

# UgliTown

Newsletter of  
the  
City and  
Environment  
Project  
July 2003 ★



Observations from writers with special knowledge of planning, public interest and environmental controversies in the Fremantle region

## Fremantle Mayor and Toxic Waters

by mark hingston (contaminated sites alliance)

The Fremantle Mayor was recently reported in the Frem. Gazette (27/5/03) suggesting that Ascot Waters in Belmont was a successful example of tip site remediation. If the Mayor is planning such a 'success' for Fremantle, residents should be afraid, very afraid.

Water sampling carried out in 2002 for the Dept of Planning and Infrastructure found that contaminants were leaching from the 'remediated' tip into the Swan River. The levels of pesticides and heavy metals were high enough to trigger National Environmental Protection Ecological Investigation levels. High levels of copper, mercury, lead, aldrin, chlordane, DDT and heptachlor, amongst others were recorded.

The City acknowledges that the former South Fremantle tip site is a complex contaminated zone (City newsletter June-July 2003). This recognition is welcomed. The next step for the City will be to formulate a state of the art remediation to ensure that an Ascot Waters situation is avoided. Hopefully, mistakes made during Minim Cove and Omex remediations will also be avoided.

The South Fremantle tip site remediation will be a litmus test for the Council, and how it conducts and handles public comment and input. Due to the cocktail of chemicals and the proximity of existing homes, the public processes will need to be rigorous and independent. Comments that the solutions need to be 'realistic and affordable' should be treated with suspicion.

The closeness of homes will probably necessitate a staged progressive remediation using enclosed domes to eliminate dust and contaminated vapours moving off site. The City should use this as a starting point in its plans.

There have been enquires about who runs UgliTown. The answer is simple, no one. It is a writers collective. That means individuals contribute depending on their time and motivation. We know that is difficult for the establishment to grasp but there it is. If you are keen to find out who contributes, and is part of the collective then you will have to keep reading UgliTown. If you have progressive ideas that we could help to distribute feel free to write to us.

**The CEP can be contacted at PO Box 356, Fremantle, 6959.**

## Friends of Clontarf Hill tackle the RAC's Bulldozer Mentality

### Part of FoCH's response to the RAC's push to keep the Fremantle Highway.

The Friend's of Clontarf Hill and Adjacent Bushland Corridor Members, many of whom are also RAC Members were horrified to read in the Cockburn Gazette that David Moir, Group Policy and External Relations General Manager has stated that the RAC supports the Melville Council in it's demand for the Bypass and Roe Highway Stage 8.

Surely the RAC should represent its member's views. As this is an issue with many views it is not the place of the RAC to support an issue of this nature. It has certainly put many RAC Members offside.

Or, does RAC executive support the destruction of the Bibra Lake Wetlands, Clontarf Hill woodland and adjacent bushland corridor? Does the RAC have no respect for Aboriginal Tradition and Sacred Sites? Does the RAC not support a State Government election promise by Dr Gallop to scrap the Bypass, by popular demand? Has the RAC not read or understood the WAPC report, "*Fremantle Eastern Bypass and Preferred Alternatives*" which clearly states that the Bypass and Roe Hwy Stage 8 would cause significant social and environmental damage and is not required? Does the RAC have no respect for the communities of Hamilton Hill, Beaconsfield and White Gum Valley, which would be dissected? Does the RAC not consider the views of both the City of Fremantle and Cockburn as being credible?

"Mistake that could never be reversed" - that is exactly what it would be should the Melville Council get its way. Removing two of the last natural vegetation remnants in the area, Clontarf Hill and Bibra Lake Wetlands, will cause local extinction of many endemic flora and fauna and the loss of the only remaining old growth tuart community in Fremantle City area. Let alone the destruction of numerous Aboriginal Sacred Sites. Surely a more irreversible mistake you could not find.

What does Mr Moir base his support on? Hopefully not the inaccurate information the Melville Council and the SOS cronies have been throwing around at enormous expense to the ratepayers of Melville and the general public.

