**Mercury**

**Jackson shoots messenger**

Environment

Minister Judy Jackson has only herself to blame for the "politics of reality" she claims surrounds the issue of possible contamination at Wentworth Park.

Ms Jackson could have dispelled the "whispers of fear" which she says some media outlets and the Opposition have perpetrated by handling the concerns of residents over fears of contamination at the old Howrah tip site and cancer deaths more decisively.

Instead, she prevaricated for several days while media outlets covered the long-held concerns of residents and the Opposition over the possibility of life-threatening contamination at the site.

"You can't keep on testing forever," she said. By Friday, Ms Jackson was saying, "I have been advised that testing is a program is warranted and I have accepted that advice."

Back to a corner, Ms Jackson finally announced the testing program, encompassing groundwater and soil sampling, and an audit of information by an independent expert.

This was the right decision, and Howrah residents are no doubt relieved by it.

Mrs Jackson is in a difficult position in blaming the media for the testing and the media for helping her do the right thing.

**Hysteria**

No one really wants to whip up hysteria over Wentworth Park.

But the concerns of residents such as Poppy Lepoatiaia and the Keralka family over the tragic death of a relative at the old Howrah tip site have not been properly addressed.

Ms Jackson acknowledges that concerns about the site have been around for years, over the lives of several governments. It is now time for proper testing for contamination had never been done.

The Minister and her advisers would be mindful of the possibility of other Tasmanians calling for the testing of suspected contamination sites.

There is a cost factor here.

But testing Wentworth Park will hardly break the Budget. It will hopefully help to put long-held fears to rest.

There are times when ministers should put aside advice from bureaucrats, evaluate problems themselves and make independent judgments.

Any climate of fear in Howrah has only been compounded by ministerial dithering.

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**Mercury**

**Jackson bows to pressure**

The State Government's decision to investigate the possible toxic contents of the former Howrah tip site is a victory for people power.

Little may have been done for the determination of former Howrah resident Poppy Lepoatiaia, Ann Burns, the Keralka family and the State Opposition.

The truth of deaths due to cancer in the Keralka family, including that of one of Tasmania's most prominent public servants, Mark Keralka, could not be ignored.

The testing program at what is now Wentworth Park, and the audit of old and new information for assessment by an expert, should help allay fears about contamination at the park.

Ann Burns revealed to The Mercury a history of family usage of the tip as a thoroughfare that could have contributed tragically to the deaths of her brother, mother, father, cousin and uncle to cancer.

Ms Jackson says she understands the fears and concerns over the site which have arisen this week. These fears and concerns were only heightened, however, by the Government's reluctance to act decisively.

**Hazardous**

The Government relied too heavily on advice from the Department of Health and Human Services that there was no evidence to suggest a pattern of specific cancer types or other diseases being contracted around the tip site.

This was inadequate when the Mesquite Research Institute, which provided the Health Department with data, said the cancer registry was only able to determine cancer reports by suburb and could not narrow information down to individual streets.

Ms Jackson says there is no basis for believing that the Wentworth Park site poses an environmental risk.

Nevertheless, the testing program will encompass groundwater and soil sampling.

No one can guarantee what lies beneath the surface of the park. Although the former tip was for domestic waste, the dumping of cancer-causing hazardous chemicals in the 1950s and 1970s cannot be ruled out.

The deaths in the Keralka family and the 21 listed by Mrs Lepoatiaia certainly raise major questions about environmental hazards.

After years of anxiety about their health, Howrah residents are close to learning the truth about Wentworth Park.

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**Out of sight, out of mind**

The distinctive ritual — the trip to the tip — is performed with an alarming lack of environmental awareness by many Tasmanians each weekend.

Few councils, if any, across the state could give a cast-iron guarantee that everything being dumped haphazardly from the trailer or truck is environmentally friendly.

Many of the state's 176 landfill sites are surrounded by areas of serious contamination, yet the State Government's view of the mounting problem appears to be out of sight, out of mind.

The Government's own State of the Environment Report warns: "The number of untested but confirmed contaminated sites in Tasmania is unknown but is likely to be in the order of many hundreds."

Mrs Lepoatiaia, whose son Peter died of leukaemia, has performed a community service in pointing out the threat of landfill contamination to public health on the environmental agenda.

Mrs Lepoatiaia fears that "any people who have died of disease, including her son, have been the victims of contamination at the old Howrah landfill site."

Some may doubt that she has a thoroughly convincing case linking disease with the site, but the general issue of contamination that she raises cannot be swept under the carpet.

**Threat**

Public health director Roseo Taylor says there is no evidence to suggest there is a pattern of specific cancer types or other diseases being contracted around the site. This is reassuring.

But as Opposition environment spokesman Jenny Beckfield says, landfill sites are a "potential timebomb" that need urgent attention.

Where are the 176 landfill sites located across Tasmania? Generally speaking, where do they contain?

The Government's own environmental report has raised the alarm about contamination and the threat to ecosystems and public health.

The community would expect the Government to take possible groundwater contamination more seriously. An inventory of old and current landfill sites of significance would be a good way to start.

The health of Tasmanians should not be at risk from the environmental hazards of their forefathers.

Testing for contaminants must be conducted on a standard procedure for landfill sites. That includes those used in the past that may have left a deadly legacy.