Submission No 104

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

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Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Proposed Energy-from-Waste (EfW) Facilities

From: Carolyn Keep
Location: Parkes Region, NSW

Introduction

My name is Carolyn Keep, and together with my partner, we run a predominantly organic farm in the Parkes region. Our property supports livestock and cropping, and we manage it with a focus on soil health, biodiversity, and sustainability.

We have seven dams that supply our livestock and are entirely reliant on rainwater for our household. Our way of life depends on clean air, unpolluted water, and uncontaminated soil.

As a breast cancer survivor, I am deeply concerned about the potential for chemical fallout and toxic exposure associated with the proposed Energy-from-Waste (EfW) incinerator at Parkes. What might seem like a distant industrial project to some is, for us, a direct threat to our health, our land, and our ability to produce safe, chemical-free food.

I am making this submission to express my strong opposition to the proposed Parkes Energy-from-Waste facility, and to ask the Committee to consider the serious health, environmental, and agricultural risks this project poses under several key Terms of Reference (TOR).

(b) Spread and Quality of Emissions

The proponent acknowledges that particles smaller than 0.02 microns cannot be effectively captured by the facility's filtration system. These ultrafine particles, along with dioxins, furans, heavy metals, and other persistent organic pollutants, are known to travel long distances and settle on soil, crops, and open water.

Our farm has seven open dams that supply our livestock. These water bodies are directly exposed to the atmosphere, meaning any fallout or airborne dust from the incinerator could easily enter our water system. There is no filtration for this, what lands in our dams stays there, and eventually moves through our livestock and into the food chain.

As someone who has already fought breast cancer, I cannot ignore the overwhelming evidence that certain environmental pollutants, including dioxins and heavy metals, are linked to hormonal and immune system disruption. Allowing an industrial incinerator to operate near homes and farms is not compatible with protecting public health, particularly for vulnerable people.

(d) Impacts on Human Health and Water Contamination

Under TOR (d), the Committee must consider the impact on human health and contamination of water and soil. For rural residents like us, this is personal. Our rainwater tanks supply all our household needs, drinking, cooking, washing. If airborne pollutants settle on our roofs, those contaminants will enter our water supply.

This is not theoretical, overseas, communities near incinerators have experienced measurable increases in dioxins and heavy metals in soil and water. Once these pollutants enter the environment, they persist for decades. There is no practical way to remove them.

No family should be asked to trade their clean water and air for the convenience of burning Sydney's waste.

(e) Impact on Agriculture and Livestock Health

Under TOR (e), the inquiry is tasked with examining the impact on agriculture. For us, the health of our animals is inseparable from the health of our environment. If airborne pollutants settle on our pastures or enter our dams, our livestock will be exposed.

For a farm that operates with organic principles, this raises a devastating question:

How can we continue to call our produce "clean" if we live under a plume of industrial emissions?

Even trace levels of contamination could result in loss of organic certification, reduced market access, and a loss of trust from consumers who buy our produce expecting it to be free of chemicals.

Our land and livestock are our livelihood. The proposed incinerator threatens both.

(i) Alternatives to Manage Waste

There are safer and more sustainable solutions available, such as:

- Composting and anaerobic digestion for organic waste streams;
- Advanced recycling and materials recovery;

Local circular economy initiatives that create jobs and value from waste without generating toxic emissions.

These alternatives not only protect health and the environment but also strengthen rural economies, something an EfW incinerator cannot do.

Lack of Genuine Consultation

Like many residents, we were not properly consulted during the early stages of planning. Information has often been technical and inaccessible, and opportunities for feedback limited.

Real consultation means working with the community, not just informing them after key decisions have been made. For something with such serious potential consequences, local voices should have been heard from the beginning.

Conclusion

Under multiple Terms of Reference, the evidence points to unacceptable risk, to health, water, agriculture, and community wellbeing.

As a cancer survivor, I take exposure to chemicals and pollutants seriously. As a farmer, I know how fragile and interconnected our natural systems are. Once contamination occurs, whether through air, soil, or water, it cannot be undone.

The Parkes Energy-from-Waste facility does not belong in a food-producing region. I urge the Committee to reject this proposal and instead support clean, non-toxic, and truly sustainable waste solutions that protect the health of people, animals, and the environment.

Sincerely,
Carolyn Keep