Submission No 302

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

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This is a personal submission in opposition to the Energy from Waste Facilities in Regional Areas proposal, in which Sydney's waste is to be transported by road or rail to regional areas to be burnt.

The fact that this process is banned in all of NSW except for four regional areas is a reflection of the fact that the effects of burning waste are known to be deleterious.

This process would not be pollution-free, or it would have been planned for more highly-populated areas in Sydney, from which the waste would originate. This process would also not produce energy sufficient to compensate for the number of truck or train movements.

Country people are being treated contemptuously, as the repository for Sydney's waste. We should not be used as the dumping ground for something that has been rejected as unsafe for the city.

The Belubula River in NSW's Central West[1], and waterways in the Blue Mountains closer to Sydney[2], are already known to be contaminated with PFOS and PFAS, a forever chemical. The known health impacts of these are sufficiently concerning that fishers have been warned not to eat any fish they catch in areas of the Belubula River. Burning waste would increase PFAS contamination in these and other areas.

As a teacher and then university-based teacher educator my entire working life has been spent living in the Central West. I have both personal and professional perspectives on the effects of polluting regional environments.

After living and studying in Sydney, my first teaching appointment was in Central West NSW. I was happy to leave polluted Sydney, and never returned to Sydney to live. I have lived and worked in the Central West for over 40 years. My role for 20 years was teaching pre-service teachers and supervising them during their placements, which involved visits to schools all over the region.

I would not have stayed in the Central West had there been toxic industrial pollution such as that from the proposed incinerators. Schools are a vital part of the economies and social compact of small towns, and to keep children and teenagers in local schools it is vital that they be offered a quality education. With unacceptable pollution levels, it would not be possible to attract sufficient staff to the town. Teachers who have a choice will not accept appointments at such schools, and I have personal knowledge of teachers who have been forced to leave towns such as Broken Hill due to their children's blood lead levels. This phenomenon is likely to extend to other towns if the incinerators are approved.

The same choices apply to other professions. Many country towns have a shortage of doctors, and local GP surgeries struggle to find sufficient staff. Quality of life, which includes healthy air to breathe, is important for new workers coming to a country town.

A Bathurst podiatrist only today has written of the barriers to attracting young staff, including "limited support, professional isolation, and general inequalities in regional areas"[3]. These inequalities should not include pollution transported from the city.

Farming and agriculture workers, particularly those with generationally-held farms, would expect to stay in country towns, or to return there after study. However as land and crops are contaminated by plumes of pollution being blown over their farms, they may be forced to leave their land.

Parkes is a beautiful town with a tourism focus, and makes a large contribution to Australia's food needs. It is ridiculous that food safety be risked for waste incineration, which would incidentally also affect city-dwellers as the supply of edible foods was compromised. Parkes Agri Solar farm has the ability to supply 138,000 MWh of renewable energy per year[4], and there are further renewables planned for nearby Wellington, so energy from waste is not needed.

Tomago is close to major population centres, and also to productive wine-growing and tourism areas, which would suffer from the toxic pollution emitted from the proposed waste incinerators. I have family moving to this area, and breathing toxic air is not what I, or they, want for their future.

Lithgow has suffered from the pollution inherent to a coal-mining town with two power stations, and is aiming to transition into tourism with the Gardens of Stone and renewable energy such as the Wallerawang Battery Energy Storage System for its future employment and growth. Coal ash management has been a major problem for local residents, and it is beyond belief that toxic PFAS-containing ash from waste incinerators would be inflicted on them, with no plan for management of this ash. With prevailing winds blowing from the west, Sydney's drinking water will be contaminated by these toxins, as it already has been by fire-fighting foam [5].

Tarago is also close to major population centres including the ACT, and is an area with small acreage farms, and significant grazing lands. As it currently hosts renewable energy projects, further development of these would produce more power for NSW than would the incineration of waste.

The ACT has banned these incinerators from the ACT for health reasons, and enshrined the right to a healthy environment in ACT's Human Rights Act. Toxic plumes would blow over the nation's capital from the Tarago incinerators, negating these rights.

In all these areas, many residents use rainwater tanks to collect drinking water. As we have seen near mining sites, these tanks would then be contaminated with airborne residue including dioxins and furans, as well as PFAS.

Sydney residents, like those of us further west, need to switch to a circular economy, in which consumption is reduced, and "waste" is re-used or recycled as much as is

possible. Burning rubbish encourages waste, when what is needed are incentives to reduce consumption, and recycle any waste, for the sake of a liveable planet. The NSW government would be better advised to work towards developing a circular economy, with programs for replacing plastics with re-usable or compostable materials, particularly for packaging, and significantly reducing waste. Separation of organic waste for re-use as fertiliser must be more strongly encouraged.

Movement of toxic materials around the state by trains and trucks is problematic. Trains can leak, as can trucks, and the latter are prone to crash and/or overturn, with truck crashes occurring virtually every day on regional roads. This gives rise to further potential for widespread contamination of waterways, towns, and bush.

“Waste and Circular Infrastructure Plan” is a misnomer. A circular economy actively encourages re-use, not burning. Local councils are progressively committing to this.

Burning rubbish for disposal of waste is unnecessary as the circular economy grows.

Burning rubbish for energy is unnecessary, as renewable energy is expanding. Specifically, areas slated for incinerators already have developed plans for renewables.

This is a betrayal of regional NSW. It is also profoundly undemocratic, that we are asked to bear the burden of Sydney’s excesses. Site the waste where it has originated.

1. https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/Working-together/Community-engagement/updates/environmental-sampling-upper-belubula-region
2. https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/sydney-water-did-not-adequately-test-before-claiming-city-s-catchment-had-no-toxic-hotspots-20250911-p5mu72.html
3. https://parkessolarfarm.com.au/solar-farm/
4. https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=central%20west%20foot%20%26%20ankle%20clinic
5. https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/sydney-water-did-not-adequately-test-before-claiming-city-s-catchment-had-no-toxic-hotspots-20250911-p5mu72.html