



Speech by

Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard Wednesday, 9 June 2010

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Willawong, Proposed Residential Development

Hon. A PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Acting Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability) (10.21 am): The Lord Mayor has reportedly expressed concerns about a medical waste disposal facility operating at Willawong in Brisbane's west. Specifically, he has raised concerns about the facility known as Ace Waste being located in proximity to some residences. I wish to respond to media reports today to address the Lord Mayor's comments and provide a clearer picture of the issue being dealt with at a state and local level. Ace Waste has been operating at Willawong since 1993. It is the only facility in South-East Queensland capable of disposing of certain types of medical waste that are required by law to be incinerated. Brisbane City Council has been examining planning options for expanded residential development to cater for population growth in the wider Oxley Wedge area for a number of years. However, it was only recently that the Department of Environment and Resource Management became aware that council had proposed a large residential development for a parcel of land adjacent to the Ace Waste facility. Council sought advice from DERM on its proposed Paradise Wetlands neighbourhood plan.

Let me be very clear: council had wanted higher density development in close proximity to a medical waste facility—indeed, within 300 metres of the facility. This is a lot closer than the nearest households, which are about 800 metres away. The state government has said no way. This year DERM informed council that it believed the proximity of 300 metres was insufficient. DERM encouraged council to consider a Draft State Planning Policy for Air, Noise and Hazardous Materials which recommended a distance of 1,000 metres away from areas that contain facilities such as Ace Waste for future developments. This facility is located away from higher density residential areas with established buffer distances and suitable conditions on its operations.

Let me be absolutely clear that the facility is operating within its development approval conditions and Queensland Health has advised it does not consider there to be any current health risks to the nearest residents. However, sensible planning dictates that residences should not be encroaching on the facility's surrounding areas. In response to DERM's advice, the council commissioned SIMTARS, an arm of the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, to undertake an air study to evaluate health risks and advise on separation distances. SIMTARS acts as an independent consultant with a world-class reputation of assessing, researching and testing health and safety risks of industry.

The council commissioned study has three stages. The first stage involving theoretical modelling of emissions has now been completed. The model, using average emissions for Ace Waste and the landfill flare, revealed that levels of modelled contaminants were within national guidelines at existing residences. It also indicated that nearby workplaces were not at risk of harm. But to establish more than adequate separation distances for future residential planning, an additional worst-case scenario model was run, and this was the subject of media reports today. This model was purposely very conservative, assuming the facility operated 100 per cent of the time at peak operational levels. It was intended to overestimate the impacts of Ace Waste's emissions and exaggerate the potential effects to identify the features of such a

worst-case scenario. It is important to note that this modelling has never and will never be based on the facility's actual operations.

Council and the state government both agree that the investigations are incomplete and further study is required to determine the actual risks. Stages 2 and 3 will provide this information. DERM is committed to continuing to assist the council commissioned investigations and will work with council to keep the community fully informed of progress. This case, above all else, is an effective demonstration of DERM acting as an environmental regulator. DERM stepped in to prevent what it saw as inappropriate planning. This case highlights the very real reasons why a State Planning Policy for Air, Noise and Hazardous Materials is so important—to guide councils on appropriate buffers between industry and households. DERM takes its responsibilities as an environmental regulator very seriously and takes action against all breaches of environmental conditions and legislation. DERM will continue to work with both Ace Waste to ensure its continued compliance with its environmental conditions and the Brisbane City Council to ensure that residential development maintains suitable separation from this facility.