

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

The Development and Expansion of Waste-to-Energy Infrastructure in Victoria

Melbourne – Friday 8 May 2026

MEMBERS

Georgie Purcell – Chair

Richard Welch – Deputy Chair

John Berger

Gaelle Broad

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Moira Deeming

Tom McIntosh

Evan Mulholland

Sonja Terpstra

WITNESS

Andy Smith, Gippsland Trades & Labour Council.

The CHAIR: I declare open the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the Development and Expansion of Waste-to-Energy Infrastructure in Victoria. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands we are gathered on today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee, or who are watching the live broadcast of these proceedings. I also welcome any other members of the public watching via the live broadcast and in the public gallery today.

I should have said at the start of the day – we tend to not too often have members of the public in the public gallery, so just a note for anyone who was not in attendance yesterday that this is considered a formal proceeding of the Parliament. I should have reminded members of the gallery that if there are any disruptions at any time, we will have to close the session.

We will kick off by introducing committee members, starting with Mr Berger.

John BERGER: Thank you, Chair. John Berger, Member for Southern Metro.

David ETTERS HANK: David Ettershank, Western Metro Region.

The CHAIR: Georgie Purcell, Northern Victoria Region.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Sarah Mansfield, Member for Western Victoria.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for coming along and appearing today. All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing, and then transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, could you please state your full name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of.

Andy SMITH: My full name is Andrew Smith, and I am here on behalf of the Gippsland Trades & Labour Council.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you. We now welcome your opening comments but ask they are kept to around 10 to 15 minutes to ensure plenty of time for discussion and questions. It is fine if it is less than that.

Andy SMITH: I think I will be on the narrow side of your 10 to 15 minutes, but we will see how we go.

The CHAIR: Great. I might also just quickly say – sorry – Dr Mansfield might have to briefly jump off but will be returning when she is free again. Please go ahead.

Andy SMITH: Okay. As I said, I have come here as a representative of Gippsland Trades & Labour Council. We are a regional trades and labour council located in Morwell in the Latrobe Valley in Gippsland. We have over 20 affiliates ranging from blue-collar maintenance-type unions all the way through to nurses and academic unions – so a good broad spread. I also note that the inquiry has had over 700 submissions, and when I did a quick review of those submissions, I would say somewhere around 98 per cent were against waste-to-energy or the furtherment of the waste-to-energy industry. I will be taking a different approach.

I certainly will be talking about the impacts on local communities and residential areas, but I will be doing so from the perspective of a region that has been in decline for some time and faces a rapid decline moving forward. Firstly I would like to thank you for having me here today and for letting me represent the union members of Gippsland and their families.

For those who are not aware, we have in the Latrobe Valley a rather large power industry, coal-fired power, and that is now facing closure. The Yallourn power station and mine will be closed in mid-2028, which is a tick over two years from now, and we expect at that time that there will be around 2000 jobs attached to the power station and mine at Yallourn that will need to be replaced in the Latrobe Valley. Alongside that we also have the closure of the Loy Yang A power station in 2035 and Loy Yang B in the early to mid-2040s. Gippsland's oil and gas sector is already decommissioning, and there are plans for that to be finalised by 2035. That just paints a little bit of a picture about what is happening at the moment and moving forward somewhat in the Latrobe Valley. I am sure a lot of people are aware of that anyway. On top of that, two or three years ago we had 300 jobs cut from the Australian paper mill at Maryvale, and that had a devastating effect on the community because at that time the paper mill was the largest employer in the Latrobe Valley. Now it is the hospital, which is great. But the paper mill leads me into the discussion around the Maryvale waste-to-energy project.

The Maryvale waste-to-energy project is the only project slated for the Latrobe Valley that could begin construction and be completed almost in time for the closure of Yallourn. I say 'could' because it has taken a hit recently with the VCAT decision on the Hampton Park waste-transfer station, but we are not completely without hope that the project may still go ahead. The paper mill at Maryvale employs somewhere around 500 to 600 workers still, so it is a very large employer in the area. The Maryvale waste-to-energy project would underpin the operations of the mill, which are precarious at the best of times, by providing another source of income and also providing energy to power the paper mill and make it a closed circuit. The Maryvale waste-to-energy project is important locally to the paper mill as it is now.

