Submission No 203

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

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Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Proposed Energy-from-Waste (EfW) Facility in Parkes

Dear Committee Members,

My family has lived in the Parkes district for more than 120 years. My great-grandparents settled here over a century ago and lived in the exact vicinity of the proposed EfW site. I have lived in the Parkes Shire for more than forty years. Our roots run deep in this land, and our connection to it is part of who we are.

I know this land, the people, and the values that make our Central West communities special. It is deeply upsetting to think that an incinerator could be built so close to where my family heritage lies. I strongly oppose the proposed Energy-from-Waste (EfW) facility in Parkes and address some of the Terms of Reference below.

Lessons from the Past: Bogan Gate Incinerator Proposal

I clearly remember back in 1991, a hazardous waste, high-temperature incinerator was proposed by the NSW Government. They searched for a central place to burn waste and landed on Bogan Gate, a town within the Parkes Shire. The opposition to it by the local and regional communities was strong - and rightly so -because they knew that the risks of air pollution and contamination of soil and water were too great. It was chosen because the community was small and expendable, and it was Commonwealth-owned land.

The same concerns exist today, regardless of how the project is rebranded or how much "modern technology" it promises. The proponents claim that today's facilities are cleaner and safer, but the truth is that no system can guarantee 100% safety. Even a small malfunction or emission breach could have devastating consequences for our region's health and environment.

A False "Circular Economy" (1a)
Parkes Energy Recovery markets the Parkes EfW as a 'state- of-the- art facility' and as part

of a so-called circular economy. But to me, it seems anything but circular. Burning waste to create energy still leaves behind large volumes of toxic residue - it is not recycling; it is just changing the form of the waste. The process still ends with the proponents disposing of the pollution and leftover material somewhere.

One of my major concerns is the disposal of the toxic bottom ash that remains after the burning process. Proponents often claim it can be the ash ‘could be’ used as road base, but can they guarantee where it will go? If not, where and who is responsible for where this hazardous material ends up. If the argument is that Sydney is running out of landfill space by 2030, will new holes in the ground - just like our current rubbish tips - have to be built to bury this bottom ash in regional areas like ours?

Imagine what will remain after burning 600,000 tonnes of residual waste every year for 20 to 40 years. That is an enormous amount of toxic ash and emissions to manage. Even countries like Sweden, often touted as world leaders in waste management, have struggled to deal with the vast quantities of bottom ash produced by their incinerators. Sweden now ships large volumes of its incinerator ash to the island of Langøya, a former limestone quarry turned toxic waste site, because the residue is too hazardous for mainland disposal.

During the Parkes Energy Recovery Community Q&A Session (July 2025), questions about the handling and destination of bottom ash were raised repeatedly. The responses offered little clarity beyond general statements about “potential re-use” in construction materials. There was no firm from the proponents on how the ash would be safely contained or where it would go if re-use proved unsuitable. Linking this uncertainty with Sweden’s experience shows that even with the best intentions, ash management remains a critical and unresolved problem - and placing that burden on a farming region like Parkes would be both risky and irresponsible.

Unacceptable Risks to Farmland and Food Security (1c)
As someone who has worked as a farmer in this region for most of my life, I am deeply concerned about the impact on agriculture and farmers’ livelihoods. This region is renowned for producing premium-quality grain, meat, and wool in Australia. The possibility of airborne pollutants settling on crops, pasture, and waterways poses unacceptable risks to both the quality and reputation of our produce.

The World Health Organization confirms that dioxins from incineration accumulate in the food chain, mainly in the fatty tissue of animals, with human exposure occurring primarily through food such as meat, dairy, and fish. The European Food Safety Authority has also identified dioxins and PCBs in food as a continuing public-health concern due to their persistence and toxicity.

Once contamination enters the food chain, it can take decades to remediate - and even the perception of contamination can harm export markets and devastate local economies built on clean, trusted produce.

Health and Environmental Concerns (1c)
A 2019 systematic review of global incinerator studies found evidence of increased health risks in nearby populations - including cancers, congenital anomalies, and respiratory illness. Even if emissions are lower than older plants, the review concluded that uncertainties remain and that governments should apply the precautionary principle when siting such facilities, particularly near agricultural regions and population centres.

The NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) itself acknowledges that EfW residues must be safely and lawfully managed, recognising the risks of toxic ash and leachate if not properly contained. Our region - with its strong agricultural base and clean environment — is simply the wrong place to test those assurances.

Parkes as a Test Case - and Why That's Wrong
There are currently no operational Energy-from-Waste plants in NSW or anywhere in Australia located within major farming communities. Existing or approved facilities - such as those in Kwinana and East Rockingham (WA) - are all located in industrial zones, not next to farmlands.

If the Parkes proposal proceeds, it would be the first of its kind in a food-producing area in Australia. That means our community would effectively become a testing ground for Sydney's waste problems - a shameful and unjust precedent that treats regional people as expendable.

Community Trust and Regional Wellbeing
Communities like ours have been told too many times that big projects will bring "jobs and growth," yet it is often locals who bear the environmental and health costs while the profits go elsewhere. The wellbeing of country people - our families, children, and grandchildren - should never be traded off for an unproven industrial experiment.

The Central West is known for its clean air, open landscapes, and agricultural excellence. Building a facility that burns waste, no matter how advanced the filters, runs counter to the very values that make this region worth living in.

Conclusion
Once pollution enters our air and soil, there is no turning back. This project risks the future of our farmland, food production, community health, and rural identity - all for a project that simply shifts Sydney's waste burden onto regional NSW.
I urge the Committee to listen to the people who live here, who work the land, and who will bear the consequences. Please reject this proposal outright.

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