Submission
No 62

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

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To whom it may concern,

I write to formally oppose the proposed Energy from Waste (EfW) incinerator (Project "Parkes Energy Recovery") in the Parkes Special Activation Precinct, Parkes NSW. While I appreciate the challenge of managing waste and the desire for more sustainable energy sources, this proposal carries significant risks and drawbacks which I believe outweigh its potential benefits. Below I outline key grounds of opposition:

Grounds of Opposition

Health Risks

There is evidence that older waste incineration technologies have been tied to increased incidences of adverse health outcomes: cancer clusters, respiratory illnesses, congenital abnormalities, and birth defects.

Though proponents claim emissions will be filtered and that modern standards are high, there remains "not zero risk," especially for ultrafine particles, heavy metals (lead, mercury), persistent organic pollutants (including dioxins, furans), and other toxins. These can persist in the environment, bioaccumulate, and pose long-term threats.

Vulnerable populations — children, the elderly, those with pre-existing health conditions — are especially at risk from air pollution and toxic emissions.

Environmental and Agricultural Impacts

Pollution from emissions and the resultant deposition of particulates or heavy metals may adversely affect soil quality, water catchments, and biodiversity. This could undermine not only local ecosystems but also productivity of farmland.

The region's agricultural sector depends heavily on reputation for clean, safe produce. Any perception (even if scientifically unfounded) of contamination could damage market confidence and export potential.

The project generates ash and other solid residues ("bottom ash", "fly ash") which themselves may be hazardous and require secure disposal. Managing ash introduces further environmental risk.

Cultural and Land Heritage Concerns

The area is on Wiradjuri country; the traditional custodians (Wiradjuri Elders) have expressed that this development threatens culturally significant land, sacred sites, and connections which are irreplaceable.

Cultural heritage is not only the physical sites but also the living connection to land — such damage cannot be mitigated simply by technical regulatory measures.

Equity, Locational Justice, and Perceived Sacrifice

The fact that energy-from-waste incinerators are banned in many densely populated or metropolitan areas (including Sydney), yet one is proposed for a regional/rural area, gives rise to concerns of "sacrificial communities" — i.e. placing burdens on less politically powerful or more remote communities rather than distributing costs and risks more evenly.

Community consultation has raised issues of inadequate transparency, insufficient detailed emissions modelling, limited information on transport impacts (waste-in trucks and trains), or water catchment impact. Without full data, the community cannot assess risk properly.

Transportation and Carbon Emissions

The proposal involves bringing in large quantities of waste (non-recyclable) from Sydney (over 300-350 km away), likely by train. This adds transport emissions, risks (spills, accidents), infrastructure wear, and ancillary environmental impacts.

The overall carbon footprint may be higher when factoring in transport, processing, emissions, and long-term waste residues, potentially undermining climate goals unless the facility is exceptionally efficient and clean.

Conflict with Circular Economy & Waste Reduction Goals

A large EfW facility with long contracts (e.g. 30-40 years, as raised by opponents) tends to lock in demand for a steady flow of waste, which can discourage strong waste reduction, reuse, recycling initiatives.

If the region and state are serious about reducing landfill and waste generation, investment might be better put into upstream waste management (source reduction, better recycling, composting, waste avoidance).

Regulatory Uncertainty and Monitoring

While regulatory standards are claimed to be among the strictest, enforcement and continuous monitoring (especially real-time, publicly transparent monitoring) are essential. Any failure in regulation (due to capacity, oversight, funding, or technical issues) could lead to harmful emissions not being caught quickly.

Modelling of worst-case emission scenarios, cumulative effects with other sources of pollution, and long-term studies are often limited or not publicly available.

Socioeconomic and Community Impacts

The project may create only a modest number of long-term jobs relative to its scale, while the risks are borne by a large number of residents, farmers, producers.

Potential decline in property values, or cost to local healthcare, could negatively affect residents.

Precedent and Regulatory Inconsistency

The NSW Government’s own legislation restricts EfW facilities to only certain areas; it bans them in others, including Sydney. The decision to exempt Parkes (and three other regional locations) needs clearer justification, especially given the same health standards apply.

The community deserves consistent regulation and protection: if a facility is deemed too risky for a city, why acceptable in a rural region