You have to excuse me if I go back and forth, because I am really trying to not just have my union hat on and talk about jobs, jobs, jobs. The Latrobe Valley in itself has some really terrible socioeconomic and social issues. It consistently ranks in the top two or three in the state in domestic violence, ambulance call-out and hospitalisation from domestic violence, and elevated homelessness, especially for women. Youth unemployment is way higher than the state average. Unemployment in general is higher than the state average, and poor mental health in the Latrobe Valley is 34 per cent higher than the state average. People may ask why I am raising these social issues in an inquiry into waste-to-energy. It is quite simple, and that is that with the impending closure of the power industry and Yallourn power station and mine, those types of statistics are only going to get worse – they are not going to get better. Those statistics do not get better in regions and locations where mass industry closure occurs, and that could be seen anywhere around the world, not just in the Latrobe Valley.

Not only would the Maryvale waste-to-energy project underpin the Maryvale paper mill, it would also create long-term jobs – ongoing jobs. It would create short-term construction jobs, which are needed by those who sort of move around with the construction industry, especially in regional Victoria. It also comes with the potential for secondary industries to be built, such as biofuel. And whether people agree with this or not, it actually is a solution to waste management in Victoria.

That being said, with any industrial or sensitive-type projects there is a lot of NIMBY, 'not in my backyard'. I understand that, because if I lived in Hampton Park or around that area, I would not want a waste transfer station at my back fence either. I get it, right. And I have got to commend those people that protested and picketed and did the hard work to get that VCAT decision because – I was nearly going to swear then, but I will not – I tell you, it makes my blood boil a little bit that we in the Latrobe Valley and we in the union movement cannot have that same level of activism and engagement to get what we want, or what we need more to the point.

The creation of the waste-to-energy project at Maryvale might only be small in scale compared to some of the projects that we are hoping for in the Latrobe Valley, but if we do not get a project started, the others will not follow. That is where we see the Maryvale project being beneficial to the Latrobe Valley. There will be many people that do not want it that live in the Latrobe Valley, but I can guarantee you there will be just as many that do want that project at Maryvale. The Latrobe Valley is used to heavy industry. It is used to noise. It is used to

smells. If you have been to the Valley, you will know what I am talking about. But I think that the support for the waste-to-energy project, at least from our members and other members of unions, is high. And I would say that it will not be accepted without commitments to the community, like strong environmental protections; full transparency around the processes, emissions and what goes in; guarantees for safe operation and community health; and – I have left this point to last – secure, well-paid union jobs, because without those secure, well-paid jobs the Latrobe Valley is going to be in real trouble moving forward. It is also important to remember that Latrobe Valley has powered Victoria for over 100 years – 100 years of power to this state, especially to Melbourne – and we seem to get the shitty end of the stick in return. We need to look at all the options, including waste-to-energy, when it comes to putting some life back into the Latrobe Valley and making sure we do not fall off a cliff. That is where I will leave it.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for that. We will now move to questions. We have got plenty of time, members, so I will put 7 minutes on the timer, and if there is extra time, we will go around again, starting with Mr Berger.

John BERGER: Thank you, Chair. I just think I should note, for transparency, given we have got union people in the room, I am a former official of the Transport Workers Union. We were affiliates of the trades and labour council down there. I understand where you are at with that; I just thought for transparency that it be noted on the transcript.

With plant closures, as we all know, there is a good chance that all the skill sets that are available whilst operating those plants now will be lost to the area once they close. What are the types of skills that might be applicable in the current settings that might work in the waste-to-energy facility if it was to get up and running?

Andy SMITH: Yes, that is a great question. We have identified jobs working with Opal, which is the company that the projects are connected to. There would be jobs for people from the mine operating heavy equipment, for example, especially moving the waste. There would be people within the actual waste-to-energy incinerator area with cranes and that type of thing. In the control room you would need people with control room skills to make sure that that is all operating as it should, and then at the other end again you would have people with heavy equipment skills or logistics tracking skills and that sort of thing. It would not be a very large number of jobs necessarily. We are talking 50 to 60 on the ongoing side of things, but it would allow for quite a good, broad range of skill sets to be in there. I suppose the short answer is that it does not just suit any one particular type of worker, it can suit many different types of workers.

John BERGER: Would you agree that once you lose those skill sets, it is very hard to get them back?

Andy SMITH: Absolutely. One of the reasons is that we already have members who are making inquiries about moving interstate to continue a particular lifestyle and a similar wage.

