Submission No 177

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

Organisation: Parkes Aboriginal Working Party

Date Received: 28 October 2025

Submission from the Parkes Aboriginal Community Working Party (PACWP)

Regarding: Proposed Parkes Waste / Energy Recovery Facility
To: Hon Nichole Overall – Chairperson
From Chairperson: Michael James – Proud Wiradjuri Man, Living on Country
Date: Tuesday, 28th October 2025

1. Introduction to the Parkes Aboriginal Community Working Party (PACWP)

The **Parkes Aboriginal Community Working Party (PACWP)** is a collective of **local Aboriginal community members and volunteers**, established in **March 2011**. We represent and advocate for the **needs, voices, and aspirations** of the Aboriginal community in **Parkes, Central West NSW** — situated on **Wiradjuri Country**.

Our work focuses on areas of **social justice, social inclusion, education, housing, and cultural improvement**. We aim to strengthen community wellbeing, promote equality, and preserve our cultural heritage and our identity.

As Aboriginal leaders and community advocates, we have a **responsibility to protect Country, culture, and Aboriginal and community health**. We therefore **oppose the establishment of the proposed Parkes Waste (Energy Recovery) Facility** on Wiradjuri Country, or anywhere in NSW or Australia where it risks harming the environment, human health, and Aboriginal cultural heritage.

2. Lack of Wiradjuri Consultation

Consultation with Traditional Custodians and Aboriginal Leaders and Aboriginal communities has been **inadequate, inconsistent, and not culturally appropriate**.

The **principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)** — as set out in the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)** — has **not been upheld**. The Wiradjuri people, other Aboriginal people, and other community whose Country this project directly affects, have not been given **adequate time, access, or opportunity** to understand, discuss, or influence decisions.

Concerns:

- Consultation appears to have been treated as a **box-ticking exercise** rather than a genuine, respectful dialogue, when invited to have a consult a day prior to the submission cut off date.
- There has been **no independent, transparent process** led by Wiradjuri Elders or recognised cultural representatives.
- The **broader Aboriginal community**, including our youth and our Elders, were **not informed early enough** or involved in key stages of any planning.

Recommendations:

- Immediately **pause the project** until genuine consultation and **FPIC-compliant engagement** occur with our local Wiradjuri people.
- Establish a **Wiradjuri Cultural Advisory Committee** to co-design all future project steps.
- Require **cultural governance training** for project decision-makers and their staff.

Key Questions:

- Who from the Wiradjuri Nation was formally consulted, and at what stages?
- How was feedback from Aboriginal community members incorporated into the project's planning or approval documents?
- Will the State Government commit to halting the project until true consultation occurs?

3. Risks to Significant Areas and Cultural Heritage

The proposed facility is located in Parkes NSW and upon **Wiradjuri Country**, a landscape of **deep cultural, spiritual, and ancestral importance**. The region's waterways — including the **Bogan and Lachlan Rivers** — are sacred, carrying **stories, totems, law, and life** that connect communities across generations.

Risks include:

- **Disturbance or destruction of sacred and cultural sites**, including those not yet formally identified or recorded.
- **Pollution of waterways and soil**, which affects food, medicine, ceremony, and the health of the land.
- **Disruption to the spiritual balance of Country**, which carries meaning and responsibility for our people.

Recommendations:

- Conduct a **Wiradjuri-led Cultural Heritage Assessment** before any further planning approvals.
- Ensure protection of all **significant sites and our waterways**, including buffer zones and cultural exclusion areas.
- Integrate **cultural heritage mapping and monitoring** into environmental management plans.

Key Questions:

- Has an independent cultural heritage impact assessment been completed by or with Wiradjuri custodians?
- What safeguards exist to ensure sacred and significant sites are identified and protected before work begins?
- How will cultural heritage monitoring continue during the life of the project?

4. Health, Environmental, and Social Risks

There are serious concerns about the **environmental, health, and social impacts** of an Energy from Waste (EfW) facility operating in the Parkes region.

