Submission No 229

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

Organisation: The Vintner's Daughter Winery

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Submission to the Inquiry into Proposed Energy from Waste Facilities

From: The Vintner's Daughter Winery,

The Vintner's Daughter Winery is a family-owned and operated business located in Murrumbateman, within the heart of the Canberra District Wine Region. Our winery, like many others in this area, is a small-scale producer dedicated to crafting ultra-premium, boutique wines that are recognised nationally and internationally for their quality.

We, like most in this region, are an Australian regional business built on quality, sustainability, and direct connection with consumers. Unlike large commercial wineries, producers in our region are not focused on quantity or bulk export but on premium domestic markets, cellar-door sales, and agritourism experiences. Our visitors come to enjoy high-quality wine, local food, and the pristine rural environment that defines this area.

The proposed Tarago Energy from Waste facility poses a profound threat to every element of that business model—from vineyard production and winemaking to tourism visitation and the regional reputation that sustains it. The Canberra District has earned a world-renowned reputation for excellence, and any risk to the purity of our environment or the perception of that purity would irreparably damage the region.

To put it plainly, the idea of placing an industrial waste incinerator near a fine wine region of this calibre is unthinkable. Could anyone imagine placing such a facility near Bordeaux in France—one of the world's most celebrated wine regions? The Canberra District deserves the same respect and protection.

2. Impacts on the Canberra District wine region

The Canberra District wine region is recognised nationally and internationally for producing exceptional cool-climate wines. It is a region built on quality, not quantity. Because our wines are boutique and ultra-premium, we command higher price points and rely on reputation and consistency of quality rather than volume.

The industry's sensitivity to air pollution is well documented. During the 2019–2020 bushfires, smoke from fires over 150 kilometres away destroyed the entire regional vintage. Most vineyards were forced to dispose of their crop, losing a full year's income, with no significant government support. That event demonstrated the devastating effect of airborne contamination on grapes—an effect that would be replicated by continuous exposure to industrial emissions.

The Tarago facility's own modelling shows emission plumes that could reach key Canberra District subregions, including Lake George and Murrumbateman. The potential for fine particulate matter and chemical residues to drift across vineyards is alarming. Once tainted, grapes cannot be salvaged. Even minor contamination can alter fermentation, compromise sensory quality, and destroy consumer confidence.

Between 2003 and 2015, Australian wine producers suffered over $400 million in losses from smoke taint. The 2020 season added billions more. Given that the Canberra District's

entire economy is tied to its reputation for purity and excellence, the risk posed by the Tarago facility is unacceptable.

Report from Australian Wine Research Institute

When the facility was first proposed, the Canberra District Viticultural Society sought expert advice from the Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI) on the potential impacts to the wine region. The AWRI's report, which was shared with all Society members, was damning and left no doubt about the serious risks posed to the Canberra District wine industry. Key points include:

- Burning mixed household waste releases a range of chemicals — including chlorophenols (CPs), bromophenols (BPs) and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). These are known to cause strong "taint" flavours and odours in food and wine, even at extremely low concentrations (thousands of times below human health limits).

- The AWRI found that, based on Veolia's own data, t**he Tarago facility could emit enough chlorophenols each year to taint every bottle of wine produced in Australia during the 2021–22 season** — more than double the amount required to do so.

- Prevailing easterly winds, especially during calm summer nights when grapes are ripening, would likely carry emissions directly over the Canberra Wine District. These are the very conditions when air pollution disperses the least.

- The danger is not just immediate. Many of these compounds settle into soil, where they can accumulate over time. In warm summer months, they can re-volatilise (evaporate back into the air), creating new pulses of airborne contamination during the critical ripening season.

- Once in the soil, compounds like 2,4,6-trichlorophenol (TCP) can undergo biotransformation—chemical changes caused by soil microbes—into 2,4,6-trichloroanisole (TCA), one of the most potent taint compounds known to wine producers (it's the same compound responsible for "cork taint").

- A similar process can occur with bromophenols, leading to 2,4,6-tribromoanisole (TBA)—another powerful taint compound. Both TCA and TBA can later evaporate from soil into the air, contaminating grapes and wines even months after the original emissions occurred.

