

Menzies institute refutes Jackson claim about research

Minister in cancer row

By ELLEN WHINNETT and HEATHER LOW CHOY

THE Menzies Research Institute has contradicted Environment Minister Judy Jackson, saying it had never researched complaints that the old Wentworth tip site was causing a cancer cluster.

But it agreed with the minister there was no cancer cluster across the suburb of Howrah.

Ms Jackson told State Parliament yesterday that cancers and illnesses reported in the area around Wentworth Park did not represent a



EVIDENCE: Judy Jackson



RESEARCH QUERY: Alison Venn

cancer cluster or an abnormal distribution of illness.

Ms Jackson said that the information was based on advice from the Department of Health and Human Services and "research that was undertaken by the Men-

zies Centre on this issue". However, Menzies acting director Alison Venn said the centre had only provided statistics from the Cancer Registry, which it manages for the Health Department.

The statistics listed incidence of cancers and cancer deaths comparing larger areas such as suburbs.

Dr Venn said the Cancer Registry did not include enough detail to examine "tiny areas" such as a specific street.

"Personally I don't consider that as research," Dr Venn said.

She said Ms Jackson may "quite reasonably" have con-

sidered the statistics as research.

However, she confirmed that the Menzies had not been asked to investigate cancer cases reported around the old Wentworth landfill site, which is now the Wentworth Park.

She said the Cancer Registry details did not show higher numbers of cancers and there was no evidence of a cancer cluster.

Howrah resident Poppy Lopatniuk has raised concerns with the Government about the Howrah landfill site.

Mrs Lopatniuk, who lived near the tip when it was in use in the 60s, has compiled a

list of 21 locals who she fears may have been victims of contamination from living close to the landfill site.

All 21 people on the list, including her son, Peter Lopatniuk, have died from cancer or other serious illnesses.

"There's no evidence of contamination," Ms Jackson said. "You can't keep on investigating something forever."

She said the Howrah landfill site had been used for domestic waste only.

Liberal environment minister Jeremy Rockliff said Ms Jackson had shown an arrogant disregard for a potentially life-threatening environmental problem.

"Ms Jackson has not even bothered to find out whether any landfill contaminant testing has been undertaken," Mr Rockliff said.

Greens environment spokesman Nick McKim yesterday blasted the Government for failing to address the Howrah landfill issue.

He said there was strong anecdotal evidence a serious health issue existed in the area of the old Howrah landfill site.

The Greens tabled a motion in Parliament calling for a full environmental and public health audit into all past and present landfill sites in Tasmania.

Information withheld

THE State Government is refusing to publicly release information provided to it by the Menzies Research Institute comparing cancer rates by postcodes.

Health Minister David Llewellyn has denied requests over the past week by *The Mercury* for the data to be released.

And Director of Public Health Roscoe Taylor yesterday also refused to

release the information. "There's no cover-up," Dr Taylor said.

But he said the information could be misinterpreted, would not be statistically helpful and could cause undue alarm.

The data, taken from the Cancer Registry, lists cancer diagnoses and deaths by postcode and local government area.