Submission
No 344

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

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1 Introduction

My name is Tim O'Brien and I am a farmer from the Parkes District in NSW.

This farm has been in my family for 3 generations and we strive to produce quality grains, meat and wool- meeting whatever market requirement is necessary.

We endeavor to look after our land and surrounding environment to the best of our abilities, ensuring it is left in a sustainable, productive state for future generations.

Having researched the proposed EfW development proposed for Parkes I like so many others have a lot of concerns arising around it.

At a time when Governments are looking to reduce emissions, moving 600,000 tons of rubbish per annum over 500kms via rail per annum seems counter productive,

If there are benefits attached to this process, why are they being moved away from the people creating the waste?. Likewise if there are negative impacts attached to the process why are they being imposed on people living in regional areas?

The fact that plans to develop EfW in Western Sydney were abandoned due to the associated risks is a cause for concern for me. It is freighted out to a regional area only for it to be unloaded and incinerated on the outskirts of a major town. It is true that it is risk mitigation. There are less people, but those people are no less important thnt the people at the source.

We run our farming business aiming to control as many of the variables as we can. This project introduces a new level of risk that is beyond our control moving forward. The potential for contamination of our soil and water and in turn commodities exists and is a risk to our long term future in agriculture in this region.

2 TERMS of REFERENCE -B- Spread of Emissions

The waste to be burnt is essentially unsorted, whatever the public puts in a red bin will be incinerated. While hazardous materials shouldn't be in a red bin, it is proven they are as part of audits conducted and publicly available from authorities.

This will prove challenging in logistics as illustrated by the constant reports of waste trucks catching alight due to hazardous materials being incorrectly disposed of. Unfiltered, highly toxic particulate emissions would result from any leg of the massive logistics effort to transport the waste to 500kms by rail to Parkes. I also understand there will be a 2 week stockpile of feedstock on hard. I imagine the risk of ignition is quite high. The raw unfiltered emissions reigning down on a major township in such close proximity could prove quite problematic for all involved.

I understand the filtering and scrubbing process proposed is quite efficient at capturing the larger particulates however some of the fines- which are some of the most detrimental to human health do make it through.

The proponents love to talk in ng or mg per cubic meter, however there will be huge volumes of air pushed through the EfW facility every second. When dealing with large tonnages of feedstock over long periods even small amounts of persistent forever chemicals accumulate in the surrounding environment.

In an age where agriculture has access to real time monitoring in a header cab of yield, crop moisture and protein I don't think it is unreasonable to expect that a large scale EfW proposal in Parkes, valued at $1.5billion should have real time emissions monitoring imposed upon them with results fed to a publicly viewable online platform to provide residents transparency around what is being imposed on them.

<u>3, TERMS OF REFERENCE -D- Impacts on Human Health</u>

It has been proven incineration has a range of adverse health impacts on humans. Birth defects, cancer, respiratory and neurological conditions have all been proven to be linked to incineration. There are no long term studies on the claimed "new" technologies. While filtration and scrubbing may be improved no claim has ever been made particulate emissions wont exit the facilities so impacts related to long-term low level exposures would remain the same.

The fine particles emitted by the plants would travel great distances on the wind and slowly build in the environment over time.

There is no doubt in my mind emissions would make their way into rainwater tanks around the region, in a lot of cases rainwater is the only option for domestic water and ingestion leads to the most harmful outcomes in humans.

The close proximity (under 10kms) to Parkes means an entire township is potentially impacted by the negative health impacts associated with these emissions.

<u>4 TERMS OF REFERENCE -E- Impact on Agriculture</u>

As primary producer we are faced with a constantly changing landscape of residue limits (MRLs), market assurance guidelines and market requirements. Traceability and farm Biosecurity have the upmost importance in any primary production system. Any potential persistent contaminant making its way onto a farm is of particular concern.

Long-term, low level particulate emissions landing on the soil and water in the region can accumulate over time and potentially ultimately lead to residue detections in agricultural commodities.

Traceability means any residue exceedance found anywhere in the world can be tracked back to its origin quickly. Detections in a region would mean producers in that area are left with limited or no markets, the highly sought after rural land in the Parkes region is rendered worthless and farming operations unable to generate income.

5 TERMS of REFERENCE -i- Alternatives

We need to move away from plastic packaging, possibly hard however mankind did seem to cope quite well for thousands of years without it. While ever plastic is allowed as the cheap, convenient option manufacturing and processing will always utilize it. Just as cash incentives like return and earn bolstered can and bottle recycling charging companies a levy to continue using problem plastics will encourage them to explore other options.

We need to reduce waste as much as possible and recycle as much as possible and help companies enter and setup in this space,

Composting of organic waste appears to be going well and we need to expand that as much as possible.