

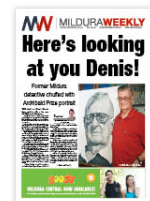
A DISASTER WAITING TO HAPPEN: CR MILNE SOUNDS A WARNING, AND CALLS FOR CHINCHILLA SALT WASTE DUMP INVESTIGATION

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Cr Glenn Milne has raised concerns about the risks associated with a salt dump at Chinchilla in Queensland, located close to a waterway that feeds the Murray-Darling Basin.

By VINNIE RODI

MILDURA Councillor Glenn Milne has called for an immediate investigation into the risks posed by a commercial salt storage facility located close to a waterway that feeds the Murray-Darling Basin.


The facility in question is situated on Baking Board Hill, Chinchilla, in Queensland, RIGHT, and was approved by the Western Downs Regional Council in 2016 after an appeal to the Planning and Environment Court.

The site is owned and operated by We Kando Pty Ltd, and is permitted to store up to 450,000 tonnes of waste landfill, 900,000 tonnes of product salt landfill and 45,000 tonnes of waste salt landfill each year, and will store salt waste from coal seam gas operations fewer than 100 metres from Stockyard Creek – a tributary of the Condamine River which feeds into the Murray-Darling Basin.


Cr Milne said the site was cause for concern now, and into the



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future, and asked Council staff to collect more information regarding the site at Wednesday's Council meeting.

"At a minimum we should be getting a rundown of the situation from someone up there, including Local Government, and see if there's anything we can do to support them in their efforts," he said yesterday following the meeting.

"We need to know what the facts are, and what threat it poses, if any – and it seems that on face value that it does (pose a threat)."

Cr Milne said that he believed locals should be concerned about the site regardless of its distance from Mildura.

"We're downstream," he said. "You've got groundwater concerns, and if you look at what mining has done around Ballarat and Bendigo, they've got contaminants within their underground water system. There's precedence being set over history.

"We've got salt interception works, and we know what salt does to agriculture, we know what high salinity does, and we've spent decades cleaning the river up from salt.

"And here they're going to sit a whole stack of it right near the river with a possibility it could leech into the Basin system. Here's another problem that could add to the Darling system... here's another thing that could go wrong up there.

"If you get a flash flood that might actually fill the river, it's going to fill it with saline water, and goodness knows what else. If it gets into the Darling, it could get into Wentworth. We're talking about the health of our river system."

Cr Milne believes the flow-on effect of any potential contamination could have widespread effects to the Mildura Local Government Area.

"Our Council area runs right up to the South Australian border," he said. "You've got almonds at Lindsey Point, there's Lake Cullulleraine, irrigation and vines, so yes we need to be

concerned.”

Cr Milne also called on Member for Mildura Ali Cupper, and the Murray Group of Councils to look into the issue.

“I think the State Government should be taking some action, and asking questions,” he said. “Our local Member should be saying something. As a community we should at least be asking questions.”

Research report supports concerns

CR Milne’s concerns about the site have been backed up by a report prepared for the NSW Environmental Defender’s Office by Stuart Khan – an environmental engineering professor at the University of New South Wales.

Prof. Khan concluded that the We Kando site posed “a considerable risk” to water contamination, and states “that there are still a number of important risks that should be properly quantified.”

These include potential salt contamination of Stockyard Creek, and the Condamine River, as well as local groundwater.

“The risks are exacerbated by the very close proximity of the proposed salt stockpile and storage area to the creek (less than 100m),” the report reads.

Prof Khan also identified the failure of the landfill liner and seepage of saline water (leachate) to groundwater and the creek as one of several potential hazardous events.

“Salt does not biodegrade in the environment, and has an infinite environmental residence time,” the report reads.

“Consequently, salt storages will need to be maintained on a permanent basis (decades or longer) or until the salt is re-mined and removed from the facility.”

The close proximity of the salt storages to Stockyard Creek also means flooding events will pose a significant hazard, according to Prof Khan.

He said that flooding could impact an open landfill 'monocell', as well as the existing stockpiles of salt being prepared for landfill.

What do the locals say?

THE location of the CSG waste dump has been cause for concern for local residents, with the Cameby Concerned Citizens Group working over the past two years to have the site removed from the area.

Group member, and adjoining landholder, Glen Beasley, ABOVE, spoke to the Mildura Weekly this week, and said the fears the group holds – mainly that the site's location beside river systems and priority agricultural land could pose great risk to farming and the environment – remained.

"Our group has done a lot of work to obtain objective scientific research into the potential threats, and one of the documents we submitted was Professor Khan's assessment," he said.

"As it currently stands we've explored every option at a local and State level, and about a year ago had a conversation with Federal Agriculture and Water Resources Minister, and our local Federal MP, David Littleproud.

"Mr Littleproud made it clear that any intervention would need to be based on scientific findings, but so far the state of play is a bit of an unknown. We have put the scientific basis in front of him with no response.

"We know that We Kando hold every approval they need from a State and Local Government perspective, and I believe they are currently being held up with some permit requirements to allow trucks to access the site."

Mr Beasley said Prof Khan's research, and a 2011 report penned by Doctors for the Environment, paint "a chilling appraisal" of the danger posed by the site.

"A precautionary principle is that you would not proceed with this (site) on what we know," he said. "We know that 15 million

tonnes of CSG waste will be allowed on the site across its lifespan – five million of which will be salt.”

Mr Beasley said the Cameby Concerned Citizens Group remained hopeful of achieving an outcome, and was currently talking to Federal cross-benchers in an attempt to drum up support.

“Being an election year it’s a good time to lobby government,” he said. “We’re still fighting.”

The Mildura Weekly contacted We Kando for comment, specifically regarding an update on the Chinchilla landfill’s operational status, and what precautions had been taken to prevent contamination into the Condamine River in the event of a flash flood.

We Kando declined to comment, or provide a written statement, prior to our print deadline.

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