

I address the Ministerial Advisory Committee and EPA Inquiry Secretariat on behalf of the people of Bulla which is located on Melbourne north-west boundary between Tullamarine airport and Sunbury.

For years the people of Bulla complained to the EPA about the stench, litter, dust and smoke that is emitted from the landfill at 500 Sunbury Road, Bulla.

And for years those complaints were dismissed and the residents treated like second class citizens by a remote and condescending bureaucracy.

The truth about 500 Sunbury Road is that it is not a landfill, it is a fire. It is a fire in an asbestos tip that has been burning for more than 20 years. Generally the fire is contained beneath the surface of the tip but as the landfill has risen far above the natural contours of the landscape the fire now regularly breaks through the surface.

As committee members may have seen on A Current Affair the operators of this tip behave outside the law. They have done so for years. Their mishandling of the asbestos they are licenced to receive by the EPA is not just cavalier, it is illegal. The environment minister Lisa Neville declared it so on national television. Yet still they continue to operate. Why have they not been shut down, deregistered or had their licence cancelled?

In May 2014 the EPA issued an order for BTQ to put out the fire. It still burns. Why has the EPA not cancelled this landfills licence to receive asbestos? Why has it not cancelled its licence for myriad breaches such as litter, odour, smoke, dust.

Why do the operators get so many “get out of jail free cards” while residents are treated with ambivalence bordering on disdain.

The issuing of pollution abatement notices and PINs is useless unless there are genuine consequences for those who thumb their noses at the law in this way.

As far as the residents of Bulla and the 10,000s of motorists who use Sunbury Road daily are the operators of this tip have a complete disregard for public safety and the environment. So just who is the EPA protecting?

We believe the “protection” part of the EPA should be taken more seriously. There is a responsibility to protect the community and the environment, not just the commercial interests of a company or the authorities need to be able to dump asbestos in an easily accessible location.

We would like to see the EPA given more power to follow up on its notices. There should be an accruing fine for non-compliance with clean-up and pollution abatement notices.

We would like to see an office of review and an appeals process so the community can be assured decisions that are vital to the well-being and amenity of our community can be assessed by a truly independent authority.

We would also like to see a revamp of the auditing protocols around landfills which rely on a small number of private consultants who are paid by the landfill operators. Sure a conflict of interest.

Carmel Egan