**Submission No 2**

# INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

**Organisation:** Cooks Myalls Pastoral Company

**Date Received:** 29 August 2025

## 1. Introduction

My name is **Glen Woods**, and I am the owner and a fifth-generation farmer, proudly farming the land at **Cooks Myalls, 25km west of Parkes, since 1876**. For nearly 150 years, my family has lived, worked, and cared for this country. Through droughts, floods, and all the challenges that farming life brings, we have endured because of our deep connection to the land and our unwavering commitment to nurturing it for the next generation.

This land is more than just a business, it is our home, our history, and our children's future. My children are committed to becoming the sixth generation to continue this legacy of sustainable agricultural stewardship, ensuring that the values of hard work, caring for the environment, and responsibility to community remain alive in Parkes. Our family's livelihood, like that of so many farming families in this region, depends entirely on the health of our soil, our water, and our community. We cannot risk compromising these foundations for short-term industrial experiments that put our long-term future at stake.

It is with deep concern, and indeed a heavy heart, that I make this submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry. The proposed establishment of a **large-scale Energy from Waste (EfW) facility in Parkes, with a minimum capacity to burn 600,000 tonnes of waste every year and the ability to expand to 1.2 million tonnes**, threatens the very fabric of what makes this region strong and prosperous. Such a facility would not only pose significant risks to our **local environment and community**, but also to the wider agricultural heartland of New South Wales that underpins food security and market trust well beyond our region.

Such a facility poses significant and unacceptable risks not only to our local environment and community, but also to the wider regional ecosystem and food production network. Parkes sits in the heart of one of the most productive grain-growing regions in New South Wales, and agriculture here sustains families, businesses, and export markets.

In July this year, Cooks Myalls Pastoral Company was proud to achieve the **national merino lamb record at the Forbes saleyards, selling at $420/head**. This achievement reflects the trust placed in the safety, quality, and integrity of our produce. If an incinerator is built in Parkes, even the **perception of contamination** could irreparably damage that trust, threatening market access and undermining the livelihoods of farming families across the district.

For generations, we have poured our sweat, knowledge, and care into growing safe, high-quality food and fibre for Australia and the world. To jeopardise that for the sake of burning Sydney's rubbish is not only reckless — it is a betrayal of the values that regional communities stand for.

## 2. Term of Reference (b): Spread and Quality of Emissions

The proposed feedstock for the Parkes EfW facility includes **unsorted red-bin waste, commercial waste, and industrial waste**, a mix that presents significant risks due to its unpredictable and hazardous composition. This stream is **unsorted**, and is highly likely to contain batteries, plastics, treated timbers, chemicals, and other hazardous materials. By its very nature, residual red-bin, commercial, and industrial waste includes items that do not belong in general waste; people, understandably, are often careless or

unsure and may **resort to disposing of materials improperly**, further increasing the unpredictability and danger of the feedstock.

Even the most advanced filter technologies **cannot capture the smallest particles**, which are often the most dangerous to human health. These ultrafine particulates can travel long distances in the air and eventually settle into soil, water systems, and crops. Once deposited, they have a **cumulative effect**, building up in the environment and food chain over time.

For our farm at Cooks Myalls, this presents a direct threat to the integrity of everything we produce. **We rely solely on rainwater for our drinking water**, we do not have the luxury of being connected to town water. Toxins from the air and rainfall could settle on pastures, crops, and our water storage tanks, entering the soil and being absorbed by the plants we grow, as well as accumulating in livestock through contaminated feed and water. Over time, these pollutants would enter the **food chain**, with serious implications for human health. Families across Australia could unknowingly consume **contaminated meat, wool, and grain**, undermining confidence in regional produce and creating long-term public health risks.

The economic and reputational impact cannot be overstated. Even the **perception of contamination** can result in significant market rejection, both domestically and internationally. Buyers of grain and livestock are highly sensitive to safety and traceability issues. Introducing a facility of this scale would create a permanent risk to the viability of our farm, the trust in our produce, and the livelihoods of farming families throughout the region.

In short, this is not a distant or theoretical risk. The emissions from such a facility would **directly compromise the food we grow, the animals we raise, and the markets that sustain our families**, turning generations of careful stewardship of the land into a source of potential contamination.

