

Bill reported; report adopted.

Mr REED (Public Employment): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; bill read a third time.

**WASTE MANAGEMENT AND POLLUTION
CONTROL BILL**

(Serial 41)

**WASTE MANAGEMENT AND POLLUTION
CONTROL (CONSEQUENTIAL
AMENDMENT) BILL**

(Serial 43)

Continued from 19 February 1998.

Ms MARTIN (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, it has been a slow process coming to this second-reading debate stage, but we are here. I congratulate the minister on that. We are ahead of schedule. For a while, I thought it would not be until the end of this year that we would have the opportunity to debate these bills. They are very important for the Territory because they are important to our future economic prosperity and to the future of our environment. There is no argument that the Territory environment is a most precious resource, and how we manage wastes and control pollution are crucial issues.

The Territory has history on its side to a certain extent. We do not face the pollution and waste problems of other parts of the country, where industry and population pressures are much greater. But that does not mean that waste management and pollution control are not critical issues for us. They are. I quote the minister's tabling speech: 'Prevention is better and cheaper than cure, and this bill is intended to ensure that sound environmental practices are put in place'. Of course prevention is better than cure, but the Territory's situation also means that we do not have to settle for the absolute minimum standard. Working with industry and the community, we should aim for standards higher than those that would simply get us by. In time, the Territory should be able to aim for best practice in environmental management. Evidence from other jurisdictions shows that, more often than not, best practice is cost-effective. It can even reduce costs overall.

The implementation of these bills will mean we meet our national obligations under the intergovernmental agreement on the environment. The areas that will be covered under the bills are environmental noise, air quality, contaminated land, control of pollution, and treatment and disposal of hazardous waste. The first 2 areas to come under the

legislation will be those covering landfill operations, of particular concern to local government, and businesses collecting, transporting and disposing of waste. I will address those areas more specifically later in this address.

In his second-reading speech, the minister pointed out that this legislation will not apply to the mining industry. He said the Department of Mines and Energy would continue to be the one-stop shop for all aspects of mining industry and that relevant legislation would be amended to ensure mining legislation is consistent with this legislation. I think mines are fascinating places. Over the past 3 years, I have had a number of opportunities to visit mines throughout the Territory. I value highly the mining industry's contributions to the development of the Territory and its continuing prosperity. However, why are the environmental, waste and pollution aspects of the mining industry still being dealt with and overseen by the body that promotes mining and advises mining companies? If our environment is, to use the minister's words, 'one of our most precious resources', then its protection should be monitored and reviewed by experts at arm's length.

Before I address the bills specifically, I wish to commend the process undertaken to give those affected by the measures in them the opportunity to have input. The Waste Management and Pollution Control Strategy was released in September 1995. Following that, a draft bill that was tabled in this Assembly in November 1996, and made available for public comment. The proposed legislation was the subject of public meetings. That was great! It was analysed by both industry and the community. The comments that were received have been used to modify the bill yet again. It was an excellent process that gave the community and industry some ownership and some commitment to the implementation of these measures.

There are 3 aspects to the main bill. One sets benchmarks known as 'environmental protection objectives' – EPOs. The second provides control mechanisms for licences, approvals, reporting requirements and pollution abatement notices. The third provides management mechanisms to encourage businesses to achieve best-practice environmental management rather than simply avoiding fines. The hallmark of the bill is one of encouragement and cooperation to achieve good practice – even, hopefully, best practice – in environmental management, rather than taking the line of having to wield a big stick. Mind you, in this legislation there is the big stick. However, the principles of encouragement, cooperation, realistic time frames for implementation and rewarding best practice are to be applauded. It is an approach that is sensible and logical.