Submission No 462

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

Name: Name suppressed

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SUBMISSION TO THE NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

I am writing this as a resident of Currawang NSW approximately 10 km north of the proposed Woodlawn Advanced Energy Recovery Centre (ARC). I have operated businesses for 30 years in infrastructure, manufacturing and mining before returning to the family farm as a 5th generation farmer.

I am strongly opposed to the Woodlawn Advanced Energy Recovery Centre (ARC) and the technology chosen to deal with NSW's waste.

Green washing & gaslighting rural communities

Firstly, state, federal governments and large corporations in recent times have forced, coerced and paid to transform regional and rural communities into vast energy factories. Solar, wind and transmission lines now dominate thousands of hectares farming land and timbered hilltops under the guise of reducing Co2 which every farmer, horticulturalist and scientist know is crucial for plant growth. They also know at 0.04% it is at the lowest levels in approx. 600 million years (2017 Gregory Wrightstone, data source: Burner 2001) yet Co2 has become a demonised element used to manipulate political decision making and change the way we are forced to live. As a result of these questionable policies, baseload coal fired power stations have been closed nationally and in NSW to make way for short term unreliable green energy technology (opinion based on18 years owning a business designing and building distribution and transmission networks in NSW). The irony is that in 10-20 years when these short-term technologies reach their mechanical life, they will end up in landfill and/or proposed incinerators for disposal. So, the waste problem we think we have will be substantially intensified over time.

My point here is that while we are closing down Co2 emitting coal fired power stations, the NSW Govt are proposing to burn residential and industrial waste in incinerators which will emit not only Co2 but, Dioxins, Furins, Heavy Metals and worst of all PFAS. The justification for this polluting technology is disguised as an Energy from Waste facility. Not only is this 'green washing' (as there are no plans or details in Veolia's EIS to connect to the Essential Energy grid), but worst of all it is hypocritical given the State Govt's stance on Co2 emissions and another example of politicians 'gaslighting' people in the rural communities who have been forced to comply with poorly advised govt policy. The gaslighting doesn't stop at Co2 emissions, it also extends to the State Environmental Planning Policy (Transport and Infrastructure) Amendment (Thermal Energy from Waste) 2022 banning these types of incinerators from a radius around Sydney CBD: south to Bargo, west to Mt Victoria and north to Wyong. The current NSW Govt while in opposition where very vocal and instrumental in stopping incinerators being built in western Syd. This is Sydney's waste not Tarago's, so why is an Energy from Waste facility not permissible in greater Sydney but ok to build and pollute the population of Tarago, its surrounding rural residents, waterways and the vast food production this region generates for the residents in NSW who's Govt think it's ok to contaminate. The answer is the same reason renewable energy projects are isolated to rural communities instead of being built more logically where the energy is consumed; not in my back yard, out of site out of mind, only a few people will be affected, they are only country people they won't understand or care! Only disrespectful, nefarious and completely out of touch decision makers would allow this type of

technology to be built in any community while being fully aware of the harm to human health irrespective of where they live.

Inadequate technology

It is well known that PFAS are a group of nearly 15,000 synthetic forever chemicals that are present in numerous household and industrial products including; stain and water protection for carpets, fabric, furniture and apparel, paper coating (food packaging & takeaway cups), metal plating, photographic materials, aviation firefighting foam, cosmetics, sunscreen, medical masks and devices, insulation and building material and nonstick cooking utensils. Many of these materials will be present in the waste feedstock being used to fuel the ARC.

It is also well known that PFAS does not breakdown in a timely manner, it is found in soil and water which leads to a bioaccumulation in our bodies via the food chain. Epidemiological studies have revealed associations between exposure to specific PFAS and a variety of health effects, including altered immune and thyroid function, liver disease, lipid and insulin dysregulation, kidney disease, adverse reproductive and developmental outcomes, and cancer.