John BERGER: And the broader supply chain – do you see some advantages in the broader community area?

Andy SMITH: Yes, definitely. What we see with the power industry at the moment is – and this is from the Latrobe City Council – for each full-time job, there are four flow-on jobs. We see that being similar with the waste-to-energy at Maryvale, given the local nature of the operations.

John BERGER: Is there much commentary – any adverse comments – down in the Latrobe Valley about the waste-to-energy project?

Andy SMITH: Look, there are people that have concerns around the environmental aspects of the project, and I have certainly heard those, read those and spoken to people about those concerns. But I have to say that the overwhelming attitude from workers in heavy industry in the Latrobe Valley is positive for the waste-to-energy facility to go ahead. It is also really important to remember that by having that facility, they are underpinning the paper mill. The paper mill is precarious at all times, and when those 300 jobs went, the white paper side of that business went with it. We do not make any white paper. This paper here that is in my hand was not made in Australia. It used to be, but it is not now. That is the precarious nature of a company that is owned by a very large multinational. The waste-to-energy project will help underpin the mill, because the energy created from the waste-to-energy project will go back into the mill itself, reducing costs for the mill. That might have been off track.

John BERGER: That is okay. That is all I have for this part. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Berger. We will go to Dr Mansfield.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you for appearing today. I am interested in your views about alternative waste management processes. If we did not go down an incineration pathway, it has been proposed that there are alternatives, for example, much more aggressive sorting and pretreatment of waste and better recycling processes. As far as I am aware, those sorts of waste treatments also require significant infrastructure development and would require a sizeable workforce to be able to undertake those efforts, potentially more than an incinerator. Would the union be open to other sources of employment that were non-incinerator, like another avenue, given that the jobs aspect of it is the primary concern here, from what you are saying?

Andy SMITH: Thank you. Yes, I think we are very open to all options in the Latrobe Valley at the moment. We prefer them to come with a relatively large and full-time work component, but, sure, we are not just stuck on any one type of technology. I think with other projects that have been explored recently, Latrobe Valley showed that.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Have you or any of your members expressed any concerns about worker safety? Given that we have heard through the submissions and from a number of witnesses about the toxic ash that is created through these facilities, as well as some of the fumes, is there any concern about worker safety?

Andy SMITH: I would answer that by saying, if you have ever visited the Yallourn power station, there would be no concerns about a waste-to-energy, purpose-built facility, if that makes sense.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I think so. Well, I guess what you are saying is that that is much worse.

Andy SMITH: There are plenty of places that are worse to work is how I would answer that. There would not be concerns about safety in a purpose-built new facility.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Yes. Okay. I guess the other thing that has been raised is that for the business case for these facilities to stack up, they require a guaranteed stream of waste ongoing, which then obviously depends on contracts, whether with councils or other entities. Are you confident that this facility has a long-term future and that it does stack up financially?

Andy SMITH: Yes, I think it does. The waste contracts are secured. The Hampton Park transfer station issue – I suppose there would be concerns that the councils that have entered into those waste contracts may look to send their waste elsewhere, or even build their own facilities, which already exist in Victoria. The life of the plant at Maryvale would be in the vicinity of 20 years. We are confident in the longevity. It is just whether or not the project is able to get up and running.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Okay. Thank you. That is all.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Dr Mansfield. Mr Ettershank.

David ETTERS HANK: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for joining us today – it is appreciated. Can I just say at the outset: I understand and endorse absolutely the concept of secure, well-paid union jobs as an objective. That is central to your job and the mission of the trade union movement. I just want to set that at the outset. There have been lots of words from different governments about industry adjustment packages and stuff like that. Could you perhaps just share with the committee and the viewers what the reality has been for the valley in terms of both the Maryvale adjustment program and also with the pending one at Yallourn. But I guess probably start with Maryvale, because that has had plenty of time to deliver lots of jobs, but I do not think we have seen that many.

