Submission No 105

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: David MacGregor
Location: Parkes, NSW

Introduction

My name is David MacGregor, and I am a generational farmer from the Parkes district. Our family runs a mixed operation of beef cattle and broadacre cropping. Everything we do depends on the health of our land, our water, our air, and the trust that consumers have in the food and fibre we produce.

I am making this submission to express my strong opposition to the proposed Energy-from-Waste (EfW) incinerator planned for Parkes. For farmers like myself, this proposal represents an unacceptable risk to agriculture, our market reputation, and the long-term sustainability of regional NSW.

(a) Performance of the Proposed Technology

The technology proposed for the Parkes Energy Recovery Facility is said to be “proven overseas”, but it has never been operated in an agricultural setting like ours. While Western Australia has projects using similar combustion systems, those are located in industrial areas near the coast, not in the middle of productive farmland.

Parkes would be the first of its kind on the eastern seaboard, and the first surrounded by cropping and grazing land. That makes this an experiment, not a safe, tried-and-tested model. There is no demonstrated evidence that this technology can operate safely in the environmental conditions we live with, dust, dry climate, wind patterns, and reliance on rainwater and groundwater.

The Terms of Reference (a) call for comparison with leading international facilities. Even those “state-of-the-art” plants overseas have had issues with emissions breaches, ash contamination, and poor transparency. This proposal does not meet the standard of safety and performance required for a farming region.

(b) Spread and Quality of Emissions

Under TOR (b), the spread and quality of emissions must be examined closely. The project’s own documents confirm that ultrafine particles smaller than 0.02 microns can’t be captured by its filters. These are particles so small they can pass through lungs and enter the bloodstream.

For farmers, these pollutants don’t just disappear, they fall back onto our soil, crops, and pasture. Over time they can build up, and even small amounts of heavy metals or persistent organic pollutants can threaten animal health and crop quality.

This isn’t just about local air pollution, it’s about protecting the integrity of the food supply chain. If contamination were detected in meat, grain, or wool, our entire district could lose market access. Once that reputation is damaged, it’s impossible to regain.

(d) Impacts on Human Health and Water

In regional NSW, our water security is already fragile. Farmers, families, and livestock all rely on rainwater tanks, bores, and local catchments. Any pollution from stack emissions, contaminated ash, or runoff could directly enter those systems.

Under TOR (d), the Committee is tasked with considering health impacts. That must include long-term, low-level exposure, the kind of slow build-up that isn't always visible right away but can cause problems years later.

Heavy metals and dioxins don't break down. Once they're in the soil or water, they stay there, and they move through plants and animals. That is not a risk any responsible government should impose on a food-producing area.

(e) Impact on Agriculture

Under TOR (e), the inquiry will examine the effect on agriculture. The risk here cannot be overstated. Agriculture is the backbone of the Parkes region, supporting local jobs, families, and export income.

Even the perception of contamination can have catastrophic effects on trade. Export markets depend on confidence in our "clean and green" reputation. One hint of contamination from an EfW facility could see buyers refuse grain or meat from the entire district, not just from nearby farms.

Farmers carry all the risk, yet none of the reward. If this goes wrong, it's our businesses, our families, and our land values that will pay the price.

(f) Parkes Special Activation Precinct

The Parkes Special Activation Precinct (SAP) was meant to create sustainable, future-focused industries for regional NSW. Adding a waste incinerator contradicts that vision entirely.

The SAP was promoted as a clean logistics and renewable energy hub, but instead, it is being tied to Sydney's residual waste problem. This not only damages the region's image it also drives away clean investment and innovation that could have created local jobs without risking public health.

(i) Alternative Waste Solutions

There are smarter, safer, and more sustainable ways to handle waste:

- Composting and anaerobic digestion for organic materials.
- Advanced recycling that recovers resources instead of destroying them.
- Regional circular economy initiatives that keep materials in use and create local employment.

Energy-from-Waste incineration does the opposite, it locks in high emissions, discourages recycling, and shifts city waste problems onto rural communities.

Lack of Consultation

Many farmers in our area were never properly informed or invited into early discussions about this project. Consultation came late, and even then, it felt more like a box-ticking exercise than genuine engagement.

When decisions are made without listening to the people who live and work on the land, it erodes trust. True consultation means working with communities from the start, not presenting them with a nearly finished plan.

Economic and Community Impacts

Beyond the direct environmental threats, this proposal would have a lasting impact on the social fabric of regional NSW. Farming communities are resilient, but we depend on stability and confidence in our land and produce.

If an incinerator compromises that, or even just creates the perception that it might, it will cause financial stress, mental health challenges, and division in the community. For many families, farming is not just a job; it’s a legacy. This project puts that legacy at risk.

Conclusion

Under multiple Terms of Reference, the evidence is clear: the proposed Parkes EfW facility presents unacceptable risks to agriculture, public health, and regional sustainability.

It does not belong in a food-producing district. The risks outweigh any claimed benefits, and the long-term costs would fall squarely on local communities.

I urge the Committee to reject the Parkes EfW proposal and instead support waste solutions that are clean, proven, and compatible with rural life, not those that endanger it.

Sincerely,
David MacGregor
Parkes, NSW