



“Progress is more than the *ka-ching* of cash registers”

POOR PLANNING IMPACTS ON COMMUNITY HEALTH, SAYS KATE ELLIS

If you are looking for party political rhetoric or Howard Government bashing you had best stop reading here.

I want to instead tell you a story about a local community who find themselves in a David versus Goliath-like battle with a major business. I also want to send out a plea to all Governments to listen to the voices of community concern in economic decision making, not just to the *ka-ching* of cash registers in striving to create the almighty dollar.

My story begins in the community of Kilburn, where for decades residents have voiced their fears that pollution from local industry may be negatively impacting on their health.

These residents are the unfortunate victims of poor planning decisions of decades past when flawed and short-sighted logic led to the location of heavy industry, including a foundry, nestled side by side with public housing.

Living among such industry can have some less than ideal consequences – in this particular case they happen to include foul odours, dirty air and undesirable levels of pollution.

After years of much lobbying and grassroots campaigning by a remarkable group of locals, in 2005 the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) agreed that they might be wise to do some research and monitor pollution levels in the area.

In the meantime, however, riding high on the mining boom, one of the local industrial sites, the Bradken foundry, devised a plan to significantly expand their operations and indeed triple the output of their foundry.

Despite the existing concerns in

the area, the State Government decided to grant the Bradken foundry expansion proposal Major Project Status.

In light of this I applied under Freedom of Information laws to access the EPA test results and after trawling through 3440 documents I learnt that they indicated that national environmental standards were being breached in Kilburn, where PM10 levels, or small particulates, were at deeply disturbing levels.

A paper prepared for the National Environment Protection Council found that such increased levels of PM10 can lead to increases in mortality from respiratory or cardiac disease; increases in hospital admissions for respiratory and cardiac conditions; increases in hospital casualty and medical surgery visits for asthma and other respiratory conditions; and increases in the daily prevalence of respiratory symptoms.

I do not claim to know what health consequences, if any, this pollution has had in Kilburn but surely finding out might be a wiser next step than massively increasing industrial production in the vicinity?

ONE of the, quite literally, hundreds of residents who have contacted me on this issue wrote: “Every month, my children need to go to the doctor because their lungs are affected by the pollution. They have asthma and have problems breathing. I often get headaches, and I think it is because of the smell and the noise.”

Another stated: “I came here with a clean bill of health. With everything in the air, I contracted asthma, which has resulted in me being on 24/7 oxygen and finding it very hard to breathe.”

I do not suggest that Bradken are the sole contributor to Kilburn’s health and environmental cam-

paign. They are not. But I do think that maybe we should be debating whether Kilburn is the most appropriate place for large scale industry in the future.

It is wonderful that this company is successful and seeking to expand. I know as well as any that it is only through the growth of the economy and the creation of jobs that governments can fund initiatives to improve the health, education and environment of the community.

But this expansion also provides the opportunity to relocate to one of Adelaide’s designated industrial precincts.

Government must take this opportunity to address poor planning decisions of the past, not to entrench them for the future.

I am afraid I cannot yet tell if today’s story has a happy ending – the approval process for the expansion of the Bradken foundry continues and remains before the State Government.

I can, however, tell the moral of the story which is that the point of economic development is to enrich our community and improve the lives and wellbeing of our citizens – not to come at the expense of this.

This is true not just in Kilburn but in all of our communities. It is a principle which must be maintained.

I will continue to fight for this principle and for the best interests of the community that I represent – no matter who that means opposing.

The health of our communities is worth it.

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EXPANSION: Plans to triple the output of the Bradken foundry in Kilburn are concerning residents