

18 November 2009

**Proposed Eastern Creek Waste Project
(also known as the Light Horse waste project)**

On 23 October 2009, the Hon Kristina Keneally, MP, Minister for Planning wrote to the Chairman of the Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) requesting the PAC to advise on the reasonableness of the Department's recommendation on the proposed Eastern Creek Waste project.

The Commission consisted of Mr Garry Payne, AM and Mr John Court (members of the PAC). Mr Payne chaired the review. The Commission has reviewed the Direction General's report, the recommended conditions of consent and relevant documents. Mr Court visited the surrounding areas of the site and other landfill and green waste composting operations on 12, 16 & 17 November to familiarise himself with the existing environment and to appreciate concerns raised in submissions and potential impacts of the operation proposed.

On 10 November 2009, the Commission met with staff from Department of Planning (Mr Chris Ritchie, Ms Felicity Greenway and Mr Jonathan Cleary) and Department of Climate Change, Environment and Water (Mr Mark Gorta and Ms Julie Currey) and Mr Tony Wright, for a briefing and clarification of issues on the Department's report.

The proposed development is to establish a new waste facility at the former Pioneer quarry site at Eastern Creek. The facility would include a waste recovery centre for recycling building materials and green waste and a non-putrescible landfill (in the former quarry void).

The Department received a total of 115 submissions when the application was exhibited. Nine of which were from public authorities and 106 submissions were from the community including a petition with 1035 signatures. Issues raised in these submissions include:

- Dust and odour;
- Impact on property value;
- Noise impact;
- Vermin control;
- Lack of community consultation;
- Environmental monitoring and screening procedures;
- Traffic and access issues;
- Permissibility;
- Lack of justifiable demand;
- Leachate management and potential impacts on groundwater;
- Stormwater;
- Impacts on riparian corridors;
- Developer contributions; and
- Uncertainty of final landform.

Off these issues the Department identified four key issues:

- Waste – justifiable demand;
- Leachate management;
- Traffic and access; and
- Amenity issues concerning air quality and noise.

Waste – justifiable demand

In order to assess whether there is justifiable demand for the proposal, the Department engaged an independent waste expert, Mr Tony Wright, to advise on whether the proposal can be justified in the context of the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy and regional planning strategy.

Mr Wright concluded that the land-fill capacity provided in the proposed facility “would add 40% to the aggregate SMA capacity of General Solid Waste (non-putrescible) landfills.” This additional capacity would extend the overall landfill capacity to accommodate 20 years of disposal demand based on the expected declining disposal demand.

The Department also considered other waste issues including asbestos and putrescible waste. It is satisfied that the environmental and health risks associated with asbestos waste can be managed and its recommended conditions of consent are comprehensive to ensure waste is appropriately managed on the site and the landfill is designed and operated properly.

Leachate management

One of the main concerns is the potential leaking of leachate into the surrounding environment. To address this concern, the Department recommended a suitable landfill liner be installed and extensive monitoring system be implemented to ensure the liner performing effectively. Both the Department and DECCW agreed that the leachate should be extracted and on-site treatment be undertaken before being piped to the Sydney Water sewage treatment system for further treatment.

The Commission agrees that leachate is a main concern having regard to the location of site, the shape of the void and fractured rocks. Following clarification on matters concerning groundwater migration rate, proposed on-site treatment and liner requirement, the Commission is satisfied that recommended Condition No 10 in Schedule 3 is adequate to address the issue.

Odour

The Department considers odour impacts to be minor as the facility is a waste recovery facility for building materials and green waste. With good management practice, the Department considers odour can be adequately controlled. Both the Department and DECCW have recommended a comprehensive environmental management and monitoring system to be implemented to manage potential air pollution sources such as landfilling and green waste composting.

Although the Commission considers that the recommended conditions are generally capable of managing air quality, experience indicates safeguards are required to ensure odours do not become a problem in the adjacent suburb of Minchinbury. The proposed green waste composting operation is relatively large and the location is more sensitive with respect to air movements and proximity to residences than most other comparable operations. Hence, the Commission recommends that:

- the most protective level of measures as set out in DECCW's *Environmental guidelines: composting and related organic processing facilities* (referenced in approval condition 12, Schedule 3) for windrow management, be applied, including establishing green waste windrows and storage mounds on a impervious hardstand area drained so as to ensure no pooling of leachate;
- the program to prepare and implement an **Air quality, Odour and Green House Gas Management Plan** (condition 36, Schedule 3) include as part of odour impact monitoring (sub-paragraph d) the conduct of odour audits six (6) months after commencement of composting and landfilling operations and at two (2) year intervals thereafter; these audits are to include odour observations by trained observers in the Minchinbury area under poor dispersion conditions in addition to any emission measurements and modelling and an analysis of complaints; and
- if it is determined by the audits that odour impacts are unacceptable, the composting activity should revert to an enclosed and controlled mode of operation.

These recommendations need minor modifications to the Department's proposed conditions of consent.

Dust

Although Departmental assessment indicated the proposal would comply with relevant air quality criteria, short term exceedences of fine particles (PM₁₀) may occur due to high existing background levels. Both the Department and DECCW believe that potential dust impacts can be satisfactorily managed. A real-time dust monitoring program is recommended to enable effective management of short term dust events. The Commission agrees the recommended conditions are reasonable and adequate.

Noise

The Department considers the proposal is unlikely to generate significant noise impact due to DECCW recommended restriction on operation hours and no after hour delivery be permitted. Furthermore, the 2 existing bunds on the north-western and northern sides of the site act as noise barrier to further reduce operational noise to the north.

The Commission is satisfied that the recommended conditions are appropriate to address the issue.

Traffic and Access

When compared with existing and future industrial developments in the surrounding areas, the proposal is not considered a major traffic generator. The Department is satisfied that the proposed contributions for regional infrastructure and local road network are adequate to assist the development of road infrastructure to meet the demand generated by the proposal. The Commission agrees.

Other issues raised in submissions

The Department has considered all issues raised in submissions and believes impacts from these issues can be satisfactorily managed via the recommended conditions of consent to minimise impacts and meet the relevant environmental performance standards.

The Commission concurs.

Conclusion

The Commission considers the Department has carried out a thorough assessment of key issues raised in submissions and the recommendation in the Director General's report is reasonable.

Given the urban setting and the nature of the proposed facility, the Commission considers it is of paramount importance to minimise or prevent impacts on the adjacent community. Odour is a particular concern to the Commission, given the proximity of the operation to residences. Hence it is recommended that the draft conditions of consent be modified to require the most protective measures are employed in the open composting of green waste initially, that audits of odour performance be carried out after start up and periodically thereafter and that composting revert to an enclosed and controlled mode of operation if odour cannot be satisfactory managed as proposed.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Payne'.

Garry Payne, AM
PAC member

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Court'.

John Court
PAC member