Submission No 38

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

Name: Ms Michelle Ross

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Submission to NSW Parliament: Concerns Regarding the Proposed Parkes Energy from Waste Project

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Michelle Ross, and I am a long-term resident of the Parkes Shire. I have lived here for 51 years, raised two children who also continue to live in the area, and I now have two grandchildren growing up here as well. I previously owned and operated a business in the community, and both of my children have also recently run businesses here. This region is not just where I live — it's where my family has built our lives, contributed to the local economy, and put down deep roots.

I am a **teacher**, and I work with **young children every day**. I am deeply concerned about the **long-term impacts** that the proposed Parkes Energy from Waste (EfW) facility may have on the **health and development** of the children I teach, as well as on my own grandchildren. Their growing bodies are more vulnerable to pollution and environmental stress, and I believe this project introduces unnecessary and unacceptable risks into their lives.

While I understand the need to manage waste responsibly, I do not believe this facility is in the best interests of our community or environment. The remainder of this submission outlines the many concerns I — along with many others in our region — hold about this project.

I express serious concerns regarding the proposed **Parkes Energy from Waste (EfW) project**. While the development is being marketed as a sustainable solution for managing waste and generating energy, there are significant and well-founded concerns across environmental, health, economic, cultural, and social domains that must be carefully addressed before proceeding.

Risks to Agriculture and Food Supply

The Central West is a key agricultural region for NSW, renowned for its clean air, water, and high-quality produce. The release of pollutants such as dioxins, heavy metals, and particulate matter from EfW incinerators can contaminate soil, air, and water. These toxic substances can bioaccumulate in crops and livestock, posing direct threats to the food supply chain, local farm businesses, and consumer health.

Risks to Water Supply (Including Tank Water)

Many rural and semi-rural residents in the Parkes area rely entirely on **tank water** for domestic and agricultural use. Airborne pollutants emitted from EfW facilities—particularly fine particulate matter and acidic gases—can settle on roofs and enter water tanks, contaminating the only available source of drinking water. The long-term impacts on water quality and health have not been adequately studied in this specific context.

Risks to Property Prices, Tourism, and Investment

There is strong evidence from other jurisdictions that waste incinerators significantly **reduce nearby property values** due to perceived and real health and environmental risks. Additionally, Parkes is increasingly positioning itself as a tourism and regional development hub. The presence of a waste incinerator undermines these aspirations and could deter future investment, particularly in sustainable and clean industries.

Health Risks

Numerous peer-reviewed studies link EfW incinerators to **adverse health outcomes**, including respiratory problems, cardiovascular disease, and increased cancer risk. Vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly, and individuals with pre-existing conditions face heightened risk. The long-term cumulative effects of exposure to low-level toxic emissions are still not fully understood, and precautionary principles must prevail.

Environmental Risks and Threats to Culturally Significant Areas

The potential for contamination of land and water threatens local **ecosystems** and **culturally significant sites**. These areas may be irreversibly damaged by pollution, noise, and increased industrial activity. Environmental assessments must include thorough cultural heritage evaluations, developed in close consultation with **Traditional Owners and Indigenous stakeholders of Wiradjuri Land**.

Greenwashing, Industry-Funded Research, and Misleading PR

The promotion of EfW as "green" or "renewable" energy is **highly misleading**. It is fundamentally a combustion process that releases CO_2 and other greenhouse gases. Much of the supporting literature is industry-funded, raising concerns about bias and the omission of independent science. PR tactics often downplay the risks and overstate the benefits, misleading communities and policymakers alike.

Ability of the EPA to Monitor and Prevent Contamination

While the EPA plays a critical role in regulation, there is **justifiable skepticism** about its ability to prevent or respond to all contamination events. Historically, enforcement of environmental regulations has been reactive and under-resourced. This is particularly concerning in regional areas where monitoring is infrequent and where response times may be inadequate.

Lack of Social Licence and Community Consultation

There has been a **clear lack of genuine community consultation** regarding the Parkes EfW proposal. Many local residents and stakeholders were not adequately informed or given the opportunity to participate in decision-making. Without a social licence, this project should not move forward.

Mental Health and Community Wellbeing

The uncertainty and fear surrounding this facility have already had a **negative impact on community mental health**. Residents are experiencing heightened anxiety, stress, and a sense of powerlessness. The long-term mental health burden of living near a high-risk industrial facility must not be underestimated.

Risks to Waste Reduction, Reuse, and Recycling

EfW projects depend on a consistent stream of combustible waste—often including materials that could otherwise be **recycled or composted**. This directly undermines NSW's waste hierarchy, which prioritises waste avoidance, reuse, and recycling. Long-term waste contracts can lock councils into unsustainable practices and disincentivise investments in circular economy initiatives.

Nuisance Impacts (Noise, Vermin, Smell)

Residents near similar facilities have reported ongoing issues with **odour, noise pollution, vermin**, and fly infestations. These affect daily life and community wellbeing, and they are often downplayed in environmental assessments.

Transportation and Carbon Emissions

EfW facilities typically require waste to be transported over long distances, often from urban to regional areas. This increases **heavy vehicle traffic**, road degradation, carbon emissions, and the risk of **hazardous spills**. Parkes should not become a dumping ground for Sydney's waste.

Hazardous Feedstock and Lack of Transparency

There is insufficient transparency around what types of waste will be incinerated. **Hazardous and recyclable materials**—including plastics, batteries, e-waste, and medical waste—may end up in the feedstock stream. Without strict, enforceable restrictions and independent monitoring, the public cannot be confident in the safety of the facility.

Conclusion

Given the serious and wide-ranging concerns outlined above, I urge the NSW Parliament to:

- **Pause any approval processes** until a full, independent review is conducted;
- Require **transparent and inclusive community consultation**;
- Prioritise investment in **zero waste**, **recycling**, and **composting infrastructure**;
- Uphold the **precautionary principle** where science is still uncertain.

The people of Parkes and surrounding communities deserve clean air, safe water, and a healthy environment—not to bear the long-term risks of a project that offers questionable benefits and significant, irreversible harm.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Yours sincerely,
Michelle Ross

26th September 2025