## 3. Term of Reference (d): Impacts on Human Health

The risks posed by emissions from an EfW incinerator extend far beyond air quality. Many farming families in the Parkes region, including ours at Cooks Myalls, **rely solely on rainwater for household use**. We do not have the luxury of town water connections. Any deposition of toxic particulates on roofs, tanks, or catchments **directly threatens the safety of our drinking water and the health of our livestock**, which in turn affects the safety and quality of the food we produce.

Dioxins, heavy metals, PFAS, and ultrafine particles **accumulate in soil, water, crops, and animals over time**, creating long-term human health risks. These include respiratory illnesses, neurological damage, cancers, and other serious conditions. The cumulative nature of these toxins means even low-level exposure over many years can result in measurable harm.

These risks are magnified in regional areas where alternative water treatment and filtration systems are limited or non-existent. In addition, **any perceived contamination of our produce could lead to market rejection**, undermining consumer confidence in regional food products and jeopardising the economic viability of farming families like mine.

It is deeply concerning that EfW incinerators have already been rejected in urban areas such as Western Sydney following strong objections from NSW Health due to the risks they pose to human health. If such facilities are **not considered safe for densely populated urban areas**, it is unreasonable and unjust to impose them on rural communities whose livelihoods and wellbeing depend entirely on uncontaminated natural resources.

## 4. Term of Reference (e): Impacts on Agriculture

Parkes sits within one of the **most productive grain- and livestock-growing areas in New South Wales**, and agriculture is the backbone of the regional economy. Any contamination of crops, pastures, livestock, or

soils would have **far-reaching consequences** for food safety, market access, and the economic viability of farming families like mine.

Traceability requirements are increasingly strict. Producers must declare whether livestock have grazed near **industrial developments, including solar farms and wind turbines**, and buyers are highly sensitive to **any potential contamination**. The introduction of a large-scale EfW facility like the one proposed for Parkes, into prime agricultural land presents **unacceptable reputational and economic risks**. Even the perception that produce might be contaminated can result in market rejection.

For our farm at Cooks Myalls, this is not hypothetical. In **July 2025**, we achieved the **national merino lamb record at Forbes saleyards for $420**, a testament to the quality, safety, and integrity of our produce. Maintaining these standards relies on **confidence in the purity of our soil, water, and livestock**. A major incinerator nearby would threaten that confidence and the trust that underpins market access, potentially affecting not only our family's livelihood but the sustainability of farming across the region.

Moreover, the introduction of toxic emissions into a rural environment undermines generations of careful stewardship. **Our community depends on uncontaminated land and water**, and the cumulative risk to agricultural systems is simply too great to accept.

## 5. Term of Reference (i): Alternative Solutions to Residual Waste

EfW incineration is frequently presented as a solution to Sydney's waste problem, but it is **not a genuine circular economy solution**. Rather than recovering or recycling valuable materials, incineration **destroys resources** and locks waste into a linear system, requiring a **constant feedstock of unsorted red-bin, commercial, and industrial waste**. The high demand for continuous fuel often **diverts materials away from recycling and reuse streams**, directly undermining existing waste minimisation programs and reducing their overall effectiveness.

Safe and sustainable alternatives are well-established and widely supported by both national and international research, including:

- **Waste avoidance and minimisation**, ensuring products are designed and used in ways that generate less waste;
- **Repair and reuse of products**, keeping materials circulating within the economy;
- **Recycling and composting**, transforming end-of-life materials into new products and soil amendments;
- **Anaerobic digestion for organic waste**, producing energy while returning nutrients to the soil.

These approaches conserve resources, **reduce emissions**, and return valuable materials to the economy **without generating toxic by-products**. They also foster stronger, locally based circular economies, creating jobs and supporting community resilience rather than externalising risks.

Transporting hundreds of thousands of tonnes of waste to regional areas **shifts the environmental and health burden onto rural communities** who receive none of the benefits but bear all of the risks. This is particularly unjust when rural communities, like those in Parkes, are responsible for producing the food and fibre that feeds the nation, and rely on **clean soil, water, and air** to maintain safe and high-quality agricultural outputs.

True circular economy principles require reducing environmental and health risks, maintaining **trust in food and fibre systems**, and supporting **sustainable, long-term production**. EfW incineration directly contradicts these principles. It **produces toxic emissions**, discourages recycling, and creates a linear, extractive system that threatens the **health, livelihood, and reputation of regional agriculture**, undermining both environmental sustainability and food security for communities across Australia.