Submission No 400

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

Name: Miss Sarah Townsend

Date Received: 22 October 2025

To whom it may Concern,

My name is Sarah Townsend, and I wish to formally object to the proposed Energy from Waste (EfW) facility planned for Parkes, NSW.

I am a fifth-generation mixed cropping and sheep farmer in the Parkes district, with a deep personal and financial stake in the long-term health and sustainability of our land and community. My family has farmed here for generations, and our livelihoods depend on clean air, fertile soil, safe water, and strong biosecurity protections.

While I understand the need for improved waste management solutions, this proposal presents serious risks to our environment, public health, and agricultural future — risks that far outweigh any potential benefit.

Biosecurity and Agricultural Risks

As a primary producer, I am particularly concerned about biosecurity threats linked to the importation and storage of mixed waste from outside the region. We simply do not know what will be contained within that waste — whether it includes seeds from invasive weeds, insects, or diseases not currently present in our area.

Animals such as cats, foxes, or rats could easily access waste stockpiles or transport areas, spreading contaminated material, seeds, or pathogens across neighbouring farms. This could have devastating impacts on local agriculture, including the spread of new weed species, soil-borne pests, or livestock diseases.

For a region that relies heavily on agriculture, this level of uncertainty poses an unacceptable risk to our biosecurity, productivity, and income. Once an invasive species or disease is introduced, eradication can be costly or even impossible — threatening not just individual farms, but the entire local industry.

Environmental and Air Quality Impacts

The burning of waste produces harmful by-products, including dioxins, furans, heavy metals, and fine particulate matter (PM2.5). These pollutants are known to travel long distances and can contaminate soil, water, and crops.

Parkes is surrounded by productive farmland and sensitive natural environments. Even small increases in emissions or ash fallout could compromise local food production and biodiversity. The proposal does not provide sufficient assurance that air quality will remain unaffected or that emissions will be monitored in a transparent and enforceable way.

Public Health and Community Wellbeing

The long-term health implications of living near an EfW facility are not fully understood, but evidence from other regions shows potential links to respiratory and cardiovascular disease due to exposure to toxic emissions.

The Parkes community should not be exposed to these risks, particularly when safer, cleaner alternatives to waste incineration exist.

Waste Hierarchy and Sustainability Concerns

This proposal contradicts the fundamental waste hierarchy of reduce, reuse, and recycle. An incinerator relies on a steady stream of waste to remain economically viable, which discourages recycling and waste reduction efforts.

Instead of burning waste, investment should be directed toward better recycling infrastructure, organic waste recovery, and circular economy initiatives that truly minimise waste generation.

Impact on Parkes' Reputation and Future Growth

Parkes has positioned itself as a progressive regional centre focused on sustainability and innovation. Approving a large-scale waste incinerator undermines that image and risks deterring investment, tourism, and new residents.

The increased truck movements, industrial odour, and visual impact of such a facility will detract from the rural character and liveability of our region — qualities that make Parkes a great place to live and work.

Lack of Genuine Community Consultation

Many local residents, including farmers like myself, feel that this project has progressed without proper community consultation or independent assessment. The people who stand to be most affected — those who live and work here — have had little real say in the process.

Given the potential for irreversible impacts, genuine engagement and transparent, science-based decision-making are essential before any consideration of approval.

Conclusion

For all of these reasons — environmental harm, biosecurity threats, risks to health and agriculture, and lack of community support — I strongly oppose the proposed Energy from Waste facility in Parkes.

Our region's strength lies in its clean environment, productive farmland, and resilient community. These are values worth protecting. I urge the Department of Planning and the EPA to reject this proposal and instead support local, sustainable waste management solutions that protect both the environment and the future of regional farming communities like ours.

Sincerely,
Sarah Townsend
Fifth-generation mixed cropping and sheep farmer