

Port Augusta Community Reference Working Group Meeting Notes

Meeting number	9
Date	Thursday 12 April 2018 at 5:00pm, The Standpipe Hotel, Afghan Room
Attendees	Brad Williams (Flinders Power), Kym Maule (Flinders Power), Brian Reichelt, Brett Prentis, Sophie Martin (EPA), Robin Sharp, Peter Georgaris (CEO, Flinders Power), Michelle Coles, John Miller, Tracey Freeman (for Dan Van Holst Pellekaan), Rob Singleton (for Chris Kennett)
Facilitator/Executive support	Steve Dangerfield (communicate), Henry Rasheed (communicate)
Visitors	Sarah Verdonk (EPA), Mark Hassam (EPA)
Apologies	John Banks (Port Augusta City Council), Dan van Holst Pelican (State MP for Stuart), Andrew Manson (DPC), Chris Kennett

1. Welcome and introduction

Steve opened the meeting at 5.00pm and welcomed the group as well as noting visitors and apologies (see list above).

Steve also congratulated Dan on his appointment as the Minister for Energy and Mining and advised the room in Dan's absence that Dan was happy to continue to be involved in the CRG as the local member dependent upon the view of the CRG. The group endorsed Dan's ongoing involvement and attendance at meetings of the CRG with Tracey to be Dan's proxy when he is unable to attend. The CRG noted that Dan's offer to keep attending meetings was generous especially given his new priorities as a Minister and that his continued input would be valuable.

2. Acceptance of minutes of meeting 7 and 8

A member noted that in the minutes for meeting 7 the sea walls were said to be in good condition, given the age of the sea walls. While the sea walls may be in good condition relative to their age, it was noted that this does not mean that they are in a suitable condition for long-term future sustainability. The room agreed that the minutes should be amended to reflect this sentiment.

It was also noted that the statement 'would be held to account by Government and various regulators' was too broad and should be amended to specify the key parties as follows:

- State Government
- Generator Lessor Corporation
- The EPA

- The Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources

Members in attendance and who were present at meeting 7 approved the minutes with these amendments.

Members in attendance and who were present at meeting 8 (site tour) approved the minutes without amendment.

3. Housekeeping

Steve emphasised the importance of the terms of reference that everyone in the CRG signed up to and asked that it be respected.

Steve also stated that a number of questions about the remediation approach to the Ash Storage Area continued to be raised despite previous attempts to provide explanation as to why the chosen approach. It was considered appropriate and necessary to go back through these important questions and provide additional and detailed information about the rationale for the remediation strategy.

Steve advised that following discussion on these key questions over the next two or three meetings, all information available as to the thinking behind the chosen remediation approach would be exhausted. Therefore, Steve requested that members of the group take the opportunity to challenge and explore the rationale with a view to close out these issues in order to move forward and focus on contingency plans (if required) and the future of the site.

The questions that will be answered include:

1. Is 15 cm of soil sufficient? Why is this different to other power stations?
2. Will leachate impact the Gulf? Why isn't the Ash Storage Area lined?
3. Why is there limited vegetation currently?
4. Why don't you irrigate? Why don't you use the SA Water outflow?
5. Has the wind decreased the soil cap and blown the seed away?
6. What happens after June 2018?
7. Does Flinders have sufficient finances to complete the work?
8. Why don't Flinders rehabilitate Bird Lake?

Steve emphasised that it was in everybody's interests to deliver a sustainable landform and that Flinders Power were committed to this objective. Efforts were being made to investigate possible contingency plans and further details could be provided at future meetings.

4. Project update and upcoming project milestones

Kym provided the room with a project update, which consisted of:

- Playford B demolition commencement and timeframes.

