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MEDIA RELEASE

New approach required to manage domestic hoarding

Cases of domestic hoarding and squalor need to be managed by taking a social approach to the problem, Mr Chris Patterson MP, Chair of the Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Regulation, announced today.

The Committee has tabled its report on the management and disposal of waste on private lands. One of its recommendations is the establishment of a state-wide program that takes a social approach to treating the underlying causes and symptoms of domestic hoarding and squalor, rather than a regulatory approach focussed solely on the waste management aspect of the problem.

“The Committee received evidence from councils, the community, and a range of experts with health and social welfare backgrounds. Not only are the people who suffer from the condition which results in hoarding being affected,” Mr Patterson said, “but so are the neighbours who live with the rubbish and odour, and the wider community who ultimately pay for the clean-ups.”

“Local councils are doing the best they can, but with only regulatory tools at their disposal it is costing a lot of money to manage a problem which simply keeps coming back.”

Mr Patterson said that the Committee heard evidence from members of the Hoarding and Squalor Taskforce, a group of government and non-government agencies with practical experience of addressing hoarding.

“The expert witnesses, including representatives of Catholic Community Services, the RSPCA and Concord Hospital, told the Committee that a coordinated social approach to treating the conditions which cause hoarding is achieving results for the benefit of both hoarders and their neighbours,” Mr Patterson said. “They showed how this is preferable to regulating hoarding as a waste management issue which is not understood by the sufferers and frequently makes the problem worse.”

The Committee recommends that the program include:

- State-wide coverage;
- Mandatory reporting;

- Education and training for councils and other regulators;
- A telephone hotline for hoarders, their families and neighbours where they can seek advice and referral to the agency which can best assist them; and
- Triage arrangements where cases can be assessed so that intervention is quick and effective.

“The program will need dedicated funding,” Mr Patterson said. “This problem occurs in all states and territories and the Committee would like the NSW Government to seek Commonwealth funding for a national program.”

The Committee’s other recommendations include:

- Simplifying the Local Government Act so that landowners and councils can be confident that the rules for managing waste on private property are clear, fair, effective, and affordable;
- Encouraging cooperation by all parties to manage illegal dumping on Aboriginal lands;
- Clarifying the rules for managing derelict buildings; and
- Streamlining responsibility for cleaning up clandestine drug laboratories in residential areas.

Further information about the inquiry can be obtained by visiting the Committee’s website at www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/environmentregulation, or by contacting the Chair, Mr Chris Patterson MP on 0414 559 953.

Media contact: Mr Chris Patterson ph. 0414 559 953