

**Submission
No 167**

INQUIRY INTO 'ENERGY FROM WASTE' TECHNOLOGY

Organisation: Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils

Date received: 26 May 2017

Submission to the Energy from Waste Technology Inquiry

NSROC Responses against Inquiry terms of reference

a) the current provision of waste disposal and recycling, the impact of waste levies and the capacity (considering issues of location, scale, technology and environmental health) to address the ongoing disposal needs for commercial, industrial, household and hazardous waste

Response:

There are no landfill sites and only two waste transfer stations in the NSROC region, which covers seven councils stretching from Hornsby to North Sydney on Sydney's north shore. Most of our councils are contracted to use Veolia's Woodlawn waste facility near Goulburn for the disposal of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW). This choice reflects the commercial reality that landfill sites are rapidly filling and those permitting the disposal of putrescible waste are operated by a single company.

None of the councils have a significant involvement in the disposal of Commercial and Industrial or Construction and Demolition waste.

NSROC considers that Energy from Waste (EFW) must be part of the suite of options in the future management of waste in Sydney. While it is not absolutely necessary that such a facility be built in this region, it is anticipated that an EFW facility servicing the region will be needed to ensure that the seven councils can meet their adopted landfill diversion targets of 70%. The value of land in this region and the current land zonings across the urban areas of the region would almost certainly make an EFW facility on a new site cost prohibitive.

The organisation's support for EFW is predicated on any such facility being given an operating licence from the NSW EPA in accordance with the NSW Energy from Waste Policy applying at the time. The current policy incorporates the waste hierarchy and NSROC's council members support the preferential treatment options of avoiding and reducing, reusing and recycling waste prior to it being considered for energy from waste.

b) the role of 'energy from waste' technology in addressing waste disposal needs and the resulting impact on the future of the recycling industry

Response:

Provided that preferential uses are made for waste above WTF in accordance with the waste hierarchy, the use of such technology should not impact on the recycling industry and may provide another option for the treatment of residues from recycling or reuse options that would be preferable to landfilling.

c) current regulatory standards, guidelines and policy statements overseeing 'energy from waste' technology, including reference to regulations covering:

i. the European Union

ii. United States of America

iii. international best practice

Response:

NSROC is not currently in a position to comment on international regulatory standards but any council approval for an EFW facility would require compliance with relevant statutory requirements.

d) additional factors which need to be taken into account within regulatory and other processes for approval and operation of 'energy from waste' plants

Response:

In addition to meeting statutory obligations at the development stage, an EFW facility would need to demonstrate ongoing compliance with all its operating conditions established by relevant authorities.

The strategic planning of a large metropolis like Sydney should address both the waste infrastructure needs of the anticipated population and the necessary operational requirements to manage waste without reducing the amenity, liveability, environmental health and human well being of the city and its residents. The Metropolitan Plan and District Plans should identify and make provision for facilities which address waste management and ensure the relevant legislation allows for waste facilities. The current approach appears to be based on allowing the commercial market to determine both the infrastructure provided and the level of service and cost for residents. Commercial requirements for financial returns often require a different model and return on capital to that which could apply to service infrastructure such as significant waste facilities.

Another critical ingredient of any successful EFW facility would be obtaining a social licence to operate. This would involve significant community engagement, consultation and education to demonstrate to the satisfaction of local residents that the facility can be a good neighbour and can provide a useful source of energy allowing a more sustainable use of resources. A role exists for politicians and government agencies in ensuring that the community is provided with an accurate and balanced picture of the likely impacts and benefits of any EFW facility.

e) the responsibility given to state and local government authorities in the environmental monitoring of 'energy from waste' facilities

Response:

NSROC is not aware of any additional requirements for local government to monitor compliance with the terms of an EPA operating licence for such a facility, but as the authority with local staff likely to be in the vicinity of such facilities on a regular basis and as

the first point of call for many local residents, the local council may well become involved in reporting obvious breaches of any licence to the regulator.

f) opportunities to incorporate future advances in technology into any operating 'energy from waste' facility

Response:

In general the approval and operation of a development is required to be consistent with the standards applying at the time of approval. It can be difficult to enforce an operating facility to incorporate any advances in the technology it uses into its future operations, except in the case of a failure to meet the relevant operating standards or where a substantial redevelopment or expansion of the development occurs.

g) the risks of future monopolisation in markets for waste disposal and the potential to enable a 'circular economy' model for the waste disposal industry, and

Response:

Given the existing duopoly in Sydney for the processing and disposal of MSW, the Inquiry has made a wise choice in selecting this term of reference. However the appropriate incorporation of EFW into the range of waste management options is unlikely increase the risk of monopolisation of markets nor disrupt the circular economy especially if a facility can be located on a site with commensurate long term energy needs.

h) any other related matter.

Response:

No further comment required.