# Is Your Council on Acid? The Dangers of Ignoring Acid Sulphate Soils During Planning

(by Geoff Evans, Convenor- National Parks Conservation Society)

Acid sulfate soil (ASS) is the common name for soil that contains iron sulphides or their oxidation products. These soils occur in low lying, waterlogged swampy areas where there is sufficient sulfate, iron and organic matter.

When acid sulfate soils are exposed to air the iron sulphides oxidise producing sulphuric acid. The acid can then dissolve and mobilise toxic concentrations of metals such as aluminium, iron and arsenic present in the soil. The acid and metals usually leach into surface drainage and can cause fish kills and loss of biodiversity in rivers and estuaries. The leachate can also contaminate groundwater with arsenic and metals and cause health problems. Increased soil acidity can also cause extensive infrastructure damage to roads and buildings.

The extent, and problems caused by the disturbance of, acid sulfate soils are poorly understood in Western Australia. This is despite these soils being widespread, extending from the north west coast to the southwest region; Swan Coastal Plain, Scott Coastal Plain and through to Albany.

## Urban Dangers

With increased pressure in sensitive areas for urbanisation, significant environmental problems will emerge unless awareness about the issue, and what can be done to manage it, is more widely raised. The recent groundwater acidity and arsenic contamination problems in the Perth suburb of Stirling are an example of the on-going problems that can arise if development in areas underlain by, or near, acid sulfate soils occurs.

The creation of inland waterways (canals), drainage, dam construction, urban development and mining and the associated changes in the watertable, are all examples of activities that may result in oxidation of acid sulfate soils and the release of sulfuric acid and associated heavy metals.

## Costs of Ignoring ASS

Sulfuric acid produced by acid sulfate soils corrodes concrete, iron, steel, and certain aluminium alloys and has the potential to cost \$M in infrastructure damage. It has caused the weakening of concrete structures and corrosion of slabs, steel fence posts, foundations of buildings and underground concrete water and sewerage pipes.

When acid sulfate soils are used as landfill they can affect plant growth and landscaping and create erosion problems. Developers of subdivisions where wetlands, swamps and peaty depressions are found or are nearby need to take particular care. Some early indicators include rust-coloured stains and slimes.

Drainage of wetlands or alteration of existing groundwater flows for urban development and agriculture can release sulfuric acid which mobilises aluminium and heavy metals.

## Solution

The best technique for addressing acid sulfate soils is to avoid disturbing the iron sulfide layer in the first place ie, retain the natural ecology. To avoid disturbing the iron sulfide layer it is important to know where it is likely to be found. To help in this the state government is currently mapping ASS zones.

A recent workshop was organised by the Department of Environment, Denmark Environment Centre and Curtin University of Technology on identifying, assessing and managing acid sulfate soils. Papers are available from the Department of Environment.

Recently identified sites include: Mandurah, Peel Harvey Estuary, Yunderup Canal development, City of Stirling, Perth City foreshore, the Swan River and numerous areas in the south-west coastal zone.

## Website

For further information you can visit [www.environ.wa.gov.au](http://www.environ.wa.gov.au). A range of articles are available if you search for acid sulfate soils at the above website.

---

## Ever wondered about truth in local government election campaigns?

Do the rules that apply to local government candidates during elections actually encourage dishonesty? In response to a letter concerning a particular candidate's claims during recent local government elections, the WA Electoral Commissioner made this reply about misleading election material,

*"Typically courts have distinguished between matters that are misleading in relation to electors forming their views about who to vote for, as distinct from being misleading at the time that the elector actually marked their ballot papers and have found that it is only the latter case that is caught by the provisions such as section 4.88 of the Local Government Act 1995"*

Are we to assume that misleading material can be freely distributed in the weeks leading up to an election but not on election day? If so, it seems this is one aspect of local government that is in need of immediate reform.

While we are at it, allowing extra votes to individuals on the basis of property ownership also needs reforming. Votes according to wealth is a hang-over from the "propertied gentleman", 'landed gentry' era. It is inherently undemocratic and needs to be reformed to ensure that voting reflects the individual rather than wealth.