

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
TANIA GIBSON

12 August 2024

Hon Penny Simmonds
Parliament Building
WELLINGTON

By email: Penny.Simmonds@parliament.govt.nz

Dear Minister

Thank you for meeting with stakeholders of Tai Poutini Polytechnic, it was great hearing you address us and provide information about the consultation and the future thoughts of the government regarding the Polytech sector in NZ. Although I was on zoom, I felt it was helpful and as Mayors, Chairs and Iwi of the West Coast we are working on our submission.

I am writing to you today, in your capacity as Minister for the Environment, with major concerns about a private landfill site in the Grey District known as the Taylorville Resource Park, and amongst other concerns, the potential threat that it poses to the Greater Greymouth water supply.

I am travelling to Wellington on 10 September and have a meeting with Minister Hoggard, Mark Patterson and Simon Court at 4.45pm regarding another matter. I will be travelling with Mayor Lash of Westland and Francios Tumahai our Iwi representative from Ngāti Waewae. I was hoping to secure a meeting with you prior to 4.45pm to discuss the landfill.

The Grey District Council has found itself in a very unfortunate situation with a large private landfill being established some 400 metres upslope from the intakes for the district's main water supply. This is the single source of water for the Greater Greymouth area, and no alternative supply exist for the 10,000 residents it serves. The water supply also feeds the district's schools, hospitals and businesses which would be severely affected by any future loss of service.

Originally this landfill site was consented for clean fill only, but it has since been the subject of several consent variations issued by the West Coast Regional Council that have allowed asbestos, coal tar, tyres and significant quantities of organic material to be deposited. The Grey District Council and Iwi were not considered affected parties so did not have an opportunity to submit on any of the variations and the Regional Council have acknowledged that this was an error.

The establishment of the landfill lacked the engineering and scientific due diligence that is required to meet all relevant environmental standards and to eliminate or mitigate the risks that landfills are known to present to people and the environment. As a result, several unanticipated effects have occurred that could have been avoided with proper engineering investigation. Uncontrolled surface leachate discharges have occurred beyond the site boundary to public drains and water courses in close proximity to our drinking water supply. The introduction of organic material has produced hydrogen sulfide gas which has impacted heavily on nearby residents, affecting their quality of life in that they feel they can sometimes not remain outside, open their windows and go about their everyday lives.

Last year two landfill workers nearly lost their lives when they were overwhelmed by gases and WorkSafe are investigating the event, yet another indicator of the lack of care exercised by the operators. The EPA has also investigated the site for compliance following concerns about material being illegally deposited at the site and unlawful leachate discharges. The quality of the consent and variation applications was well below the standard

required for landfill consents. The Regional Council has conceded that the consenting process did not consider all likely effects and that they made errors throughout the consenting process.

Of serious concern are other potential consequences that may have been unanticipated by the site operator and the Regional Council. I am concerned that these issues are being downplayed and the level of attention and pace of action does not match the potential threat. Proper engineering investigations that establish hydrogeological and underlying geological conditions have not taken place. That means that the direction, volume and velocity of groundwater flow from the landfill site, the contour of underlying mudstone and the influence on groundwater flows caused by pumping at the water extraction bores is unknown. The absence of engineering investigations puts us in a position where the risk to the public water supply from subsurface leachate is not fully understood and several assumptions have been made by other parties who believe that the risk to the water supply is low. This casual approach is unacceptable to us at the District Council when considering the significant responsibility to the community for protection of the public water supply. In a worst-case scenario, landfill leachate could reach the public water supply and if that occurs it would be a major catastrophic event that would be much more severe than the Havelock North incident. This risk must be determined scientifically, and any assumptions confirmed or otherwise. As they were responsible for the situation occurring, the Regional Council had provided an undertaking to us that it would arrange for these engineering investigations and to date we have not seen any evidence of it having commenced this activity.

To protect the community, Grey District Council is now undertaking additional water testing at the water source, which is costly to our ratepayers. This situation is very concerning because it is only a last resort precautionary measure in the absence of more detailed information about ground water flows that quantify the risk. If these tests detect contamination, essentially like a fire alarm, the public water supply would need to be shut down and a contingency plan implemented to provide an alternative source (directly from the river as opposed to bores) and with the addition of significant treatment. It is likely that at best this would take between six to eight weeks to implement and cost more than \$2m.

The landfill site is situated adjacent to a steep sided slope that adjoins a main road and no seismic assessment has been made about the stability of the landfill. In the event of the AF8 or any earthquake this dump site is likely to slip towards the roadside, exposing the landfill, exacerbating the risk of contamination reaching our water supply and the Grey river below as well as creating an avoidable burden on agencies and personnel during a CDEM response.

The landfill consents don't include bonds and do not include long term management of the landfill beyond the life of the consents, which is only 25 years. The public water supply has an indefinite life. It is critical that the district has a reliable water source and this long term risk to the public water supply places a burden on the people of the Grey District indefinitely.

We have had numerous meetings with the Regional Council over the last two years, and they have made promises about arranging for on-site engineering investigations and to keep us and concerned residents up to date with progress. Despite multiple approaches, we have had little success in gaining information on the actions of the Regional Council and understand that their lawyers have advised them not to update us. We know that the West Coast Regional Council along with the Police and Mines Rescue visited the site several months ago with excavators to search for illegally dumped material. At that time the CE of the Regional Council told me that ten different areas they tested were contaminated and that they would get back to us in the next few weeks with information on the way forward. Unfortunately, I have heard nothing since. We also believe that a new leachate pond that has been created is not properly consented and the Regional Council are not admitting that they have made another error in that regard.

Grey District has become a dumping ground for waste that is not easy to dispose of in other districts where landfills have been subjected to proper process, located in appropriate places and constructed with all necessary environmental protections. The short cuts that have been taken for this site have saved cost and made it a cheap place to dump waste, so much that it is feasible for trucks coming from all over the South Island to bring toxic materials to this site. When people ask me what keeps me awake at night, this is it, I am at my wits end, along with my fellow District Councilors, our staff and residents.

The Regional Council have found themselves in a difficult position where they have issued consents incorrectly, their powers do not allow them to revoke the consents, even though they were issued in error, and they are now trying to manage the situation through enforcement, allowing an activity to continue which should never have been allowed in the first place.

Negligence in the consenting process is clear, the operator's incompetence with two staff almost losing their lives, the high degree of uncertainty over the long and short-term security of a public water supply for 10,000 residents and a raft of other consequences which are likely to play out all translate to this landfill being a very serious issue that cannot be allowed to drag on with woefully inadequate levels of action. I am calling for some assistance by way of intervention by your Ministry, to get action to eliminate the risks and avoid a health and environmental catastrophe.

This is by no means the full technical version of events, it is a complex matter and our Council has sought legal and technical engineering advice as the situation has evolved. You can also find many media articles on this issue that highlight concerns. I have attached a screen shot of an image and you will see in the green circle is our Grey District Water Treatment Plant that tells the true extent in visual detail.

If you do have time on 10 September prior to 4.45 pm I would very much appreciate a discussion about support from your Ministry with the intention that an outcome can be reached without delay.

Kind regards



Tania Gibson
Grey District Mayor

Copy to: Maureen Pugh, MP



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