

Speech to Bega Valley Shire Council, Eden chipmill wood pellet plant, Harriett Swift 7 February 2012

It's customary to start with a joke: so I'd like to refer to an extract from the chipmill consultant's report on noise from the pellet plant. They say that one of the biggest single sources of noise at Edrom Lodge is birdsong. Birdsong! There's no particular point to that story, other than: it didn't inspire me with confidence.

This has been quite a saga. SEFE no doubt hoping for third time lucky! Three weeks ago a decision on the pellet plant was deferred because noise and emissions assessments as required under the original terms of approval, were not provided. Had we not drawn that to the attention of councillors on 17 January it would be operating now, outside the requirements of the State law.

This time we have the reports on noise and emissions and we have a council officer's assurance that the "applicant has demonstrated that the noise and air emissions generated by the pellet plant would meet the requirements of the relevant environmental legislation."

I read that statement with some interest, because this report also contains a letter from the State OEH, which says the opposite. The letter dated 23 January clearly states that there are problems remaining in relation to both noise and emissions.

The papers before council today tell us that within hours of council receiving advice from OEH that the plant still did not meet State requirements, SEFE responded again and offered to make some further modifications affecting both noise and emissions. They also tell us that OEH then approved – in an email - the revised SEFE proposal. All this took 24 hours or maybe less. It's amazing how quickly bureaucracies can act when they are trying.

The only trouble is: we have not been given any details of either SEFE's additional measures to bring noise and emissions levels within the law and we have not been provided with the final advice from OEH –just a second hand assurance – which apparently says everything is hunky dory. If I were a councillor – I would not want to add to the very time consuming and expensive series of errors that have already led to a possible \$85,000 legal bill for ratepayers arising from in the case in Land and Environment Court, I would want to see the additional measures proposed by SEFE, I would want to see the final advice from OEH and I would want to make sure that Councillors and the public had adequate opportunity to fully consider BOTH.

If I was a councillor and didn't want to risk another huge legal bill for ratepayers, I would want all of those provided so that they can be properly considered.

Finally, I imagine those councillors intending to vote for this project think they are doing SEFE a favour. I am not so sure. Just 10 days ago, we heard that Plantation Energy, the huge Albany based pellet plant is closing its doors. PE is 200 times as big as Eden with the consequent economies of scale. It has established customers. It is closer to the biggest market place for pellets (Europe) and yet it couldn't make a go it.

And even without the legal delays, it is taking SEFE – according to public statements by chipmill managers – almost 9 months to start full commercial production. What is so difficult about turning a perfectly good tree into a pile of pellets?

This plant is viewed by the industry as the first step in broadening its economic base into energy production. They are desperately hoping it will give the woodchipping industry a future. However, far from being the saviour of the local native forest

woodchipping industry, the pellet plant could help sink it. I'm not suggesting you vote for it on the strength of that, but it's something to consider. While it may help to sink SEFE, it will be at a high cost.

A high cost to the region's environment, probably further high costs to the Shire ratepayers and undoubtedly at a high cost to the shire's reputation.

(100% recycled paper)