Submission No 184

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

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

Submitted by: Mrs Juanita Coleman
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Introduction

I am a Wiradjuri woman, born and raised in Condobolin, and a proud member of the local community. I am a Drug and Alcohol worker, and I also serve as a Councillor for Lachlan Shire Council.

I make this submission to oppose the proposed Parkes Energy from Waste (EfW) facility. This project raises serious concerns for the health and wellbeing of our communities across the Parkes and Lachlan communities, the protection of Country, and the fairness of planning decisions that disproportionately impact regional communities.

While I recognise the importance of managing waste responsibly, I do not believe that burning waste is consistent with environmental sustainability, community safety, or cultural respect.

Health and Environmental Impacts

A systematic review by *Hamidinasab and Nabavi-Pelesaraei* (2025) found that incineration technologies contribute significant environmental burdens, including greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, and toxic residue, often performing worse than alternative waste management methods when assessed through life cycle analysis. These findings reinforce the need for cautious consideration of incineration projects and stronger investment in waste reduction, reuse, and recycling initiatives as safer and more sustainable approaches.

The proposed Parkes EfW project poses threats to human health and the environment, especially in our rural communities that rely on local water supplies, agriculture, and rainwater gathering. The World Health Organisation, in a report, *Dioxins and their effects on human health, 2023*, detailed that emissions from a plant such as an EfW can produce heavy metals and pollutants like dioxins, which can settle on rooftops, soils, and open water storages, contaminating drinking water, soil, and the food chain.

It's important to note that our communities depend on rainwater tanks, groundwater, and drinking water from the Lachlan river, where the potential for contamination is heightened, especially through the handling of ash and waste residues. These impacts directly conflict with the precautionary principle and the objectives of the *NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979,* which require decisions to prevent harm to human health and the environment where there is reasonable risk or uncertainty. The project should not proceed unless it can be clearly demonstrated through independent assessment and continuous monitoring that emissions will not compromise air, soil, or water quality in surrounding communities.

Regional Planning and Fairness

Regional NSW should not be used as a dumping ground for the waste of Greater Sydney. Communities like Parkes and Condobolin already face challenges in access to healthcare, population decline, lower life expectancy, poorer health outcomes and workforce shortages.

The proposal to transport metropolitan waste hundreds of kilometres into regional areas reflects poor planning and a lack of fairness where these challenges will be exacerbated should this project progresses. It ignores the principle that regional and remote communities deserve protection, not exploitation.

Impact on Workforce Attraction and Local Health Services

Parkes and Lachlan Shires already face significant challenges attracting and retaining skilled professionals, particularly in health, education, and community services.

The introduction of an EfW facility will further discourage skilled workers and families from relocating to the region due to serious concerns about air quality, environmental safety, and overall liveability. The perception of increased pollution or industrial activity can significantly impact the region's attractiveness, limiting the ability to attract and retain a skilled workforce that is vital for local economic growth and service delivery.

The regional health system is already under resourced, characterised by workforce shortages, extended wait times, and persistent challenges in attracting and retaining medical, nursing, and allied health professionals. Any development that contributes to increased illness, and psychological distress, without adequate investment in health infrastructure would exacerbate the existing pressures on rural health services and compromise community wellbeing.

This has direct social and economic consequences for community wellbeing, continuity of care, and workforce stability.

Aboriginal Cultural and Environmental Impacts

Wiradjuri people have lived on this land since millennia, in harmony with its rivers, soils, and ecosystems. Our relationship to Country is not symbolic, it is living, enduring, and sacred.

Placing an industrial waste facility on Wiradjuri land demonstrates a profound lack of respect for this connection and a disregard for the cultural, spiritual, and environmental values that define who we are as Wiradjuri people.

There has been inadequate consultation with Wiradjuri communities, Elders, and Traditional Owners throughout the planning and assessment process. This approach directly contradicts Closing the Gap Priority Reform One, which commits governments to shared decision-making and genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The proposal continues a long pattern of environmental injustice, where decisions made for our communities impose harm and disadvantage upon our lands and community. For generations, Aboriginal Country has borne the burden of industrial and environmental impacts justified in the name of "progress." The Parkes EfW project risks becoming another example of this ongoing disregard for Country and for the rights of Aboriginal people to protect it.

True progress must start with respect for Country, listening to community voices, and ensuring that Aboriginal knowledge and values are central to every decision that affects our lands and waterways.

Alternative Waste Management Solutions

There are better ways to manage waste that align with environmental, cultural, and regional priorities:

- expand and invest in local recycling, re-use, and composting infrastructure across regional NSW. These systems keep waste management close to its source, reduce transport emissions, and create local employment opportunities.
- community education and behaviour change programs play a crucial role in reducing waste at the source. Supporting households, schools, and businesses to separate materials correctly, repair goods, and reduce consumption helps to build long-term environmental responsibility

- establishment of regional circular economy hubs offers a practical, future-focused alternative to waste incineration. These hubs would allow materials to be recovered, repurposed, or remanufactured locally, keeping both economic and environmental benefits within the community

These solutions create sustainable jobs, protect Country, and reflect our collective responsibility to future generations.

Energy from Waste is not a sustainable or just solution. It threatens the health of our people, the integrity of our Country, and the fairness owed to regional and Aboriginal communities.

For the wellbeing of our future generations and the protection of Wiradjuri Country, I ask that the Parkes EfW proposal is stopped.