**Submission No 275**

# INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

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Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Energy from Waste Incinerators

I'm a resident of Parkes NSW.

My husband, Geoff, and I run Buckwheat Enterprises Pty Ltd which supplies flour to bakeries nationwide, and we run superfine wool merino sheep on a 150ha farm 20kms east of Parkes. Buckwheat Enterprises Pty Ltd has submitted to the Inquiry for the Terms of Reference: (e) Impacts on Agriculture, (h) Methodology of Emission Monitoring, and (j) Any other related matters.

This is my personal submission to the Inquiry for the Terms of Reference:

(i) Alternative solutions to reduce and manage residual waste produced by Greater Sydney, and
(j) Any other related matters.

## (i) Alternative solutions to reduce and manage residual waste produced by Greater Sydney.

### 1 Business and industry are developing and implementing products and systems, to reduce waste going to landfill

#### (i) 1.1 Adelaide Fringe Festival

https://adelaidefringe.com.au/sustainability#sustainability-action-plan (1)

The Adelaide Fringe Festival in April 2025 had 2 bin types available – Composting or Recycling. Landfill bins were available in the public toilets.

Every vendor supplying food and drink did so in compostable or recyclable packaging and the entire festival was aimed at stopping waste going to landfill.

If the Adelaide Fringe Festival can hold a "no waste to landfill" event, so can any festival in the Greater Sydney region, or any festival in Australia.

#### (i) 1.2 Soft Plastics Taskforce

https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2025-09-12/soft-plastics-recycling-woolworths-coles-aldi-trial/105756840 (2)

The excerpts below (from the ABC news article link above, dated 12th Sept '25) highlight the efforts being made to reduce soft plastic going to landfill, and the **need for government mandates to implement recycled material content standards**, and to **legislate the Soft Plastics Stewardship Australia's (SPSA) soft plastic levy scheme on supermarkets and plastics producers**:

*500 Woolworths, Coles and Aldi stores in NSW and Victoria are now accepting soft plastics from local shoppers.*

*This is an initiative of the Soft Plastics Taskforce, which was established by the three supermarket chains after REDCycle's collapse.*

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*A spokesperson for the supermarket members of the taskforce said that the trial is due to expand to parts of south-east Queensland, the ACT, and Adelaide in the next 12 months.*

*"There is simply not enough soft plastic recycling capacity in Australia to support full, nationwide collections, so it's important not to exceed limited local recycling capacity."*

*The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission recently proposed to authorise a product stewardship scheme to manage soft plastics recycling.*

*This voluntary scheme, which will be run by Soft Plastics Stewardship Australia (SPSA), will collect levies from supermarkets and other plastic producers.*

*REDcycle left behind an 11,000-tonne stockpile of soft plastics, which the taskforce has now reduced down to 3,500 tonnes. (ABC News: Margaret Paul)*

*Barry Cosier, co-CEO of SPSA, said the levies would go towards funding parts of the plastic recycling chain which needed more attention. "We're almost like a dating service for the supply chain," Mr Cosier said.*

*Separate to the taskforce,* ***SPSA is also running kerbside recycling trials*** *in nine councils in SA, Victoria and NSW.* ***Residents in these councils can register to join pilot programs where soft plastics can be bunched together and put in their recycling bins.***

*Some other councils around Australia have set up their own schemes independently. You can check your local council's website, or call them, to find out what's possible in your area.*

*Once collected, the soft plastics are shipped to local third-party sorters and recyclers. For now, they're mostly being converted mechanically, via shredding, grinding or melting, into lower-grade plastics for use in things like road asphalt and park benches.*

*It's possible to convert soft plastics back into new soft plastics. This relies on chemical reactions to break the plastic molecules into their component parts. But this method, known as chemical recycling, is complicated to do.*
*"It's a really long supply chain, but that's the only way you can get packaging back into food grade packaging," Mr Cosier said.*

*He said the lack of "end markets" for recycled content is one factor limiting soft plastic recycling at the moment: there's low demand for materials made from recycled plastics. It's cheaper to make new plastics from petrochemicals than it is to use recycled material, particularly for food and medicine packaging.*

*A new large-scale recycling facility at Taree has already processed thousands of tonnes of soft plastic left over from the collapse of REDcycle.*

