Submission No 485

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

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Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Energy from Waste
From: Andrew Wright, Parkes NSW

Introduction

My name is Andrew Wright. I thank the Committee for the opportunity to express my concerns. I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed Energy from Waste (EfW) facility in Parkes, on behalf of myself, my wife, and our two small children. I am a fourth-generation farmer and have lived and worked in the Parkes Shire my entire life. Our livelihood depends entirely on the health of our land, clean air, and safe water.

The thought of millions of tonnes of red-bin waste being transported from Sydney and burned in our agricultural region each year is distressing and deeply concerning. I have summarised our opposition into key areas that we believe are substantiated and relevant to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

1. Agricultural and Food Safety Risks

Our farm business depends on maintaining the highest standards of food health and safety to meet both domestic and international market requirements. Contamination of soil, air, or water from heavy metals, dioxins, or other persistent pollutants poses a serious risk to biosecurity and export integrity. This risk could cause lasting damage to our region and beyond, in an industry that is critical to Australia's financial stability. Even minor contamination could jeopardise trade and permanently harm Parkes' agricultural reputation.

The Chief Scientist and Engineer's report on Energy from Waste facilities highlights the importance of avoiding proximity to food production areas. It recommends that human health risk assessments consider food as a potential exposure pathway.

A recent systematic review by Tait et al. (2020) further supports a precautionary approach, showing links between incinerator emissions and adverse health effects, and reinforcing the need to account for food as an exposure pathway.

https://researchportalplus.anu.edu.au/en/publications/the-health-impacts-of-waste-incineration-a-systematic-review?utm_source

Parkes has a proud agricultural history and is a key food-producing region in NSW. The area supports a diverse mix of cereal crops—including wheat and canola—alongside sheep, cattle, and wool production. Pulses are also grown extensively, contributing to crop diversity and soil health. The health of our community, the safety of our produce, and the economic stability of the region are all closely tied to this agricultural sector. Introducing an Energy from Waste facility near these food production areas threatens both the livelihoods of local farmers and the long-term future of agriculture in Parkes.

2. Inadequate Environmental Monitoring

There is an inability to monitor the effects of heavy metals and 'forever chemicals' present in our soil, atmosphere, and watercourses. It is evident that the EPA can neither widely monitor nor prevent contamination resulting from the operation of the proposed precinct.

We rely on rainwater tanks as our sole source of water for drinking, cooking, and bathing, yet even these, along with natural watercourses, local fauna, and flora, are at risk of contamination to some degree. The EPA's track record in managing environmental contamination provides little confidence that the situation would be any different here. The ongoing legacy of lead contamination in Broken Hill demonstrates the long-term failure to protect communities from heavy metal exposure, while the detection of PFAS in the Belubula River at Canowindra highlights the inability to contain or remediate persistent pollutants once they enter the environment.

These examples make it abundantly clear that regulatory assurances are not enough. Once contamination occurs, the damage cannot be undone, and it is regional communities like ours that are left to bear the consequences.

3. Long-Term Intergenerational Business Transfer Risk

Should the proposal be successful and the aforementioned aspects of our business be affected, this will result in a significant decline in productivity, revenue, land value, and the ability of future generations to succeed in agriculture in the Parkes locality. We are immensely concerned for our children and future generations should the EfW proposal proceed.

4. Adverse Effects on Mental Health

Our family and friends are already experiencing mental health struggles as a direct result of this proposal. Anxiety relating to health and finances is something we are increasingly noticing amongst family members, friends, and the community at large. This proposal has already caused significant distress within our region, with widespread fear about health impacts, financial uncertainty, and government disregard for local voices. Our Local Health District is already facing a large array of challenges and quite certainly does not have the capacity to cope with more.

5. Transport and Emissions Contradictions

The use of diesel freight trains to transport hundreds of thousands of tonnes of Sydney's red-bin waste over 500 kilometres to Parkes for incineration is incredibly contradictory to much of the government's own climate policies and emissions reduction schemes that have governed public trust and votes for many years.

This project has been marketed as a "clean" and "green" solution, yet the sheer volume of diesel transport required completely undermines that claim. The emissions generated through long-distance waste freight, combined with the incineration process itself, will produce significant greenhouse gases and particulates—contradicting the very rationale of emissions reduction and environmental responsibility.

6. Economic and Property Impacts

There are potential adverse effects to the business sector, commercial and residential real estate, as well as the price per hectare of agricultural land. Many people within our community have expressed that they

would leave the region should the Energy from Waste proposal be approved. This would initiate a significant decline in the economic viability of our community across business, health, education, and agriculture.