Andy SMITH: Yes. With Maryvale, when those 300 job losses were announced, there was also a worker transfer scheme – for lack of a better word – that was set up to help those workers find jobs in industries locally. The exact number of workers that have been transferred into local employment I do not know. I do know that some of those workers have made their way into the power industry at Yallourn and at Loy Yang, and others have moved into roles within the Latrobe Valley. But the numbers I am not sure of. In 2021 Energy Australia announced that the Yallourn power station would be closing in 2028. That is a seven-year lead-in time, which you would think would be a pretty reasonable time to get something going and to put something in place that

was going to be of benefit as you got closer to closure. We are now five years since that announcement, and as we sit here today there are no firm transition plans in place for the Yallourn workforce or the Latrobe Valley. I am not saying that work has not been done, because work has been done by all sorts of different governments, whether they are local, state, federal, different agencies or different bodies. But we do not have a transition plan that at this point in time allows affected workers at the Yallourn power station and mine, including contractors, to move into jobs in the Latrobe Valley or Gippsland.

David ETTERSHANK: But it has created well-paid jobs in the consulting industry, presumably.

Andy SMITH: In the power industry?

David ETTERSHANK: In the consulting industry, doing all of these studies.

Andy SMITH: I have lost track of the times I have had to do consultation, and I find it thoroughly – it is exasperating because every time you meet someone new you have to do consultation. I am telling the same problem – not just me, dozens of people are telling the same problem over and over and over, to get no action taken on it. There are a lot of people in the Latrobe Valley at the moment who work not just in the coal-fired power sector who are really concerned about what the future looks like. It is putting a great strain on people. One of the problems is that the answers are not there, and how that is going to look in in two years time, come closure, I have no idea. As a union leader attached to a mining and energy sector, it does not feel great, saying that.

David ETTERSHANK: I get that entirely. I think when we were doing the committee report on decommissioning of the gas and fuel, it was really exciting, the proposal that came from the MUA, to actually literally set up an industry servicing wind power and servicing the decommissioning of pipes, and clearly that had the capacity to create a lot of jobs, create basically a whole new industry and also use up a lot of the current skills. So that was very exciting to hear. You talked there about having been consulted to death, possibly. Have you been consulted much by the consortium and/or Opal and Veolia?

Andy SMITH: Not Veolia. We have certainly – when I say ‘we’, I mean myself and members of the Gippsland Trades and Labour Council. I will just backtrack a little bit. Opal have done the community consultation part really well, and I think if you have gone and visited their set-up in the Morwell Innovation Centre at the Morwell TAFE you would not be able to say they have not, because they do provide you with as much information as they possibly can about that project and how it looks in the region. I would say that I am satisfied with the level of consultation I have had with Opal in relation to not only the waste-to-energy project but the jobs attached to it and the flow-on effect. I think they have done one of the better jobs. You touched on the oil and gas. I have been to many consultation sessions now with Esso, and I feel like Esso also do a good job of community consultation. What happens behind the scenes is not for me to see.

David ETTERSHANK: Yes, sure.

Andy SMITH: But the consultation that I see face to face is well done.

David ETTERSHANK: Okay. So you talked about the precariousness of being employed by a multinational. If the balance of the Maryvale timber- and paper-related business is closed – and certainly my understanding from the pulp and paper union folks is that that is a very real possibility – would that adversely affect the commercial viability of the Maryvale project?

Andy SMITH: I believe the waste-to-energy project could still run, but it would not be running for its purpose, which is to supply energy to the paper mill itself. I assume they have got contingencies if that does happen. But at the moment, from my understanding, the waste-to-energy project is built for purpose, and that purpose is for the paper mill.

David ETTERSHANK: I would love to be able to respond to that. You raised, very validly, the importance of transparency, but I think it has been the experience of this inquiry to date that we are not seeing any transparency. I think what has been coming from all of the communities we have been talking to is that it is totally opaque, and there has been lots of greenwashing and lots of assurances, but when you scratch the surface there is not much there or it is commercial in confidence or it is blah, blah, blah. For example, we heard this morning that the clients for this project – so that is both a consortium company as well as the nine councils –

have all entered into, effectively, NDAs. So they are not at liberty to discuss anything about the project. Have you had discussions with the consortium or with any of the councils?

Andy SMITH: Not the councils. Certainly, like I said, with Opal. I do not know – maybe it is because we are from a union or it is just a different sort of connection. I feel as though they are pretty open and honest with us. They know at some stage they are going to have to work with us whether they like it or not, and at times I think that that can help with the openness because you do not necessarily want to get off on the wrong foot when it comes to site agreement negotiations, for example.

So all I can say from my experience, I have not felt as though I have been kept away from information. Of course, there have been times when they have claimed commercial in confidence over certain parts of the project, but they are not necessarily the parts that I am interested in, in relation to the job that I am doing.

