certain metals to cause serious health problems. A metal that had spectacular effects, and which changed people's view of industrial waste disposal, was mercury. People knew that the direct application of mercury was extremely dangerous. However, they did not realise the capacity of various life forms to turn it into a different form of mercury capable of being absorbed and causing major problems in people's bones, especially their jaws. That happened in Japan where people around Minamata Bay suffered an epidemic. It took some time before people discovered that it was a form of mercury poisoning. I suppose, historically, the problems with phosphorous are not all that new. In more recent times we have had problems with asbestos. We regard many events as everyday events, but they have probably been happening for thousands of years. It is not until a major conurbation occurs that we cease to get away with habits we practised as a provincial society.

A massive increase in waste products has occurred. Development of plastics is a classic example. When I was a child, bakelite and cellophane were the only products used.

Hon J.A. Scott: They might not have put two and two together.

Hon PETER FOSS: Hon Jim Scott is right. In some ways, how we deal with these issues is partly a matter of realisation, but it is also a matter of degree. Time and again in all of the problems we have addressed, whether they be conservation, greenhouse gas or waste management, the underlying situation that makes pollution such an urgent matter is the massive increase in population, both globally and locally.

Not only is there a massive increase in population but, in many cases, localised increases in population have also been greatly accelerated. That creates situations like the one in Western Australia in which the population increase is in the cities. Western Australia is not unique in becoming more urbanised. This State is one of the most urbanised parts of the world. However, it was not always like that; there used to be about a fifty-fifty split. In places like China, which has the largest national population in the world, people are moving from the country to the city. That is proving to be a massive problem for China. It is also a massive problem for the world, because the types of fuel that people use when they move from a country to an urban environment must change. One cannot get a bit of cow dung or a piece off the local trees for fuel. In China, most people generally change to coal. If they are lucky they use gas, but it is more likely they will use coal. This increase in international,

national and local populations is the root cause of why it is becoming so urgent for Parliament to deal with this issue.

I am not sure whether Hon Jim Scott indicated this point by way of interjection, but to a large extent members must take into account that more is known about these matters now than ever before. Things are also being produced that are far more likely to stay in the environment. Plastic is a classic example of that. When I was a youth, bakelite and cellophane were the only such products available. Even when I was in my 30s, items from the local grocer were carried home in paper bags. There were no plastic bags. It was probably not until the 1980s that the massive increase in the use of plastic began. Glass bottles became plastic bottles and wrappings changed from cellophane to plastic. I know that cellophane is a form of plastic, but it is one that is more benign than some others.

In some ways, the change from chromed steel bumper bars is an improvement because chromium plating plants were closed. There are still problems with plastic. I have been amazed by the number of foundries that still exist in Western Australia. I suggest that Hon Jim Scott look in the *Yellow Pages* under both ferrous and non-ferrous foundries. He will find an astounding number of foundries. Some of those foundries are small, one-proprietor operations, while others are massive. Foundries still use a method that dates back thousands of years to the commencement of the Iron Age, in which they cast in casting sand. That sand must be disposed of. Generally speaking, it is just disposed of. Yet it contains some nasty minerals. McCabe Street is a classic example of that. I do not think it was a matter of ignorance. It was not a matter of the State's disregarding that situation - it was how things were done at that time. The idea of siting a foundry in Mosman Park made an awful lot of sense. I remember when it was open. One of my neighbours worked there for many years.

The community realises that problems exist that we have made for ourselves. With the impact of massive urbanisation, something must be done. There was a huge expansion in population after the war. Most of the people of this Parliament - leaving aside its younger members - are in the baby boomer category that exploded upon the scene. Perth had to grow rapidly. The simple solution of post-war Governments was septic tanks. In some situations, that may have been acceptable. However, the fact that Western Australia sits on sand was missed. Whereas septic tanks can be an effective and hygienic method of disposal in many parts of the world, they do not work well on sand, especially with ground water only a short distance below the surface. It has been a constant problem in Western Australia, both with the disposal of waste to landfill and the use of septic tanks and other forms of sewage disposal. Western Australians are sitting on an enormous reservoir of water, which should be used. I did not hear Hon Jim Scott pick up on this point, but the general disposal of waste water is a major problem in Western Australia. About the only place that waste water can be sensibly disposed other than at sea, which is done at the moment, is to take it over the Darling scarp and into an area in which it can be safely disposed into the ground without causing the sorts of problems that disposal in the main part of the metropolitan area would cause. There are some interesting points to that disposal method. One of the weird things about the disposal of waste water in this State is that finely treated water is pumped about five kilometres out to sea. That treated water is perfectly hygienic and would still be if chlorine were not added to it at the end to make the water transparent. If the water were just pumped out after it had been finely treated, it would be brown. It would be perfectly hygienic, but brown.

Hon J.A. Scott: I wouldn't say that it would be perfectly hygienic.

Hon PETER FOSS: No less hygienic than it is after chemicals are added to make it clear. Public pressure has forced the addition of a nasty chemical to that waste water in order to render it clear to prevent complaints about brown water being released five kilometres out to sea. I think that it is pumped five kilometres out to sea, but I am not sure if my recollection is correct. The waste water is decoloured purely for aesthetic rather than health reasons. From an environmental point of view, it would be better to not add that last lot of chemicals and to pump brown water out to sea. It is decoloured for fashion reasons and because pressure is placed on Governments and public authorities. I can imagine the number of complaints that would be made every time somebody in his boat passed through a brown, smudgy stain five kilometres off the coast of Western Australia.

Hon Barry House: Better still, put it on golf courses.

Hon PETER FOSS: Yes, they are a good place to put it. However, an awful lot of golf courses would be required. I have not followed this, but there was a program for what was called sewage mining. That was for Mosman Park to draw water out of the sewer and to treat it for use on local parks and gardens. Sewage mining is possibly not a bad idea when some of that water can be used effectively, without having to send it all the way to Woodman's Point before pumping it all the way back again.

Hon J.A. Scott: Like a proper farm.

Hon PETER FOSS: Yes. However, it is difficult on the coastal plain because of its subsoil, which is either sand or limestone. Both pose a problem. It must be taken out a fair way. One other suggestion was to do this and to then pump the water back for other uses. Of course, it is extremely expensive. I do not know whether members have looked at their so-called water rates, but the water rates do not cover only water rates but also sewerage and drainage rates. These are some of the most expensive parts of the rates. I am sure that the time will come when people will be happy to spend more money on this. However, it is not just one cent on top, but something like three times the amount of current sewerage rates if the treated water is sent back over the scarp. There is a cost. It would be a brave person - the same sort of brave person who would be prepared to put brown water five kilometres out to sea - who would be prepared to treble drainage rates and charges for people who use the sewerage system.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.