***Mr Cosier said "government-enforced standards for including recycled material in products would help to increase demand for recycled materials".***

***Anya Phelan, a researcher in innovation at Griffith University, said that mandatory recycled content standards were crucial for ramping up plastic recycling.***

*"If producers and manufacturers can just use any type of packaging they want, then we're back to square one," she said.*

***Widening soft plastic regulation, Dr Phelan believed the new levy scheme spearheaded by SPSA was promising but should be mandated.***

*Voluntary schemes, she said, ran the risk of free-riders — businesses reaping the benefits of improved recycling without having to pay levies — and patchy coverage across Australia.*

*"At the moment, everything is very metro-centric and it's not fair to other regions that don't have* recycling," *Dr Phelan said.*

*Since REDcycle's collapse, large-scale soft plastic recycling has been on hold in Australia. (ABC) Mr Cosier said companies which had already signed on to the scheme accounted for about 15 per cent of the soft plastics in the Australian market.*

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*While he wanted other companies to join the scheme, he said that legislation to regulate it could take a long time. "Better we get started, but ultimately it would certainly accelerate action if the scheme was mandated," Mr Cosier said.*

***Simran Talwar, a researcher in the circular economy at University of Technology Sydney, said that the scheme was an important step forward, and mandating it would help to deal with plastics at the end of their life.***

*But this isn't the only problem, according to Dr Talwar. "While soft plastic is highly recyclable, that doesn't necessarily justify its use when there's no form or functionality that it delivers," she said. "There is no regulation around where and when these materials need to be used. That is a big part of the problem."*

*Reusing glass and plastic instead of recycling it used to be common. Could it be part of the solution to Australia's waste problem?*

***A better recycling system, according to Dr Phelan**, would have **Australia-wide coverage**, more transparency for consumers, and ways to penalise plastic producers that don't meet recycling targets. Dr Talwar said that the best regulations take in a **material's whole life cycle, pushing for better design and minimised production, as well as dealing with waste.** "When we think about circularity, it is often what can we do with the material that's already there, and what are the best end uses for that material."*

*Dr Talwar said there wasn't a "one-stop solution" to the soft plastic problem. "We definitely do need to address the issue around production, but at the moment, I think the immediate opportunity is around how we use those materials and how best we can recover them at the end of life."*

**(i) 1.3 NSW facility takes on large-scale recycling of Australian household soft plastics**

https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-08-28/large-scale-recycling-household-soft-plastics-new-taree-facility/105699588?utm_source=abc_news_web&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_campaign=abc_news_web (3)

Excerpts below (from link above dated 28/8/25) detail soft plastic recycling at Kundle Kundle, the only facility of its type in the Southern Hemisphere, yet Sydney's red bin rubbish – FOGO, soft plastic, general household waste is still going to landfill. Is this a local council problem, no FOGO collection and composting, no soft plastic collection and recycling, no attempt to reduce landfill? Their solution – incinerate their waste in someone else's council.

*A new large-scale **soft plastics recycling facility** will be able to prepare waste plastic packaging to be **turned back into rigid plastics or food grade soft plastics**. It has capacity to process nearly double the amount being collected by the REDcycle program before its collapse in 2022.*

***The company hopes $9.1 million in state and federal government funding will help increase the facility's processing capability.***

*The new Soft Plastic Processed Engineered Commodity (SPEC) facility on the New South Wales Mid North Coast can turn up to 14,000 tonnes a year of household soft plastics into pellets and flakes, which can then be used to create new plastic products. The plant has been processing tens of thousands of tonnes of plastic waste left over from the collapse of REDcycle.*

***The plant will process soft plastics from in-store collection points once they are reintroduced at supermarkets across the country, as well as through council bin collection programs.***

*"This facility has processed all of the REDcycle material that was in NSW, Queensland and Western Australia," Mr Gallagher said. iQRenew chief executive Danny Gallagher, whose company owns the plant, said it had allowed the centre to test its capacity.*

***Mr Gallagher said the plant could sort one type of soft plastic from another, which was previously the "missing piece" in soft plastics recycling**. "What we've been able to design is equipment that separates the bread bag from the chip wrapper, so those two products can go on to be recycled in new, different products," Mr Gallagher said.*