- Scrap processing, update on shipment dates.
- Northern site, further scrap processing of felled boilers.
- Next week's activities on site.
- Ash Storage Area, spreading topsoil on the last areas and taking measures to suppress dust in extreme weather events.
- Site contamination remediation, sampling and excavation of contaminated sites.
- Coal stockpile revegetation project, new plan being put together to cap the area with topsoil.
- Community, media and stakeholder engagement, number of enquires and site tours completed (currently 151 people have been taken on a tour)
- Upcoming events, timelines for coal bunker charge felling (expected 24 April)
- Update on ElectraNet's work to build a bypass around the site so the stack can be felled without any chance of it falling on the supply lines to Eyre Peninsula.

Interest from a community member in retaining the stack was raised.

Brad shared that the stack was built for an approximate 40 year life (ending 2023), pending routine inspections and maintenance. If the stack was to be retained it would need to be inspected annually using a drone with a detailed visual assessment completed by specialised steeplejacks every two years. In addition, during operations the stack was always warm so if it were left to sit cold, condensation would over time potentially damaging the concrete and creating a safety risk. For these reasons it was felt that the stack should be demolished as it would otherwise pose a liability in terms of cost and safety for any future owner of the land.

The member asked that a fact sheet be developed detailing why the stack needed to be demolished and that this be made available on the website and at any future open day.

5. Ash Storage Area - remediation plan context

Brad presented the background and context for the selection of the preferred Ash Storage Area remediation strategy.

Information included (refer presentation):

- The guiding principles that were established and which the selected strategy had to meet, including long term management of dust, affordability and safe constructability;
- The technical advice that was provided by a vast range of expert consultancies including Golder Environmental, McMahon Services, Coffey Environments, Kirsa Environmental, Succession Ecology, Eyre Native Seeds, Greenhill Engineers, Integrated Heritage Services, Lester Franks, Vital Chemicals, Tonkin Engineering and MWH;

- The remediation options considered – with the preferred option delivering the best outcome utilising local soil to facilitate the growth of native vegetation.
- Brad went over the key risks that were mapped out at the start of the rehabilitation project including dust, constructability and stormwater management.

The group questioned whether the advice received was the right advice given the current approach didn't seem to be working.

Brad advised that Flinders Power believed that the preferred strategy was the best option to deliver the overall objective for the site – that being to achieve a self-sustaining landform. The issue had been the lack of rain, which had prevented widespread germination of the native seed.

While this was understood by the group, this factor should have been accounted for by the consultants advising Flinders Power given the very low level rainfall experienced from year to year in Port Augusta. Peter acknowledged this point and said that Flinders Power had been taking steps to have the plan reviewed and contingency plans assessed.

It was pointed out that while the hard work and effort being applied by Flinders Power is understood and valued, the community need to see results. It was therefore important that information be provided articulating the nature of any contingency plans and the efforts being applied to achieve the overall objective.

Brad said that there had been a recent joint risk workshop with Flinders Power, EPA, DEWNR, McMahon Services and Succession Ecology regarding what more can be done. Flinders Power are committed to achieving the rehabilitation goals for the community.

It was agreed that a contingency plan fact sheet be put together to help the community understand what Flinders Power are doing to ensure the remediation approach is successful.

6. Ash Storage Area – commonly asked questions

Brad asked the room the most important questions to be addressed. The group identified three questions to be addressed at the meeting with the other questions to be dealt with at the next meeting.

Q1: Is 15cm of soil sufficient? Why is this different to power stations?

Brad outlined the preferred remediation option and why 150mm of soil cover was selected. The ash, not being toxic was able to sustain native vegetation growth as demonstrated in a portion of the ash storage area at the northern end of the site.

Brad explained to the room that every ash dam is different, and the specific conditions need to be addressed in each rehabilitation plan. What might work on one site won't necessarily work at another.

The ash in this dam is neutral in pH, it is not alkane or acidic and the water used for the power station was salt water not fresh. The ash is inert with the key issue for plant growth being salinity and low levels of organic carbon and nutrient. Physically the ash is very different to the ash at other sites around Australia, as is the climate. The intention for this site is to deliver a natural, sustainable landform. The objectives at other sites vary substantially, including at one site the intention being to return the land to farming.

