

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
Question On Notice

Thursday, 28 April 2016

4108. Hon Robin Chappie to the Minister for Housing representing the Minister for Water

I refer to question on notice No. 3790. The Broome community are very concerned about the contamination of groundwater by the Water Corporations Broome South Waste Water Treatment Plant (BSWWTP) which the Minister is responsible for. I seek further detailed information that is not currently on the public record. While it is on the public record that effluent is leaking from the BSWWTP and Broome Golf Course, into the Ramsar listed and National Heritage listed Roebuck Bay wetlands and proposed Yawuru Nagulagun Roebuck Bay Marine Park, I ask the following specific questions in order to allow a greater public understanding of the issue:

- (a) when did the leaking of effluent from the BSWWTP into groundwater first come to the attention of the Minister and the department;
- (b) how long has it been known that effluent has been leaking from the BSWWTP into groundwater;
- (c) what volume of effluent is estimated to be leaking into the groundwater per day and per year, and discharging into Roebuck Bay from the BSWWTP;
- (d) how much nitrogen and phosphorus is estimated to be entering and polluting Roebuck Bay per day and per year from the BSWWTP leakage;
- (e) is the Minister aware that the BSWWTP was reclassified in 2015 as “Contaminated – Remediation Required” under the *Contaminated Sites Act 2003*, and that the golf course next door to the plant, which uses treated wastewater from BSWWTP to irrigate the fairways and green, has been classified as “Potentially Contaminated – Investigation Required”;
- (f) will the Minister please advise of any actions that are proposed by the Water Corporation to fix the leak in the BSWWTP;
- (g) what options have been put forward to fix the leaking ponds;
- (h) will the Minister table the options for fixing the leaking ponds;
- (i) if no to (h), why not;
- (j) is the Minister aware that nitrogen and phosphorus in wastewater contribute to blooms of the *cyanobacteria lyngbya majuscula*;
- (k) is the Minister aware of the worsening blooms of the *cyanobacteria lyngbya majuscula* over the last decade in Roebuck Bay;
- (l) is the Minister aware of growing community concern from all sectors of the Broome community about this serious issue;
- (m) is the Minister aware that exposure to lyngbya can cause severe irritation including skin and eye irritation, respiratory irritation and exacerbation of pre-existing respiratory conditions, such as asthma following inhalation of dried lyngbya, and gastrointestinal irritation following ingestion of dried lyngbya;
- (n) is the Minister aware that lyngbya has been linked to the formation of tumours in marine turtles, alterations in turtle blood biochemistry and increased dugong strandings;
- (o) is the Minister aware that lyngbya can cause seagrass and mangrove loss;
- (p) will the Minister guarantee that this serious contamination from the BSWWTP will be halted within the next two months;
- (q) if no to (p), when will this serious contamination be halted; and
- (r) will any action be taken against those responsible for allowing this serious contamination to continue for so long?

Answer

The Minister for Water has provided the following response.

- (a-r) The Water Corporation is undertaking significant environmental investigations, as required by the Department of Environment Regulation, and overseen by an independent auditor. Because this is a comprehensive and wide-ranging investigation, sampling needs to be undertaken over a number of seasons and is well-underway. Permission was required from native title holders to drill additional monitoring bores, and this is expected to occur during the 2016 dry season.

Since January 2016, flows to Broome South wastewater treatment plant have been reduced by 20 per cent and a \$7m project to prevent suspected seepage from two holding ponds will commence shortly.

Water Corporation will continue to consult with the Department of Environment Regulation, the Shire of Broome and community groups on this important issue.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nawis", is located in the lower right quadrant of the page.