***"This is the only facility of its type in the Southern Hemisphere that's able to sort household soft plastics."***

*However, Mr Gallagher said the facility's success would depend on whether there was enough supply of soft plastics and users of the recycled product. **"Building this piece of infrastructure is half the solution, the other half is the***

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***community reaching out to their councillors [and stakeholders] saying, 'We want you to buy products that contain recycled content,'" he said. End product uptake is a key priority of Soft Plastics Stewardship Australia (SPSA), a not-for-profit organisation made up of 45 major brands and retailers with the goal of increasing soft plastics recycling.***

*"This is the chicken and egg scenario, so to up the recycling rate,* ***we now have the recycler, but they need people to buy their material****," said SPSA co-CEO Barry Cosier.*
*One of the facility's capabilities is preparing old plastic packaging for a more advanced type of chemical recycling, called* ***hydrothermal liquefaction****,* ***which involves converting plastic back into oil. The oil product can then be turned back into food-grade soft plastics.*** *It is being trialled by Licella at Somersby, on the NSW Central Coast, with the aim of launching a full-scale plastic recycling facility in Victoria from next year.* ***"This facility essentially enables us to sort and deconstruct household soft plastics ... and we can then provide that feedstock to companies like Licella," Mr Gallagher said.***

***"In the near future, we are hopeful that, here in Australia, a bread bag sorted here at this facility, processed through chemical recycling, can become another bread bag. That's true circularity."***

*The* ***NSW Environment Protection Authority said the SPEC facility was a good step towards addressing the 890,000 tonnes of plastic waste produced by the state each year****, only 14 per cent of which was recycled.*

***"We're running out of landfill capacity in Greater Sydney by 2030,"*** *NSW EPA executive director programs and innovation Alexandra Geddes said.* ***"The more that we can do to maintain and promote a circular economy, keep things in use longer, [that] really is the most important thing."***

**(i) 1.4 You've already stopped using plastic straws**

https://edition.cnn.com/health/reduce-plastic-waste-wellness-hnk-spc (4)

Another way to reduce plastic going to landfill, is to reduce the use of single use plastic.

This article gives ideas of how to reduce single use plastic by **Plastic Free July campaign founder, Australian Rebecca Prince-Ruiz**:

*reusable tote bags, water bottles and straws*
*reusable cups, plates, bowls and decorative items for parties*
*reusable fabric wraps for presents (once common in Japan)*
*avoid using glitter as small items are difficult to recycle*
*reusable menstrual products*
*taking homemade food to school or work in reusable containers, instead of packaged meals*

*A study Rebecca did find that the installation of microwaves on RMIT's campus enabled people to eat food they brought in from home.*

*She believes that* ***cultural change around plastic use is needed****, instead of putting the onus on individual consumers.*

*Going totally plastic free today isn't possible, says Prince-Ruiz, but that's not the point.*

*"It's about* ***lots of people making small changes that add up to make a difference and create cultural change****, which then puts pressure on* ***business and government****," she says, "rather than just a few zero wasters being perfect."*

**(i) 1.5 FOGO**

Parkes Shire Council has been collecting FOGO (Food Organics Garden Organics) in kerbside bins for several years for composting at Orange.

Sydney and Canberra are trailing FOGO in small areas.

FOGO composting by councils is a way to repurpose waste into the value-added product compost and reduces landfill.

**(i) 1.6 Packaging made from leftover cooking oil**

https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-09-22/chip-packet-oil-recycling-snackbrands-australia-viva-energy/105788230 (5)

Excerpts below are from the above link:

*Snackbrands Australia has finished a trial **using recycled oil to make plastic packaging**. Snackbrands Australia, which produces a range of chips including Thins, CCs and Cheezles, has finished the first stage of its trial at Viva Energy's Geelong refinery.*

*The refinery normally produces soft plastics using fossil fuels but, at the start of this year, it trialled replacing crude oil with used cooking oil, importing about 120 tonnes from Snackbrands Australia's Sydney facility which was transformed into millions of packets.*

*It is a first for Australia, with the new packaging set to appear in stores next year.*