There is widespread concern that approval of this project will cause a serious downturn in agricultural land values, residential property prices, and the sustainability of local businesses. The loss of population and investment would weaken the very foundations of our regional economy and threaten the long-term social and economic stability of Parkes.

7. History of Decommissioned Incinerators

Similar facilities have been decommissioned overseas due to pollution, health, and safety concerns, including the Detroit municipal waste incinerator in the United States. Japan has also shut down hundreds of smaller plants due to dioxin emissions. If this technology has failed elsewhere, why would it succeed here, particularly in a prime agricultural district like Parkes?

8. Intergenerational Health Risks

The long-term health impacts of dioxins, furans, microplastics, and toxic ash are well-established, including links to cancer, reproductive issues, immune system damage, and hormone disruption. While these effects may not be immediately apparent, evidence shows that exposure can have devastating consequences for multiple generations. We should not be asked to risk our children's health or their future, particularly when Sydney itself has rejected such proposals. It is unreasonable to impose these risks on regional communities, especially when authorities have acknowledged that such facilities are considered unsafe for most of NSW. Treating regional communities as secondary or expendable is both unfair and unjust.

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1753-6405.12939

9. Proximity to Schools and Sensitive Locations

Parkes Christian School, which is attended by over 350 children, is located approximately 4 kilometres from the proposed Energy from Waste precinct. These children spend more than 30 hours per week at the school, playing, learning, and participating in outdoor activities. No parent would willingly expose their child to airborne emissions from an incinerator, including dioxins, furans, ultrafine particles, and other toxic pollutants. The long-term health risks associated with such exposure, including respiratory issues, developmental impacts, and chronic disease, are well-documented. The health and safety of these students must be given absolute priority over the convenience of locating industrial infrastructure in close proximity to sensitive community sites. The presence of an incinerator so near a school is not just irresponsible; it is a direct threat to the wellbeing of our children and our community.

10. Lack of Local Benefit

The proponents claim the project will create 80 jobs, yet the long-term economic, environmental, and health costs far outweigh this short-term gain. There are no genuine benefits for the Parkes community, only risks.

11. Lack of Consultation and Regional Inequity

It is deeply unfair that Sydney's waste problem is being imposed on regional communities such as Parkes, Goulburn, Lithgow, and the Richmond Valley. These communities are being asked to bear the environmental, health, and economic risks of a problem that originates far from their homes, without receiving meaningful benefits in return. Projects of this magnitude should never be forced upon regions with minimal consultation, particularly when similar facilities are prohibited in other parts of NSW due to proven environmental and health risks. The consultation process to date has been largely inadequate, fragmented, and non-transparent, leaving residents with little opportunity to understand the true scope of the project or influence decision-making. This lack of genuine engagement suggests that critical information may be being withheld and raises serious concerns about the fairness and integrity of the planning process. Regional communities should not be treated as secondary or expendable simply because they are outside metropolitan areas; their voices, rights, and wellbeing deserve equal consideration in decisions of such far-reaching impact.

12. Better Alternatives

We acknowledge that Sydney's waste crisis must be addressed, but burning it in regional NSW is not the solution. We urge the Committee to pursue genuine alternatives, including:

- Waste reduction and improved packaging reform;
- Reuse and recycling initiatives;
- Cold or non-thermal waste treatment technologies such as anaerobic digestion and mechanical-biological treatment.

Conclusion

Our community deserves clean air, safe water, and a secure future for our children, fundamental rights that should not be compromised for the convenience of industrial waste management. The proposed Energy from Waste facility poses serious, long-term risks to health, agriculture, the environment, and the economic stability of our region. It is imperative that the Inquiry listen to the people of Parkes and take decisive action to reject this proposal.

At this time, I respectfully decline the offer to give evidence at a hearing. However, I strongly encourage the Committee to consult with the Parkes Clean Future Alliance (https://parkescleanfuture.org) for further insight, local perspectives, and community-driven research on the risks and alternatives associated with this project.

On behalf of my family, I urge the Inquiry to consider not only the immediate impacts but also the long-term consequences for future generations. We cannot accept a plan that sacrifices the health, wellbeing, and livelihoods of regional communities to solve urban waste issues. I sincerely hope that our concerns are

fully acknowledged, and that the proposed Parkes Energy from Waste facility is permanently halted, ensuring that our children and the generations to come inherit a safe, thriving, and resilient community.

Yours sincerely,
Andrew Wright
Parkes, NSW