Given it has been proven that the native plants in the area can grow directly into the ash, the 15cm of cover was identified as sufficient to germinate initial growth and to address the risk of ash dust (a key risk identified by Golder).

Brad presented some examples of plants that are growing in a portion of the site, which had been dug up. They showed healthy root systems and moisture at the interface of the soil and ash substrate. They also showed that the root systems were not avoiding the ash once they started to reach it.

It was asked that since some of the plants are showing good signs, would it be possible to sow more seeds on the ash storage area. This was a possibility that was being considered.

A further question was asked about the need for a clay layer to effectively cap the ash and prevent leaching. Concern was raised that the 15 cm of soil was not an effective cap and was only used because it was a cheap option.

Brad pointed out that the soil used was natural to the area and does crust over. The 15cm is a minimum depth, with test pits showing soil depth typically of 20cm. In addition, it was not considered to be an issue if rainfall penetrated into the ash given the inert nature of the ash.

It was pointed out that Flinders Power had applied much effort including seeking the best advice and information available to develop this strategy – and that a final determination could not be made as to the success or failure of the strategy without there being any rainfall. The strategy is dependent upon rain and this needs to be taken into account.

Despite the information presented, a member remained concerned that the 15cm of cover was not enough to ensure the site is adequately remediated for the future. This was noted with Flinders Power reiterating that all the science-based evidence suggested the 15cm cover was adequate.

Q4: Has the wind eroded the soil cap and blown the seed away?

Concern was raised that some of the seed may have been blown away in the winds.

Brad stated that wind erosion has affected small patches, however no deep gullies have formed. The way in which the seed was applied using a 10cm harrow depth would also minimise loss and therefore the conclusion at present is that the majority of the seed should still be in situ. Brad went through the seeding method, which was to purposely use a lot of seed (15kg/ha) and to harrow to a 10cm depth in the soil profile. This approach best replicates a natural soil seedbank. He also stated that Flinders Power is doing further greenhouse trials this month by taking samples from the ASA and germinating in ideal conditions.

A member asked how long vegetation is going to take to grow, based on expectations. The objective was to allow for native vegetation to create a self-sustaining vegetation ecosystem. Regarding how long before the vegetation would grow the advice to date indicated that the answer was dependent on natural rainfall, how much and when.

Provision has been made to possibly undertake some re-seeding of areas, but at this stage it was not preferred until there is natural rainfall and a determination made about the effectiveness of the current seeding.

A member asked that in 12 months time if Port Augusta has had its average rainfall and there isn't an acceptable vegetation growth, what happens then? This was considered a critical question that should be revisited regularly. It will also be addressed in the review of contingency plans at future meetings.

Brad said that if September arrives and there still hasn't been good growth, serious consideration would be given to reseedling.

Steve suggested that at a future meeting the group come up with a list of the "what ifs" and a list of responses / mitigation measures be developed should Flinders Power face a worse-case scenario of little or no growth at the end of 2018. This was agreed as a key action. Consideration could also be given to developing possible solutions / ideas based on the knowledge and expertise from the collective membership.

Q5: Why don't you irrigate / use SA Water outflow?

Kym said that they had spoken with SA Water but had identified some issues with the use of the water. It was understood that the water was not suitable for primary contact and most likely needed to be treated to a higher standard before it could be used.

Consideration would also need to be given to how the water is applied – and for what purpose. Is the water being applied primarily for dust suppression or vegetation growth? The area cannot be flooded with water either as it will cause erosion across the surface and therefore the type of irrigation to be used also needed consideration.

Kym stated that they had looked at irrigation options, reaching out to a number of irrigators. Substantial infrastructure would most likely be needed together with a greater volume of water than what might be available from the SA Water WWTP.

A member asked if a trial could be conducted to assess the results of irrigating. This was noted as a possible option.

Kym explained that Tonkin Engineering had been engaged by Flinders Power to consider various options as contingencies to prevent dust and encourage vegetation growth. Tonkin was due to provide Flinders Power with some advice before the end of April 2018.