*Viva Energy's refinery in Geelong produces about 80,000 tonnes of soft plastic each year. Viva Energy Australia's sales and commercial manager James Harrington said the company was looking to expand the initiative but needed more support. **"We are looking at other opportunities to offer bio-circular plastic**. There is a lot of used cooking oil that's collected in Victoria that can be used for the same application," he said. **"It takes investment, collection, legislation and support from the government around mandated content for recycling targets."***

***Mr Harrington said recycling the packaging made with cooking oil remained a challenge as, currently, it could only be disposed of in landfill. Plastic pyrolysis was one of the solutions he suggested to avoid landfill.***

***"We're looking to develop a way to dispose of it in a bag in normal recycling or take it back to a store,"** Mr Harrington said. He said the company was investigating the soft plastic's integrity and had so far not found it to have adverse effects on the environment.*

***Deakin University sustainability senior lecturer Trevor Thornton said creating a closed-loop system was necessary to reduce the volume of waste going to landfill and its associated greenhouse gas emissions.***

*Deakin University's Trevor Thornton says more attention should turn to **reducing the size of packaging**. (ABC News: James Oaten)*

*But he said it was **important that consumers knew how to correctly dispose of the recycled packaging**. "I'd be more concerned about the community putting these types of materials into recycling streams, thinking it's plastic and it can be recycled and therefore contaminating it," Dr Thornton said.*

*He said another focus should be on **reducing the amount of packaging to decrease the volume of recycling** that was needed.*

***"You go to buy something, chips or whatever, and <u>the packaging is twice the size of the actual content</u> because it looks like you're getting a lot of food," Dr Thornton said.***

***"So, we've got to look at all ways of trying to reduce the amount of packaging, regardless of what it's made of."***

## (i) 2 <u>Home Compostable + Council Compostable + Soft Plastic Recycling + FOGO = we need a National Awareness Program to reduce waste going to landfill</u>

Recycling soft plastic, composting FOGO and compostable plastic, and reducing, recycling and repurposing commercial and industrial waste will all help to reduce landfill.

However, understanding the different "plastics" and the definition of FOGO will require a National Awareness Program if each waste stream is to be collected and managed correctly, otherwise we could create another waste problem.

A nationwide awareness program is needed to reduce waste going to landfill and could include:

- easily understood descriptions of FOGO and compostable plastic (home and council)
- easily recognisable labelling/logos on packaging indicating the correct "end of use" handling

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- convenient and easily recognisable collection points, council footpath bins, household kerbside bins
- education on the importance of stopping FOGO and soft plastic going to landfill as the alternative is incineration, which nobody wants in their backyard
- emphasis on the importance of putting waste in the correct bin to avoid creating another waste problem
- education on the correct handling of kitchen waste and home compostable plastic for DIY composters/worm farmers
- education for industry and business to reduce commercial waste going to landfill, designated skip bins for composting, recycling and repurposing of commercial waste, businesses don't want incineration in their backyard either
- target all age groups/ethnicities/occupations/industries, this isn't someone else's problem, with everyone participating we make a difference
- emphasis on how ALL ways to reduce waste and landfill are important, every little bit helps - composting, recycling, repurposing, being more resource aware, being end of life aware, being a responsible consumer/business
- education for councils and their citizens on the importance of working together to manage their particular waste streams, manage waste locally, turn it into a resource for your community
- education on the importance of how we produce, use and manage our resources to reduce waste

The Australian government has legislated many changes for public health & safety including removing lead from petrol/paint, seat belts, minimum drinking age, responsible serving of alcohol, minimum blood alcohol levels for drivers, driving speed limits, health warnings on cigarette packets, smoking ages and locations. Government legislation that's improved citizen health and wellbeing.

Life Be In It , Slip, Slop, Slap, Seek, Slide, Grim Reaper, Give Up For Good , Yeah.....Nah, Stop, Revive, Survive and Don't be a Tosser! are examples of previous government awareness programs to improve the health and safety of our population and environment.

Government has already introduced mandates to reduce the volume of waste going to landfill or entering the environment including single use plastic bag bans in supermarkets in NSW, plastic straws banned in several states & territories, plastic takeaway food containers replaced with biodegradable containers, and the collection and recycling of bottles and cans. Drum Muster is an agricultural example of reducing landfill.