Concerns:

- **Air pollution and toxic emissions** could increase respiratory illness and cardiovascular disease, particularly among our Aboriginal families who already face higher health risks.
- **Water contamination** from runoff or leachate could threaten local catchments, tank water, and ecosystems.
- **Soil degradation** could harm native plants and animals that are central to Wiradjuri cultural practices and stories.
- **Noise, odour, and vermin** will negatively affect quality of life and mental wellbeing.

Recommendations:

- Commission an **independent environmental and health impact assessment** that includes Wiradjuri participation.
- Implement **baseline air, water, and soil testing**, with ongoing community access to data.
- Fund **local Aboriginal health and wellbeing programs** to mitigate potential community impacts.

Key Questions:

- How will the project monitor and report emissions and waste outputs transparently?
- What emergency response measures exist for contamination events or system failures?
- How will Aboriginal health services and other health services be supported to address potential increases in pollution-related illness?

5. Economic and Equity Concerns

This project raises serious **equity and justice concerns**. Regional communities like our home of Parkes should not bear the environmental and social burden of Sydney's waste. Similar facilities have been **banned in metropolitan areas**, yet rural and our Aboriginal communities are expected to accept the risks.

Concerns:

- Regional areas are being **used as dumping grounds** without fair protection or benefit.
- Local farms, soil health, and tourism could be impacted, reducing economic opportunities.
- There is **no clear evidence of long-term local employment benefits**, particularly for Aboriginal people.

Recommendations:

- Conduct a **Regional Equity and Justice Review** to compare protections offered to metropolitan vs rural areas.
- Guarantee **Aboriginal employment, training, and procurement opportunities** if any future waste projects proceed.
- Explore **alternative waste management strategies** that prioritise recycling, education, and local innovation.

Key Questions:

- Why are rural communities being exposed to projects banned elsewhere for health reasons?
- How will Aboriginal employment and participation be guaranteed and monitored?
- What compensation or support will be offered to affected landholders and businesses?

6. Cultural, Social, and Emotional Impact

The proposal has already caused **distress, confusion, and division** in the Aboriginal community. Many Aboriginal people feel **ignored, unsafe, and unheard**.

For Wiradjuri people, this is not only an environmental issue — it is **spiritual and emotional**. The thought of an incinerator operating on Country brings **grief, anxiety, and fear** for what it means for our ancestors before us, our people, our children, our elders and our cultural future.

Recommendations:

- Provide access to **community healing and wellbeing programs** to address emotional distress caused by the proposal.
- Include **Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing assessments** in all project reviews.
- Ensure **ongoing communication and respect** with community Elders and leaders.

Key Questions:

- What mental health and wellbeing supports are being provided to affected communities?
- How will cultural healing and spiritual impacts be acknowledged or addressed in the project's decision-making process?

7. PACWP Advocacy and Commitment

The **Parkes Aboriginal Community Working Party** continues to advocate for **social justice, social inclusion, education, housing, and cultural improvement** in the Parkes region.

We work to **strengthen community pride, protect culture, and empower our youth** to live strong and healthy lives connected to this Country.

This proposal threatens everything we stand for — the safety of our land, the wellbeing of our people, and the preservation of our culture for future generations.

We call on the **NSW Government, Parkes Shire Council, and the Parkes Energy Recovery Project** to:

- **Halt the proposed development immediately.**
- **Engage directly and respectfully** with Wiradjuri Traditional Custodians and Aboriginal community leaders and representatives.
- **Explore sustainable, culturally safe, and environmentally responsible alternatives** to waste management.

Conclusion

Our message is clear:

- **Wiradjuri Country is living Country.**
  It deserves to be respected, protected, and cared for — not used as a dumping ground.

- We, the members of the **Parkes Aboriginal Community Working Party**, stand united in opposition to the proposed Parkes Waste (Energy Recovery) Facility and call for genuine partnership, cultural respect, and environmental responsibility in all future decisions affecting the Parkes Shire, our Country, water, and our people.
- **On behalf of the Parkes Aboriginal Community Working Party members (PACWP)**
  Michael James
  Chairperson – Proud Wiradjuri Man, Living on Country
  Parkes, NSW