The group felt that another approach to SA Water was warranted. Every effort should be made to fully explore the possibilities of accessing water to irrigate.

Steve suggested as an action that Flinders Power approach SA Water again to understand what could be possible.

7. Next Steps

Steve said that the presentation that Brad put together will be packaged up and sent to the group once it has been fully presented, so as to properly inform everyone in the group and for use in discussing with the greater community.

A member asked if there was a cut off time for the tours. Peter responded by stating that there wasn't and that Flinders Power would seek to accommodate anyone who was interested in looking at the site. The group was encouraged to promote the tours to members of the community, especially those who may have concerns but have not as yet visited the site.

It was suggested that Flinders Power approach the media again (television and radio) to convey to the community the contingency plans and the actions that are being undertaken. Peter said that they are happy to communicate the outcomes of the contingency planning and future actions. Another member said that having the community reference group seen on TV would be good for many in the community to know that there are still actions being taken and the group is still meeting on a regular basis.

Discussion followed this line with some suggesting that Flinders Power should look to try to explain more broadly what is occurring and the efforts that are being taken to ensure the remediation of the ash storage area is a success. Some in the community are tired and remain angry and while this may be a smaller group it would be good to broaden the messaging to a bigger audience.

It was noted that some in the community who had ongoing concerns had been offered the opportunity to tour the site and discuss their concerns with Flinders Power staff but had not accepted the offer. Some had also been offered the opportunity to attend meetings of the CRG. One member of the CRG noted that

some people have chosen not to be educated about the issues and that broadening the message might not change their opinions.

It was agreed however that there was merit in getting the message out more broadly that more work is being done to ensure the remediation project for the ash storage area is a success. A member suggested that Flinders Power should be 'bragging' about the great work that they are doing and not just about the demolitions, but all the efforts being made to reduce the dust. There also seemed to be a misunderstanding from some that fly ash was still a risk of being blown across the town. As the ash is now capped with soil, the dust is from the soil and is expected to be minimal once vegetation growth occurs. This information being promoted by some should be corrected.

Peter said that Flinders Power has communicated that there is no longer a risk of fly ash dust through Southern Cross and through newsletters distributed to residents; however, it is obvious that the message is not resonating.

Steve suggested that there needs to be some very specific information put together on the actions being taken and the contingency plans. This was agreed.

Steve asked whether anyone from the group would be willing to speak to the media about the work of the reference group in order to elevate the group's profile. Two members of the group would be willing to consider this.

A member suggested that there be some test sites on the ash storage area so the community can see that Flinders Power are trying different methods to get maximum germination – and that this be promoted.

Kym stated that Flinders Power were considering options on different grasses which might be quick germinating. Possible test sites could be established.

8. Any other business

Drop-in sessions were suggested in order to address individuals in the community who may not have the time to sit through a presentation, attend meetings of the reference group or participate in a tour. Drop in sessions could be 2 hours held across different days at different times at the Cinema and be well advertised. Flinders Power staff and possibly members of the EPA could be present to take questions and have informal conversations. Fact sheets should be prepared on contingency plans and irrigation options for these sessions.

It was suggested that the next meeting be held in 3 weeks time to conclude working through the questions dealt with in Brad's presentation.

Next meeting: 3rd of May 2018.

9. Close

Steve thanked the group and closed the meeting at 7.30pm

Actions

Item	Action	Who
1	Upload minutes of meeting 7 and 8 with amendments	Flinders Power
2	Develop fact sheet on the difficulty of retaining the stack, to be uploaded on Flinders Power website	Flinders Power
3	Revisit discussions with SA Water about options for irrigation support	Flinders Power
4	Develop fact sheet outlining activities being considered for contingency planning	Flinders Power
5	Brad's presentation to be made available on the website once presented following next meeting	Flinders Power
6	Open days – consider for May/June	Flinders Power
7	Consideration be given to further media opportunities to communicate contingency plans and efforts being undertaken to ensure the delivery of a sustainable land form	Flinders Power