Australia has the highest per capita installation of roof top solar in the world, EV car sales are increasing, and recycling is 2nd nature to us now. Soft plastic collecting a few years ago was so successful it had to be stopped due to stockpiled soft plastic. We have improved processing capability now, but we need more demand for recycled plastic products and uses.

Australians are willing & ready to adopt new ideas and ways to improve the environment in which we live.

With a national awareness program, we can collect FOGO and soft plastic to save landfill space. With a national awareness program, we can reduce waste going to landfill from business and industry. And with a national awareness program we can all make a difference as no-one wants an incinerator in their backyard.

## (j) Any other related matters

### (j) 1 Energy for Parkes Special Activation Precinct (SAP)

Parkes NSW has a climate suited to solar and concentrated solar thermal energy production, both clean renewable sources of energy.

Parkes NSW would also be suitable for wind energy, as exhibited by the number of wind turbines north of Wellington, 100kms away and a similar type of landform.

The Parkes Clean Future Alliance's (PCFA) well attended information evening on 26th July '25 stated that the proposed Waste Incinerator for Parkes would produce a similar quantity of energy as the existing Parkes Solar Farm.

If a 2nd similar sized solar farm was built at Parkes, with concentrated solar thermal and/or wind turbines for baseload, we could generate the same amount of energy as the Waste Incinerator, without the risk of waste incineration.

We don't need to burn waste at Parkes NSW for energy generation, we have safer, cleaner and renewable alternatives to power new industry attracted to the SAP.

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### (j) 2 Burning Fossil Fuels – transporting Waste for Incineration

Australia is a signatory to the Paris Agreement and we're committed to lowering our greenhouse gas emissions.

Freighting 600,000mts or more, 500kms annually to Parkes will burn significant diesel fuel.

We'd be burning plastic and diesel to solve this waste problem, waste that could be composted, recycled or repurposed closer to its source.

### (j) 3 Parkes Shire Council – a progressive council

Parkes Shire Council has had a long-established vision for the inland port, and this vision for the crossroads of our nation has come to fruition with the development of the Inland Rail and the Parkes SAP.

Inland Rail will reduce Parkes' freight time to 12 hours to 80% of our Australian population, a huge achievement and the SAP will attract businesses for that reason alone.

The new Parkes Wastewater Treatment Plant has received national media attention and multiple awards, including the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Award. The council run Parkes Elvis Festival has also won numerous awards, is a consistent winner of NSW Tourism Awards and attracts tens of thousands of visitors to our Shire each year.

Please don't turn us into the plastic burning centre of NSW, detracting new business and families from relocating to the newly formed SAP.

## In Conclusion

This isn't about energy for the Parkes Special Activation Precinct (SAP).

It's about waste. And this isn't just a Greater Sydney waste problem; it's a worldwide waste problem.

Australia is a 1st world country with world class scientists, researchers, industry leaders and Members of Parliament, we should be part of the solution not part of the problem.

Industry and business are already transitioning towards reducing waste going to landfill, recycling is 2nd nature to us now, but we can do a lot more to save landfill space and the need for incineration.

**NSW Government and the Federal Government please ban EfW incinerators <u>everywhere</u> in NSW <u>and</u> Australia, and:**

- **implement government mandates on recycled material content standards**
- **legislate the Soft Plastics Stewardship Australia's (SPSA) soft plastic levy scheme on supermarkets and plastics producers and expand local soft plastic recycling**
- **assist with the implementation of FOGO collection and composting**
- **and educate with a nationwide awareness program on the importance of reducing, recycling and repurposing waste, or any other means of reducing waste going to landfill, as nobody wants a waste incinerator in their backyard.**

Greater Sydney doesn't want an EfW waste incinerator in its backyard and the residents of Parkes, Tarago, West Lithgow and the Richmond Valley don't want EfW incinerators in their backyard either. **Nobody wants an EfW waste incinerator in their backyard.**

**NSW Government and the Federal Government please ban EfW incinerators <u>everywhere</u> in NSW <u>and</u> Australia and implement nationwide strategies to reduce waste going to landfill, for the benefit of everyone and our environment.**

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this Inquiry.

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