

Council rejects environment group's 'scaremongering'

Armidale

By Aidan Cromarty

ARMIDALE-Dumaresq council has issued a stern rebuke to scare-mongering efforts by a local environmental lobby group over the option of establishing a new waste management facility.

The Gara Valley Environment Preservation Association has accused the council of putting the World Heritage listed Oxley Wild Rivers National Park at risk by delaying investigations into alternative sites for the facility.

But mayor Brian Chetwynd said the site in question, referred to by council as Site 7, was not even the subject of a concrete proposal and had only come to favour after what has already been an extensive research program.

"Ten years ago, when council first started looking into this matter, we had 40 proposed sites

before scaling that back to three or four and now it looks as though we may fulfil our need, but that needs to be far more closely investigated," Cr Chetwynd said.

President of the association, John Hamel said the groups primary concern was that waste products could leak from the site into nearby waterways, in particular the Gara River.

But Cr Chetwynd said there were few areas around Armidale which would not be located near heritage listed locations.

"The fact is that it wouldn't matter where the site was around Armidale, it would still be close to a World Heritage listed site," Mr Chetwynd said.

Cr Chetwynd also drew attention to a long running plan by the council to explore new ways of efficiently dealing with waste products.

"As a matter of priority coun-

cil are investigating new waste technology, we have held two conferences recently to investigate new waste management technologies, we have consulted with Sydney based experts and we have surveyed the best new facilities in the State," Cr Chetwynd said.

"With the technology we are looking to implement at any future site, there would be absolutely minimal impact on the surrounding environment."

And while Mr Hamel accepted that the council was working hard to implement leading environmentally friendly waste disposal technology, he said ratepayers should not have to foot the bill.

Mr Hamel also dismissed the need for a new waste disposal facility at all, saying that the present site served the needs of the local community well.

"The site that the council are

using now has been used for 40 years. Why can't they just continue using it."

Another key criticism put forward by the group was over the supposed lack of any community involvement in exploring waste disposal options.

But Cr Chetwynd rejected the suggestion that no effort had been made to discuss plans with community, saying that not only had a community consultation board met regularly for 18 months over the past two years, but that members of the Gara Valley Environment Preservation Association had been part of it.

And with no plans for any new waste handling facility in the next four years, council says that there is still considerable time to weigh up the environmental impact associated with any site.