David ETTERS HANK: Opal will be the ones who are actually constructing the plant, as I understand it. I guess I was referring to the South East Metropolitan Advanced Waste Processing company, which is the intermediary between Opal and the nine councils. Has there been any discussion with SEMAWP or whatever? It does not lend itself to a nice pronunciation.

Andy SMITH: No, not that I know of. Not from the Gippsland Trades & Labour Council.

David ETTERS HANK: Okay, cool. Just one last question, I guess. Andy, you talked about the plant being critical to other projects. What is it that is out there in terms of those potential other projects that you have got a level of confidence about in terms of them proceeding?

Andy SMITH: Well, Opal have plans. I do not want to go into the technical details because I am not Opal, but Opal have explained to us and shown us during that consultation that they have plans for a biofuel facility to be run off of the paper mill so they could produce an ethanol product through the waste products of the paper mill itself. We also see the potential that if you had a waste-to-energy facility at Maryvale, hopefully that may encourage carbon capture and storage. And if carbon capture and storage becomes a reality in the Latrobe Valley, it will then allow us to have numerous industrial projects that would be carbon neutral.

David ETTERS HANK: This would be carbon capture and storage associated with the waste-to-energy plant?

Andy SMITH: I believe that is the potential because the way that the waste-to-energy facility works is it releases carbon emissions.

David ETTERS HANK: Yes.

Andy SMITH: But they are offset by the volume of methane emissions that would have been released through landfill. We do not claim it is and Opal do not claim it is, and I am not going to speak for Opal. But we do not claim when we are talking to people that that project is not emitting carbon – it is. But what we do say is that the amount of methane that is released from landfill offsets the carbon that is released.

David ETTERS HANK: Yes. We will just take that one as given. There would be a lot of people who would probably dispute that, and it is sort of not like one does the other. I recognise you have got a difficult job – like you have got jobs – but then there is also the health and the safety of your community. I guess you say, ‘Yes, it produces CO₂,’ but it also produces a huge number of other toxins: dioxins, Agent Orange active ingredients, things like that. Has that formed part of the discussion amongst your members?

Andy SMITH: It was given final EPA approval in mid-2019. So as far as those emissions and the environmental side of that project go, I would sincerely hope that the EPA have done due diligence before giving that approval.

David ETTERS HANK: I wish it was true. Thank you, Andy. Appreciate it.

Andy SMITH: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I just have a couple of questions. Thanks so much for appearing before us today. I know it probably is not easy, given the sort of overwhelming feedback that we have received for this

committee, so thank you for showing up. I just wanted to reiterate Mr Ettershank's comments too that I know that it is really difficult when you are representing workers and going through cycles like this and changing industries and finding people secure jobs. I did just want to acknowledge that I know that it is really your core focus here. I just wanted to talk a little bit about we have heard a lot about the health impacts that could come from waste-to-energy projects. Is this something, I guess, that has been explored in detail by any of your affiliated unions or members more from an OH&S perspective for people within the industry?

Andy SMITH: The effects potentially on the community overall?

The CHAIR: Well, I more mean the workforce.

Andy SMITH: The workforce? No, not that I am aware of. We have not looked into that.

The CHAIR: I mean this genuinely: is there a reason why that is? Obviously when there are hazards in a workplace that, when we look at the past with things that have appeared on worksites such as asbestos or certain types of stones that have been known to cause health impacts later on, is there a reason why, given that this project has not yet commenced, it is not being looked into beforehand as a preventative measure?

Andy SMITH: It will be, it is just that the closer you get to the project, the more you know, I suppose. It will still be covered by all of the occupational health and safety Act regulations and the other legislation that sits around workplace health and safety. It is specifics on how you would mitigate certain types of issues, whether that be a particular type of fume or materials workers might come in contact with, but until you have got a much clearer idea of what they actually look like, it is difficult to really put specific measures in place.

The CHAIR: Yes. Putting aside specific measures for a worksite, are the broader health concerns for workers on the site something that has been explored, as in, is it acknowledged that if this is to proceed, it will very likely come with health impacts for workers?

Andy SMITH: The EPA may or may not have done their due diligence, but I go back to the fact that it has got EPA approval, and as far as we know at the moment the actual process itself is safe. Of course there will always be concerns about workers safety, whether it is a worker in child care, someone that is sitting here today as a worker or a worker in a heavy industry. I mean, the concerns and the steps put in place to ensure worker safety will remain.

