

Question on Notice

No. 997

Asked on Thursday, 24 August 2023

MR L MCCALLUM ASKED THE MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE GREAT BARRIER REEF, MINISTER FOR SCIENCE AND MINISTER FOR MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS (HON L LINARD)—

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise what action is being taken to protect the Bundamba community from waste companies that are impacting our community with odours, both now and into the future?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for the question.

The Department of Environment and Science (the department) continues to actively investigate an increased number of odour nuisance reports received from community members in and around the Swanbank industrial area.

The Cleanaway landfill at New Chum was a major source of odour issues during 2022 due to large volumes of water ponding in a landfill cell and mixing with leachate to become highly odorous.

The department has taken strong enforcement action to have the odorous water removed and hold Cleanaway to account for its poor environmental performance.

As a result of this strong action, the number of odour related community reports has decreased in and near New Chum.

During 2023, however, there has been an increase in odour complaints from suburbs to the south east of Swanbank. Consequently, more recent investigations and compliance activities have included undertaking extensive field investigations at residences in Ripley, Ecco Ripley and Redbank Plains.

These investigations, along with information from community reports and weather monitoring technology, have identified that composting facilities located in the southern part of the Swanbank industrial area are significantly contributing to the odour currently being experienced.

As a result of these investigations, the department's compliance activities are focusing on composting facilities in and near the Swanbank industrial area, particularly those sites that use highly odorous wastes, have poor onsite management and water management processes.

In June 2023, the department completed a two-day, multi-agency compliance blitz in and near the Swanbank industrial area. This targeted waste transport operators to ensure they had the correct licences and permits and that the waste was only going to those facilities licensed to receive it. The intelligence gathered during this operation will support ongoing compliance activities targeting waste transport operators that receive and process highly odorous waste.

In late July 2023 departmental officers undertook detailed site inspections at all composting sites in the Swanbank industrial area. These inspections focused on closely examining waste receival processes, composting process management and on-site water management.

The findings from these inspections, including results of scientific analysis of water, waste and compost product samples, are being considered by the department in determining what enforcement action should be taken against operators found to be non-compliant.

The department will continue to focus its compliance efforts on waste operators within the Swanbank industrial area and the department will be taking strong enforcement action against any operator found to have been wilfully breaking the law.

Community reporting is an important source of information for the department. The department has recently updated its online reporting form to allow for community reporting of all environmental nuisance issues—including noise, dust and heritage matters—in addition to odour. Members of the community are encouraged to continue reporting any odour issues to support ongoing compliance efforts.

While residential encroachment and multiple odour sources makes swift resolution of odour issues in the area complex, resolving the odour issues being experienced by residents remains the highest priority for the Government and department.

The Government has also undertaken a review of the powers and penalties available to ensure that the environmental regulator has the appropriate tools in place to manage environmental impacts, including ongoing nuisance, and deter environmental offending.

Several of the recommendations have already been delivered through the *Environmental Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2023* which commenced in April 2023. The remainder of the recommendations are being progressed through the consideration of a consultation paper which was released by the Government on 14 September 2023.

On 17 September 2023, I attended a community meeting at Redbank Plains, alongside representatives of the regulator, to discuss odour impacting the community. I outlined a range of additional measures that Government is examining to strengthen the powers and tools available to the regulator. These measures are designed to hold companies and directors to account for wilful non-compliance, and better prevent odour issues arising. This will include measures to speed the transition to enclosed, in-vessel composting. We will also look at further strengthening regulation in relation to the transport of waste.

We will also be investing in a new monitoring network across the community to better capture the information we need to prevent and respond to issues – and to provide clear evidence to support enforcement action and potentially prosecutions when companies do the wrong thing. We have extended offers to do this in partnership with Council. This network will provide information on not just odour, but also broader nuisance issues that affect the community.

This will be of benefit to the department as a regulator, but also Council as an enforcement authority under the *Planning Act 2016* with powers in relation to a range of matters including odour, fumes and dust.

All levels of government need to use the powers available to them to bring these companies into compliance and hold them to account for any identified failings.

I would like to thank those community members involved in organising the meeting, and for sharing their experiences and views. The Government remains committed to resolving this issue as a matter of priority.