Submission
No 106

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

Name: Mr Barry Woods

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

From: Barry Woods
Location: Parkes, NSW

Introduction

My name is Barry Woods, and I am a generational farmer who has lived and worked on the land my entire life. I run a mixed farming enterprise of sheep, beef, and cropping in the Parkes region. Our livelihoods, our land, and our reputation depend on clean soil, air, and water.

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed Energy-from-Waste (EfW) incinerator planned for Parkes. I believe this facility poses unacceptable risks to agriculture, market access, and the health of regional communities, and that it fails to align with the intent of sustainable development within the Parkes Special Activation Precinct.

(a) Performance of the Proposed Technology

The technologies proposed for the Parkes Energy Recovery Facility are similar in type to those being constructed in Western Australia, which also use moving grate combustion and bottom ash recovery. However, the Parkes proposal represents a larger-scale facility situated in a very different environment, one defined by intensive agriculture, variable climate, and close proximity to productive farmland and water catchments.

While there are emerging examples of EfW plants in Western Australia, there is no proven record of this technology operating safely in agricultural regions or under eastern Australian environmental conditions. The local risks, including to air quality, water systems, and agricultural market access, remain untested and unquantified.

In short, the Parkes EfW proposal may resemble other Australian projects on paper, but in practice it is an experiment in a completely different and more sensitive regional context, without the operational history needed to justify that risk.

(b) Spread and Quality of Emissions

The project's proponents claim emissions will be tightly controlled, yet their own documents acknowledge that particles smaller than 0.02 microns cannot be captured. These ultrafine particles, along with heavy metals and persistent organic pollutants, can travel significant distances and settle on farmland.

Once these pollutants enter soil and water systems, they bioaccumulate in plants and livestock, leading to potential contamination of agricultural produce and the risk of market exclusion for affected farmers.

(d) Impacts on Human Health and Contamination Risks

The Parkes community relies on rainwater and groundwater for drinking, household use, and livestock. Any release of toxins or heavy metals — whether through air deposition, ash handling, or leachate — could contaminate these supplies.

Once contamination occurs, it is virtually impossible to reverse. This would have serious long-term consequences for the health of local families, including children, and for the sustainability of agricultural operations that depend on clean water.

(e) Impact on Agriculture Locally and Across the Wider Region

Agriculture is the backbone of the Parkes region. The clean, green reputation of our food and fibre underpins market access and consumer confidence in both domestic and export markets.

Even the perception of contamination can have devastating consequences. Grain buyers, meat processors, and wool exporters all depend on strict quality assurance systems. A nearby waste incinerator risks undermining decades of work by farming families to maintain those standards.

If contamination were ever detected — or even suspected — the economic damage to the region would be irreversible. It would destroy livelihoods that have been built over generations and fracture community trust in both government and industry.

(f) Alterations to the Parkes Special Activation Precinct

The Parkes Special Activation Precinct (SAP) was intended to create sustainable economic growth and innovation for regional NSW. Positioning an EfW incinerator within or adjacent to this zone contradicts the stated goals of the SAP — which include clean industry, renewable energy, and environmental protection.

Installing an industrial waste burner in the heart of a food-producing district sends the wrong message about what “activation” means. It endangers the region’s potential to lead in clean logistics, renewable energy, and agricultural innovation, and replaces it with the burden of being Sydney’s waste destination.

Lack of Consultation

Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of this proposal is the lack of genuine community consultation. Local farmers and residents were not properly informed or invited to participate in the early planning stages.

Consultation has often felt tokenistic, with decisions appearing pre-determined and technical documents released in ways that make them inaccessible to everyday people. If this facility were truly in the public interest, there would have been transparent engagement from the start, not a top-down approach that dismisses legitimate local concerns.

Conclusion

The proposed Parkes Energy-from-Waste facility represents an unacceptable threat to our farming livelihoods, market reputation, and rural way of life. It is incompatible with the region's agricultural identity and with the objectives of the Parkes Special Activation Precinct.

I urge the Committee to consider the long-term impacts of this project on regional agriculture, market confidence, and community wellbeing. Once trust and clean land are lost, they cannot be replaced.

I strongly recommend that the Committee reject the Parkes EfW proposal and instead support alternative waste management solutions, such as composting, recycling, and circular economy initiatives, that genuinely protect rural NSW and its people.

Sincerely,
Barry Woods
Parkes, NSW