

'Another plant could be built closer to Fremantle and in my own neighbourhood'



# Opportunity going to waste

**T**HE South Metropolitan Regional Council's Canning Vale composting plant has been much in the news lately and for very good reasons.

On the one hand it has been causing offensive odours for local residents but on the other it is providing a really valuable service to the wider community it serves: It is diverting organic wastes from landfill that would otherwise be buried and generate methane, a powerful greenhouse gas. And instead is producing compost that, in the right application, provides a beneficial land management service, perhaps growing trees that can also act as a carbon sink.

This plant is an experiment in more sustainable living and demands our attention as we try to solve some of the issues surrounding it. Personally, I compost my own organic wastes for our home vegetable garden that my partner Jill has lovingly grown.

However, there are many people who may not compost at home for various reasons plus there are many commercial producers of organic wastes so the need for these plants will always be there.

Rather than shut the plant down we need to improve its performance and provide more of them across the metropolitan area to make productive use of our wastes. My colleagues at Murdoch University are working on a solution to improve the performance of the bio-filter and I hope for the sake of the local residents and the future of this experiment that this becomes available soon.

Another plant could be built closer to Fremantle and in my own neighbourhood. Nearby is the Lefroy Road former quarry site which is about to be redeveloped. A new improved

**MARTIN ANDA** of Curedale Street in Beaconsfield is a senior lecturer in environmental engineering at Murdoch University and has copped a hammering from some for his support for Canning Vale's odorous waste management centre. In this week's **THINKING ALLOWED** he explains his thinking and even suggests more of them should be built, including in Fremantle.

resource recovery centre could be included as part of that development to save trucking my waste, and my neighbours', all the way to Canning Vale. Again this would reduce greenhouse emissions.

Other candidates for resource recovery centres in Fremantle would be the old Daly Street tip site off Douro Road and perhaps another could nuzzle in alongside the tennis courts and cricket field off Fremantle's Ellen Street. If an anaerobic plant was used at the latter site, as is the case at the Stirling waste centre, then methane could be generated and piped across the field to heat the swimming pool and offset fossil gas used.

Such innovation requires a close partnership with the Fremantle and Melville communities in their waste disposal policies. It would be a contribution to a number of similar global experiments on how to live lighter on the planet.

To determine how much greenhouse gas can be saved is one of the challenges and here there are methods which have been accepted globally through the Kyoto Convention. To address the more controversial issue of whether I have suggested the best locations in Fremantle would require a broader sustainability assessment method that draws upon social and economic factors and hopefully will bring the community into partnership.

Many parts of our society are currently grappling with these

different methods of project appraisal in order to avert the massive crisis of climate change that intensifies around the globe.

Sustainability is a growing profession that will depend on such partnerships and developing methodologies. For example I am working with Adam McHugh (*Herald, Thinking Allowed, July 11, 2009*) and other colleagues at Murdoch University on a sustainability assessment of different water supply options for Perth with their associated energy use and emissions.

Urban development is not yet an area where global agreement has been reached on how to reduce carbon. Professor Peter Newman at Curtin University and his team of research students has chosen to work with North Port Quay on a case study on how to make NPQ a carbon-neutral development. I am working with Peter Newman and his CUSP group, several mining companies, Horizon Power and other staff at Murdoch University on how to create low-carbon mining settlements and remote indigenous settlements.

The many factors affecting the performance of these developments make it a complex task. But hopefully research with industry and community partners in different situations will reveal the various toolkits, methodologies and principles that can be deployed.

North Port Quay is also a proposed experiment in how to reduce waste to zero: With higher density living than Canning Vale let us hope that the odour control in its proposed system is adequately managed. In order to do this, it will be learning from the experience at Canning Vale. This is how the problems of sustainability are slowly resolved.