

Red flag for Oceana permit

JOHN HARVEY

Activists who have raised a stink about air pollution from Hout Bay's fishmeal factory have appealed the City's decision to renew the plant's atmospheric emissions licence.

The City granted the renewal for the Oceana factory's licence on January 24, but Fresh Air for Hout Bay (FAHB) says the process leading to that decision was flawed.

It says environmental assessment practitioner, Pieter Badenhorst Professional Services (PBPS), did not run the public participation process competently.

FAHB says not only is the PBPS website "completely defunct" with no information about the emissions licence or other projects, but the comments-and-response report contains "blatantly inaccurate information" and, in general, the responses provided do not relate to the comments being made.

The organisation said that on page 2 of the PBPS responses, for example, reference was made to the 2016 health-risk assessment of Oceana, and the response stated that the assessment concluded there would be "no significant odour annoyance".

Yet the assessment, which FAHB



■ Oceana's licence was renewed in January.

managed to obtain, clearly stated that it was likely the odour would be regarded as unacceptable and there was a likelihood of odour

annoyance.

The organisation also charged that PBPS's only source of information was Oceana itself.

Furthermore, there was no follow-up with stakeholders who had registered their concerns, FAHB said.

The City cited several reasons for renewing the licence

- Public-participation had followed due process, with adverts in local newspapers; there were 44 objections to the licence renewal and 50 in favour of it; and 665 people signed a petition in support of the factory.

An atmospheric impact report dated October last year showed that the introduction of formalin (formaldehyde) to the production process posed no significant health risk to the community.

- The facility was in compliance with the atmospheric emissions licence.

- The national minister of environmental affairs had not deemed it necessary to identify specific pollutants or prescribed minimum emission standards for pollutants from animal-matter processing facilities.

Concern over report missing key points

From page 1

● Oceana provided employment to 91 members of the community as well as benefits to their dependants, local contractors and suppliers.

But, says FAHB, the City and PBPS are missing one important point: the factory is making people sick.

"In our surveys, we had people complaining about feeling sick as a result of the odour produced by chemicals used in the factory, but the PBPS report doesn't even mention this. Nowhere in this document does it address the well-being of residents," said FAHB founder Kiara Worth.

She has also taken issue with the City's report.

"FAHB submitted comment of behalf of 627 of our members, but we were only considered a single stakeholder. There was also no reference or consideration of the odour-pollution-impact surveys that FAHB submitted, highlighting well-being impacts and concerns," she said.

She claimed the City had "selectively" included information to suit its decision, and it had not referenced the complaints FAHB had repeatedly raised.

"With regards to socio-economic impact, the City's report notes the positive impact of the factory in terms of its 91 employees, local contractors and suppliers, and corporate social investment programmes," Ms Worth said.

"The report briefly considers the 'alleged' negative impact on Hout Bay's economy yet says 'no statistical evidence was submitted in this regard'. With this comment, the City is implying that it is somehow the residents' responsibility to conduct empirical socio-economic research concerning the dynamics of Oceana's operations. This is simply unreasonable."

She said the National Environmental Management Act made it clear it was the state's responsibility to ensure principles of sustainability were being applied, and, as such, it was the state's responsibility to pro-

duce statistical evidence to support its decisions.

"Despite numerous calls for socio-economic research to be conducted, this has not been done, and the City has not provided reasonable statistical evidence to support their decision. Even when the community has attempted to produce social research with statistical results, such as the FAHB air pollution impact surveys, these have simply been dismissed by the City."

FAHB, she said, was not wanting Oceana's licence to be revoked, but at the very least the City should have conceded that there was a problem with the smell so that solutions could be found.

"The City does not even acknowledge the existence of the odour pollution and instead considers it as 'potentially' generated with 'alleged' impacts.

"The City talks about wanting to redress the impact of apartheid, but all they are doing is reinforcing old apartheid rule. Hangberg was built to provide cheap labour for industry, and it was acceptable for disadvantaged groups to tolerate the smell. It seems nothing has changed," she said.

Pieter Badenhorst, of PBPS, said he was no longer involved as his company had completed its task and Ms Worth should submit her appeal to the City of Cape Town and it would take her claims under consideration. He declined to comment further.

Suzette Little, mayoral committee member for area north, said it would be inappropriate to respond while the appeal period was still open.

"If an appeal is submitted, then the appeal authority will consider the merits of the appellant's argument and decide one way or the other on the decision taken to renew Lucky Star's (Oceana) atmospheric emission licence," she said.

The Sentinel asked Oceana for comment, through spokesperson Dayne Stern, on Monday. None was received at the time of this edition going to print.