

## **“No” Vote For Toxic Child Care**

The City of Fremantle Council said “No” this week to a proposal for a major child care centre that would have set a dangerous benchmark for children’s health.

Despite political pressure to approve the 86-place centre, Fremantle’s largest, the Council stood its ground and made a decision that reflected commonsense and caution.

“In the absence of controls to stop this kind of thing happening, it was a frustrating and risky process. But in the end, good reason, good ethics and good planning prevailed,” said quality child care campaigner and local mother Ms Libby Davy. “Now we have to ensure this result carries over into safe, healthy child care for all children,” she said.

Bizarrely, the proposed centre was in an industrial area next to spray painters, boat builders, the Coffin Cheaters clubhouse and at one of Fremantle’s worst crash sites – the busy intersection of Hampton and Douro Roads. It was also well outside EPA guidelines for separation distances between industrial and sensitive uses.

This controversial proposal became a test case for child care and the decision has set a positive benchmark for other Councils to take the lead from.

“But sadly, right now there are child care centres throughout Australia on major roads, disused petrol stations and other places of poor environmental health and safety. Busy parents often have little choice due to a lack of quality places,” Ms Davy said.

Councillor Helen Hewitt led the charge to protect young children in this instance from exposure to high levels of constant noise and air pollution during their key developmental years.

“The facts were clear, but common sense alone should tell us we fail our duty of care if we approve child care in such inappropriate places,” said Cr Hewitt. “We must work as a community to find the best, healthiest places for children to play and develop,” she said.

It is expected the applicants will attempt to win approval at a later date, armed with new research and consultant's reports, despite the first environmental consultant they hired going public to oppose the site.

The applicants, Christian City Church, planned to turn the children's only outside play area, alongside intersection traffic lights, into a 24-bay car park on Sundays.

Hon Barbara Scott MLC, WA Shadow Spokesperson for Children and Member for South Metro, made a compelling submission to Council on the rights of the child and their developmental need for safe, high quality outdoor play spaces.

Hon Lynn MacLaren, WA Greens MLC for South Metro, submitted a referral to the EPA to assess the site on environmental grounds.

"Child care is the most sensitive of land uses and EPA guidelines state that centres should be well removed from industrial uses and the associated risks. But local government says it's not their job to apply them and in this case, that's what initially happened," said Ms MacLaren.

"The council have made a sensible decision," said Ms MacLaren. "However this case highlights the need for strong guidelines being used regarding the siting of child care centres. These types of guidelines exist for the siting of schools, why not child care facilities, where children are younger and more vulnerable?"

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**Photographs/Television:** Local children (and Councillors) are available to meet on site near playground and intersection, or spray paint shop. Call Libby Davy.

**For more information or comment contact**

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