

28 September 2010

## Report into the Monitoring of Cockburn Sound

The Office of the Auditor General has issued a report on the effectiveness of the monitoring of Cockburn Sound, and has found that there are some areas that are lacking. It is good the report has been done as it highlights the problem where an essential agency such as the CSMC struggles to meet the expectations when it is underfunded.

This finding is of significant concern to the Kwinana Industries Council for several reasons.

KIC places a high value on the work of the CSMC and continues to believe that its data is by far the best available to provide scientific evidence to support their annual Health of the Sound Report Card.

The health of the Sound is important to industry and to the community that uses the Sound for recreational purposes. The Sound's health status been reported as improving for several years via the Cockburn Sound Management Council's (CSMC) annual report card, and it clearly identifies areas on concern for ongoing closer monitoring.

If there is a problem with the data, then there should be a close look at the adequacy of funding the CSMC receives to do the work required of it.

For the past few years the KIC has lobbied the DEC to increase its funding to CSMC so that it is adequately funded to carry out the work it is expected to do. KIC has a representative on the CSMC and KIC voluntarily financially supports its operations. It is KIC's view that the CSMC is underfunded, and is therefore unable to do the depth of research that it believes is necessary.

In these modern times industry is not the polluter of the Sound that it once was. In decades gone by industry was licensed to emit stormwater and process water to the Sound, but the standards were much lower than they are today. Today, very little process water, if any, is emitted to the Sound by KIC's full members. The licences are still held and fees paid, but the environmental standards have rightly increased dramatically since the 'bad old days' and there is a strong regulatory environment, which is appropriate.

What is emitted now to the Sound is sea water in and sea water out primarily for cooling water or for the desalination plant. Some stormwater licences are still held for extreme rain events, but it is a rare occurrence that they are used now. Industries that need to emit waste water now have access to the Sepia Depression ocean outfall pipeline in many cases, provided strict quality parameters are met.

The inference that industry remains a polluter of the Sound is plain wrong. The only way industry can defend itself against allegations of continuing to be the polluter that it once was is with reputable scientific reports being produced annually by the CSMC.

The CSMC is seen as the independent scientist gathering and providing the data, and it is the DEC, that does the regulatory work – the licensing and enforcement. The two roles are and should be kept separate.

KIC supports CSMC with direct funding to the tune of \$50,000 pa, with \$20,000 of this tagged for research projects at the CSMC's discretion. In addition, industry voluntarily pays the CSMC's rent so that it can continue to be located near the Sound.

If asked what the condition of the Sound was, KIC would refer to the CSMC report, and would refer a specific scientific or data related inquiry to Dr. Tom Rose, the Director of the CSMC. His expertise is highly regarded by industry and the local community, as is the work he is attempting to do on a minimal budget. On this basis it is not reasonable for the Auditor's report to place criticism at the feet of the CSMC, it is a matter providing adequate resources to do the job, simple as that.

CSMC needs at least \$800,000 to do the job properly, it only gets a \$500,000 annual allocation. Industry pays in excess of \$1.5m in Cockburn Sound related licence fees to the DEC. Therein lies the answer to the problem.

Taking a positive view of the report, it highlights the need for adequate funding of the Management Council. The message in the report should be to provide adequate funding to do the job asked, or don't do it at all. Half way funding is not good enough.

Industry wants the CSMC to be well funded so it can be effective in its data gathering and reporting, and we are doing our bit, voluntarily, to assist with that funding. The inadequacy of the funding is easily fixed, a mere \$300,000 would do the job, and industry is paying more than 5 times this amount in Cockburn Sound licence fees to the DEC already.

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