

February 27 2008

## Hesse comes clean on Cancer

Kwinana environmental campaigner Steve Hesse has finally come clean on Kwinana's cancer rate; backing down from earlier claims it was Australia's highest.

In a statement issued today, Mr Hesse has retracted a claim made at a recent Kwinana public meeting that, in Kwinana, "more people die from cancer than anywhere else in Australia".

This statement was challenged at the meeting – called the Communities Industries Forum - by Kwinana Industries Council (KIC) Director Chris Oughton – who asked for the evidence in support.

In a subsequent series of exchanges between KIC and Mr Hesse, Mr Hesse realized he got it wrong and had misread a report prepared by The University of Adelaide's Public Health Information Development Unit.

Mr Hesse's retraction statement says: "what he should have said (at the meeting) was: 'Kwinana has higher rates of cancer than the national average'. Mr Hesse and the KPA (Kwinana Progress Association) apologise for this mistake".

According to Mr Oughton, Mr Hesse's apology should have been more extensive.

"Mr Hesse has not just made this statement once," Mr Oughton said.

"For some time he has been wrongly stating Kwinana has the highest cancer rate in Australia, which has caused needless alarm for the community," he said.

"To imply it was a one-off mistake at the Communities Industries Forum is a bit hard to take as he has made the "mistake" repeatedly in letters to the editor, newspaper articles and when being interviewed on radio.

"Our media clippings file indicates that, were it a mistake, then Mr Hesse has been repeatedly mistaken, time and time again."

"It's time for Mr Hesse to stop this campaign of exaggeration, which paints an unfairly bleak picture of Kwinana."

"Nobody challenges the cancer rate in Kwinana is marginally higher than both the national and state averages, but to repeatedly state it is "the highest in the nation" is just plain irresponsible.

"Mr Hesse's tenacity as a campaigner is to be admired, but the over zealous use of figures is disappointing for someone who leads a community organisation such as the Kwinana Progress Association.

"It would be preferable were Mr Hesse to apply his tenacity to the Town of Kwinana's healthy lifestyles program, which seeks to reduce the incidences of cancer by improving the general health of the community and which is strongly and financially supported by industry."

Adelaide University's Dr John Glover, who compiled the report Mr Hesse relies on, is on record saying "socioeconomic disadvantage was the most common cause of high rates of chronic disease". (Weekend Courier October 20, 2006 P.3).

Dr Glover then said: "Industry plays a part but socioeconomic disadvantage is the biggest factor in population health, and that's just a fact of life."

"It's time Mr Hesse accepted these facts of life," Mr Oughton said.