- The AWRI concludes that, given these risks of chemical accumulation, transformation, and re-volatilisation—and the region's wind and weather patterns—it would be inadvisable to locate the Tarago incinerator near a premium wine-growing area. An alternative site should be sought.

3. Impacts on Regional Tourism and the Rural Economy

The Canberra Wine District is one of the pillars of regional tourism in southern NSW, drawing thousands of visitors each year to experience its cellar doors, food experiences, and rural charm. The wineries are the anchor attraction supporting a thriving ecosystem of artisan producers, accommodation providers, restaurants, farm shops, and local makers.

Most of these businesses are family-run and employ local residents for both retail and production work. Together, they sustain the region's rural towns and underpin the Yass Valley's visitor economy.

Visitors come here to escape the city—to breathe clean air, see open landscapes, and enjoy fine food and wine in an unspoiled environment. The installation of an industrial incinerator would fundamentally undermine that experience. Even the perception of pollution or environmental risk would be enough to deter tourists and damage the regional brand. Once lost, tourism confidence is almost impossible to rebuild.

4. Impacts on Domestic and Export Markets

It is deeply concerning that a facility of this nature—banned within the Sydney Basin—is being proposed for a predominantly agricultural area. The Yass Valley and Goulburn regions produce clean, high-quality food and wine for domestic and export markets.

Australia's reputation for producing clean, green, and safe agricultural products is central to our international trade success. A single incident of contamination—or even the perception of it—could close export markets overnight. It is very difficult to confidently predict the effects of accumulation into the food system over time and whether this will be low enough to meet importing country's chemical residue limitations (both current and future requirements)—the European market is particularly strict on this with little to no chemical residues permitted in imported produce. Furthermore, one mishap or accident at the incinerator which results in fluid leakage or higher than expected air pollution could cause the loss of export markets and wipe out entire local agricultural industries, not to mention the effects on human health.

Many Canberra District wineries sell directly to consumers rather than through export or wholesale channels, but in those cases their success and reputation depends on the broader image of the region and our standing in the domestic premium market. Residue accumulation, however minimal, in rainwater, soil, or crops would threaten both production and public confidence. The facility's proponents have not adequately demonstrated that long-term accumulation of emissions in agricultural environments will remain within safe limits or that the potential for volatilisation of compounds held in agricultural soil will not occur in later hotter months, refer AWRI report attached.

5. Impacts on Residents, Water and Food Security

Most rural households in this region, including our own family and our employees, rely entirely on rainwater for drinking water and on creek, bore or dam water for stock and irrigation. There is no central water treatment system for most residents or businesses. Pollutants settling on roofs would wash directly into tanks, gradually accumulating in household water supplies.

Rural residents also depend on their land for food security—growing vegetables, collecting eggs, keeping goats, or raising and butchering their own meat. Veolia's modelling has not accounted for this key difference between metropolitan and rural households when evaluating potential health impacts. The potential for long-term exposure and accumulation of pollutants through self-sufficiency activities in our food chain is a serious public health concern.

Without robust, independent air and water monitoring, residents would have no means of knowing whether their food and water remain safe. It is unacceptable that rural communities should be expected to carry such risk for a project that primarily benefits urban waste producers.

6. Broader Considerations

The proposal contradicts the NSW Government's stated goals of supporting sustainable regional economies, promoting agritourism, and protecting agricultural land. For decades, small family businesses have invested heavily in creating a vibrant, environmentally responsible rural economy in this region. This proposal jeopardises that achievement for an unproven industrial experiment.

Modern waste management should prioritise reduction, recycling, and circular economy approaches, not exporting Sydney's waste burden to regional communities.

Conclusion

For the reasons outlined above, *The Vintner's Daughter Winery* urges the Committee to reject the proposed Tarago Energy from Waste facility.

The Canberra District Wine Region represents one of NSW's greatest regional success stories—built on premium agriculture, tourism, and family enterprise. The risks to human health, agriculture, and the broader rural economy are far too great.

To site an industrial waste facility adjacent to one of Australia's most respected boutique wine regions would be unthinkable anywhere else in the world. Our government should show the same respect for Australian wine regions as is shown for those in France, Italy, or New Zealand.

In matters of human health, agriculture, and reputation, uncertainty is a risk too great to take.

The Vintner's Daughter winery

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