

***Evidence to EPA Oral Hearing
for
Fingal Landfill Facility at Nevitt, Lusk,
Waste License Proposed Decision
Registration No. WO231-01
Balbriggan, March 2008***

***Statement of Evidence by Senator Brendan Ryan
Local Public Representative***

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Inspector, my name is Senator Brendan Ryan of Baltrasna, Skerries, County Dublin. I speak today as an interested party, both from a local and national perspective, in support of the Lusk-Nevitt group.

The proposed landfill is located within my Dail constituency area. Strictly speaking, however, a Senator does not have a constituency but has a national mandate. I have spoken on the matter of the proposed landfill in the Seanad on two recent occasions from a national perspective.

Although I am a chemist and food scientist by profession it is not my intention to provide any technical evidence one way or another today.

I have attended and observed the hearing last week and many experts on both sides of the argument have been giving evidence and been robustly challenged on their evidence. As a former practising scientist I was fascinated by the cross-examination of various experts and the manner in which they could be put under pressure to stand over their own methodology and their adherence or otherwise to standard methodology. I do not propose to pass judgement on any of that or which arguments were most significant.

My contribution will be quite short and will focus on 4 areas that for me, and for the casual observer, should be key considerations for the EPA:

- The water resource that lies beneath the landfill footprint
- The risk to that resource
- The potential impact on the local food processors if that risk becomes a reality if the control measures fail in some way
- Why take the risk in the first place?

There is a significant aquifer located under the proposed landfill site. That, I believe is now widely accepted. It is not just a local resource, it is a national resource. It is an important national resource for the food and horticultural industry which is heavily relied upon by that industry in North County Dublin for irrigation and washing of vegetables.

Water is currently a scarce resource. Consideration is being given at present to pumping water from the Shannon in order to meet future water needs for the greater Dublin region.

The question I want to put to the EPA is why we should put such a nationally important resource, such as exists in this part of Fingal, at risk and possibly put it beyond use for either of these needs.

In the US in 2006, the FDA had to issue a warning to consumers in relation to bagged spinach. Consumers were advised not to eat the product which was likely contaminated with E Coli from contaminated ground water. If this proposal goes ahead and if something like this were to happen the impact would be catastrophic. It would spell disaster for the food operators in the area. They would be out of business with little scope for recovery. Confidence would be lost forever and confidence is so important in the food industry.

Fingal County Council is dismissing the risk as being insignificant. The EPA is prepared to go along with that assessment as per its response in the PD. I am urging the EPA to think again and to ask if due consideration has, in fact, been given to this risk.

It seems to me, and to many people with whom I have discussed the proposal, that the EPA in its PD, whilst acknowledging the risk of leachate to the environment, is focussed on putting in controls to reduce the risk, rather than putting the primary focus on the valuable resource itself and asking the very obvious first question that any man or woman on the street would ask: Why put such a valuable National resource at risk in the first place?

Why should the application for a landfill license by a local authority take precedence over the protection of a national resource? I ask the EPA, the environmental protection agency, to consider doing just that i.e. protecting the environment for current and future generations.

The first step recommended in any hazard analysis and risk assessment process is to remove the hazard if that can be done. In this case that is the landfill proposal itself.

Fingal County Council accepts that there will be leakage. They estimate theoretical leakage at 100 litres per day, due to possible imperfections in the lining.

My experience as a former scientist and more recently as an operations manager with a high profile multi-national company has informed me that you can never rely on material datasheets and supplier specifications to the extent that you might expect, but that it is only after the successful delivery of the project that you can relax in any way.

Many projects fail.

Unfortunately it will be too late if we discover, after the event, that either the materials have failed or their application was incorrect and the result was contamination of a valuable water source and the destruction of a sustainable food industry.

Inspector, I ask you to give due consideration to the matters I have raised today.

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