My concerns are that the Woodlawn ARC will become a concentrated depositary for PFAS for all of Sydney's industrial and domestic waste over an extended period. My concern has now been heightened with the knowledge the incineration process (850 deg) does not break down PFAS and that our region will become the dumping ground for PFAS and other toxins via flu ash, bottom ash and water runoff. This concern should also be one that is shared by all Govt entities given the serious nature and the potential to affect the wider population.

In a recent article published in 2023 by Environmental Science and Technology Emission on "per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) from a waste to energy plant - occurrences in ashes, treated process water and first observation in flue gas by BJorklund et al(2023)" Environ. Sci. Technol. 2023, 57, 10089−10095. In this article they state "our results demonstrate that some PFASs are not fully degraded by the high temperatures during WfE conversion and can be emitted from the plant via ash, gypsum, treated process water and flue gas. The article also states that larger amounts of PFAs can also be leached from the waste stockpile prior to entering the incinerator. I believe this is something the State Govt and Veolia should be looking at rather than declaring it can't be done and not pursuing it just because the EPA does not require it as it currently has no policies around WfE facilities nor does it set safe levels of PFAS. In Europe and the US the safe level for PFAS is zero.

An engineer and production manager from my business recently attend the 2025 WWETT Show in Indianapolis USA, at this show they discussed PFAS, its removal and technologies that could break it down. At present the only known, but undeveloped to scale, technology to break down PFAS is plasma arc. So, unless current incinerator technology develops a way to completely break down PFAS due to its proliferation in the feedstock required to run these incinerators, it should not be used as a means to deal with any waste.

EPA involvement in the community

The EPA are now fully aware of the potential harm to human health, safety risks of widespread contamination generated by the incineration process and the inadequacies of the technology as a number of working groups in the Tarago region have taken them to task initially by formal communication and more recently in direct community consultation. They are also fully aware of Veolia's numerous odour breaches and operational failures resulting in the lack of social

license in the community from years of repeated license violations. The fact they have now moved some of their staff from Wollongong to nearby Queanbeyan shows they are now taking the community concerns seriously. More recently they have been conducting water testing in surrounding waterways. What they have found is leachate from Veolia's current operational landfill site has found its way either through fissures in the underground rock structures or from runoff. Among the contaminants found in the test results were PFAS. This should be a major concern for Sydney residents as all waterways in the region are part of the Sydney catchment and run east into Warragamba dam. The EPA are now conducting more widespread testing surrounding the Veolia site including local bores to determine the scale and spread of the contamination. This will only be exacerbated should the WfE facility become operational.

Duty of care

Veolia and the State Govt have a legislative duty of care under the Work Health and Safety ACT to protect its own employees and the community who will no doubt bear the brunt of these contaminants. The Hierarchy of Controls used to reduce the risk in high-risk environments such as this, state that elimination is the best control. We cannot see any way that Veolia and the State Govt can eliminate PFAS from any of its feedstock given the numerous products containing PFAS. The information above and the 2023 sited article by 'Environmental Science and Technology Emission' clearly proves that PFAS is a commonly known contaminant in the Waste from Energy process and does not break down but in fact becomes concentrated on that site.

Veolia and State Govt also have a duty of care for the hundreds of miners who work for 'Develop' at the Woodlawn Zinc/Copper mining operation who share the site with the waste facility. The underground workings are reliant on the surrounding environment to ensure the miners have clean fresh air circulating through the underground operation. Should the incinerator go ahead, the contaminated flu gas from the incinerator will undoubtedly put the mine employees in a volatile situation by exposing them to serious long term health risks.

Conclusion

NSW Govt by their own admission and the fact they opposed the building of incinerator facilities in greater Sydney, know that the proposed Woodlawn incineration facility is not safe for the environment nor for people. What they should be focusing on is the banning of products entering the country containing PFAS, encouraging food manufacturers to reduce packaging, facilitate farmers markets where fresh unpackaged food can be sold, run campaigns to educate against purchasing unrecyclable and throwaway products, have purchasing policies around made to last sustainable products, encourage community based recycle centres and deal better with Sydney's waste at the source instead of transporting 200 km's away.

Regards,

Currawang NSW