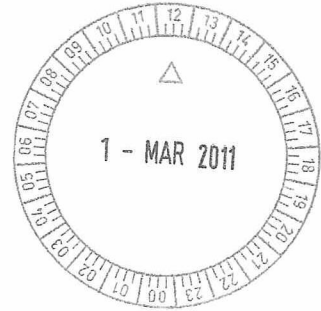




Ms Linda Omar
Committee Clerk
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs Committee
Legislative Council
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000



Dear Ms Omar

I refer to the letter dated 17 December 2010 from the Hon Brian Ellis MLC, Chairman, Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs, inviting the Department of Education to provide a written submission on the inquiry into Cockburn Cement Ltd, Munster.

The Department's submission will be on matters relevant to the inquiry and within the Department's jurisdiction and will be structured according to the Committee's terms of reference outlined in the letter.

1. Health, environmental, dust, odour, property and other concerns.

The Department is aware that the operations of the Cockburn Cement plant directly impact on the students and staff at South Coogee Primary School, which is within a 1 km radius of the plant site boundary.

Conditions are monitored at South Coogee Primary School by the Department with the following concerns observed and reported:

- Private vehicles of teaching staff are coated daily with a thin film of white dust, which can breakdown protected layers of polish and affect finished paintwork over an extended period of exposure. This concern has been previously acknowledged by Cockburn Cement, which has offered teaching staff access to their vehicle wash down facilities.
- Two years ago the school installed a number of environmentally sustainable roof mounted solar panels. A thick coating of white dust has built up on the surface of the panels affecting their performance. The school has been advised that the panels must be washed down more regularly than required to maintain their performance. The additional use of water resources for cleaning is in contradiction to the school's worthy initiative to be environmentally responsible.
- Students, teaching staff, parents and particularly visitors have noticed, at different occasions, a strong oral metallic taste. This condition has become less noticeable by permanent teaching staff, who believe they have become less sensitive to the taste because of prolonged exposure.
- South Coogee Primary School is a new school built in 2005 and opened in 2006. In that time it was observed that both in-situ applied and factory applied finishes to external materials had been significantly degraded in an accelerated timeframe due to reactive dust deposits. Last year the school was the recipient of a significant repainting program, which was five years ahead of the programmed 10 year schedule.

2. The adequacy of action to address the above concerns.

The Department is concerned that statutory buffer zones are not adequate in scope or distance and that independent testing and monitoring at the extremities of the zone should be introduced immediately. This is necessary to safeguard both the school and the broader community and potentially reconfigure the zone boundary to ensure Cockburn Cement's management strategies are extended to include a larger area.

3. The process of issuing and amending licences.

The Department does not issue or amend licences but relies on the due diligence of other state and local government agencies and authorities for safeguarding the integrity of the environment and thereby ensuring the affected school is a safe place to learn and work.

4. Any other relevant matter.

The Department believes it is unacceptable that students and teaching staff are being exposed to airborne dust produced by operations at the Cockburn Cement plant. The film of dust settling on the school on a daily basis indicates the extent of the buffer zone is inadequate. It also demonstrates Cockburn Cement's dust minimisation and containment strategies are not sufficiently stringent and pose a significant risk to the school community.

Thank you for bringing this to my attention.

Yours sincerely



SHARYN O'NEILL
DIRECTOR GENERAL

28 FEB 2011