The CHAIR: I am not suggesting otherwise. I guess from my perspective – and I have come into this as someone who probably has less understanding than Mr Ettershank or people that have been engaging with this in their communities. Of course workplace safety is something at every single worksite no matter where we are, but it seems, based on a lot of the evidence we have heard, that there is a particular risk that comes with this outside of broader OH & S measures, so I was just keen to hear if that has been explored. But that is –

Andy SMITH: All I would say, again, is if you have been to any of the power stations, the mines, other manufacturing facilities, the paper mill itself, those workers are exposed to all sorts of hazards day in, day out.

The CHAIR: Yes, of course.

Andy SMITH: I just do not see it being any different to those hazards in how you mitigate the exposure and the risk.

The CHAIR: Yes, I would agree with that. I think probably in my mind it is different in the sense that we have learned about a lot of these hazards as industries have progressed or as workers have become sick or there have been clusters, whereas this one appears to be something that we could potentially front foot and know more about before it begins – noting that it is still potentially a while off, if it is to happen.

My other question is, are there concerns from any of the people who could be transitioning into a role like this, or have you heard from transitioning workers with questions or that have heard about this inquiry or the broader narrative about waste-to-energy projects that have concerns about transitioning? Is there broad interest in this as an industry?

Andy SMITH: We took a delegation of Yallourn power station and Yallourn mine members to Canberra about six weeks ago. We were up there talking to relevant ministers and government bodies. The number one

item on our list was the Maryvale waste-to-energy project. So there is a lot of desire amongst the workforce that that may be an option to transition into. I think people in the Latrobe Valley are also sceptical, and rightly so, that there have been dozens of projects that have been sold over the years and have not eventuated.

The CHAIR: Yes. Okay. Thank you. Does anyone else have any further questions? You do, Mr Ettershank.

David ETTERS HANK: I do have one, yes, if that is all right.

The CHAIR: Yes.

David ETTERS HANK: The ILO, the International Labour Organization, classifies waste-to-energy as a high-risk industry, and it recommends a detailed analysis before workers go in of what hazards exist and how they will be controlled, or better still, and this is early in the piece, how they can be, as you would be aware, engineered out before people are exposed to them, which is optimal. I get what you are saying, absolutely, about there being a lot of dangerous work in the valley and a lot of hazards that people are exposed to. But I guess the question in my mind would be whether or not there has been any discussion, or whether the way is open to have that discussion, with Opal as to how to try and engineer out those hazards, because we are talking about really serious carcinogens. We are talking dioxins. We are talking pathogens. We are talking about a range of biological hazards because of the waste that is being dealt with. Is that something that the labour council or its affiliates have discussed as a way forward, or have there been discussions with the health and safety unit at Trades Hall?

Andy SMITH: No, not yet, and that is purely because we do not even know if the project is going ahead. The project will have a two-year minimum construction phase before it goes into operations as well. So it is about the timing. I mean, it is in Opal's best interests to work with government departments, bodies like unions and health and safety bodies as well to make sure everything is right for day one, because they do not want to get into a situation where they are putting people into risk. I can assure you that by the time that plant opens – if it does ever go ahead – those issues will have been worked out. We do not send workers into unsafe conditions, wherever that can be avoided. It is just not going to happen.

David ETTERS HANK: I have worked in the union movement for close to 20 years, and I guess I had a lot of commissionings that I was involved in where the sort of hazard avoidance that common sense dictated would be rejected by the employer on the basis that the building was already built or the design had already been finalised. So you then end up using respirators instead of controlling the release of vapours and suchlike. But I will not push it any further, because I am not going to tell you how to suck eggs.

Andy SMITH: I mean, they are going to have to get through WorkSafe and the rest of those health and safety agencies. I put my faith in those agencies like WorkSafe, because we have to and because we have to believe that agencies like WorkSafe do their job to the bare minimum that we would expect, – I have got that the wrong way around.

David ETTERS HANK: Andy, you are a more generous spirit than I am, and I congratulate you for that.

Andy SMITH: I try to be.

David ETTERS HANK: I thank you for your time.

The CHAIR: Thank you. There are no other questions from members? All good. Well, that concludes the public hearing then. Thank you so much for coming along today and speaking with us. We really appreciate it. Thank you.

Witness withdrew.